

SECTION III

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The University of Kentucky has employed a number of methods to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of its academic, research, and public service missions. While traditional methods of evaluation (student grading, student evaluations, promotion and tenure reviews, and program reviews) were employed across the campus, consistent efforts to assess the effectiveness of academic or support programs are not present, and evidence is not present to show the results of program reviews have had an impact on or influenced budgeting. This is not to say that there have not been data-based evaluation activities that have had a direct impact on curriculum and resource allocations. However, the Self-Study Report and surveys, literature, and interviews of Committee members do not reflect an institution-wide, reasonably consistent and effective program and process to evaluate performance in relation to goals and objectives. Application of evaluation processes and use of the results are spotty. The Medical Center programs and some programs in the College of Agriculture have been required by professional accrediting standards to assess the outcomes of their programs. It has only been within the past several years that institutionally, as part of the Strategic Plan, all units of the University have been required to develop goals and to identify measurable outcomes. The influence that this activity will have on institutional priority setting or resource allocations is yet to be seen since it is a recent institutional mandate.

To coordinate and support units in their evaluation efforts, institutional assessment coordinators were identified from each sector and vice-presidential area. While the institutional effectiveness coordinators are in place to coordinate the documentation of the goal setting process and support unit assessment activities, it is clear that they are providing a coordinating function and do not have authority or responsibility for assessing the effectiveness of the unit evaluation activities.

At the unit level, through interviews, it is clear that there is not a universal understanding across the campus of the purpose of institutional assessment activities. As identified in the Self-Study, initiatives directed at the education of the campus about the assessment and planning activities will have to be accomplished if the University is to evaluate effectively its programs and processes. (Suggestion 2) The Committee suggests that the President and his staff examine ways to provide the understanding of institutional effectiveness concepts by faculty and staff to ensure successful evaluations throughout the University of Kentucky.

3.1 Planning and Evaluation

The University has put into place a comprehensive strategy that incorporates in the Strategic Plan goals and objectives for each unit and measures to evaluate the unit's attainment of these goals. All units have developed goals and evaluation measures that are consistent with the stated purpose of the University. If all units make a creditable effort at objectively evaluating their progress toward their stated goals, the results should be a "blue print" of the strengths and weaknesses of the University. While the institutional

effectiveness coordinators are in place to coordinate and support unit assessment activities, there does not appear to be any individual or unit responsible for evaluating and documenting the impact of these assessment activities on programs or providing feedback to the units about the results of their evaluation programs. (Recommendation 2) The Committee recommends that an office or offices be charged with the responsibility of working with all units to evaluate the extent to which the unit's goals have been met and to review and document the use of these ongoing evaluations to improve educational programs, services, and operations.

Included in the goals of the units are those that address research and public service that are consistent with the purpose of the institution. In the case of public service, visible activities are concentrated in the College of Agriculture and the Medical Center Sector, especially the College of Dentistry. However, public service is also accomplished by various individuals and groups throughout the Lexington campus. Public service activities lack visibility above the college level in terms of institutional research, coordination of effort, policy and operation guidelines, recognition for performance, and program evaluation. (Suggestion 3) The Committee suggests that appropriate procedures for evaluating effectiveness in this area include visibility for the public service mission at the level of the President's cabinet in a manner that will accord it attention comparable to that given research and teaching.

3.2. Institutional Research

Institutional research at the University of Kentucky has evolved over the years in a decentralized fashion with units being created to support the specific needs of a unit. In general, the needs have revolved around supporting reporting mandates of external agencies with very little actual analysis being done by the "institutional research" units. As identified in the Self-Study, the fragmentation of these functions has led to confusion within the University about who has responsibility for institutional data and their analysis. It is clear that the Office of Planning and Management provides a single University source for external reporting; and, that, additionally, it provides an executive support function only to the President and his staff. It does not provide analytic service to the sectors. As a result, institutional research in support of the programs in the sectors is the responsibility of the individual sectors or colleges and from a University perspective is not the responsibility of a single administrative unit. This has resulted in the conduct of institutional research without an institutional perspective and in spite of substantial barriers to data access and technical support. In this environment, systematic evaluation of institutional research has not occurred across the campus. (Recommendation 3) The Committee recommends that procedures be developed and responsibility be assigned for evaluating all formal institutional research functions.

It is clear that access to University data and information is difficult at best, and that systems at this point are neither user friendly nor well documented. In addition, security regulations result in a bureaucracy that virtually prohibits timely access of student, human resource, financial, and facilities data for analysis. This is not to say that it cannot be done, but there are many hoops to go through just to have a request for data being placed in the

computing center's programming line. This has resulted in frustration on the part of decision makers and the independent development of "shadow systems" to support their planning and decision making needs. Often these systems are not consistent with the official University data.

Priority at the University in administrative computing has been the installation of new operating systems during the past seven to ten years. Attention to campus management data needs has not been a priority. The Vice President for Information Systems has indicated that once the Human Resource System is in place, increased attention will be given to educating campus users. He indicates that those conducting institutional research will be critical in this process.

The environment for using institutional data in evaluation or monitoring activities is not user friendly or inviting. The fragmentation of the institutional research functions on the campus contributes to this frustration. Without a University-wide coordinated effort to develop an infrastructure to support decentralized data access and analysis, evaluation efforts at all levels of the University will suffer. (Suggestion 4) The Committee suggests that an organization with an institution-wide perspective be given the responsibility for, 1) creating an infrastructure (census file creation and access policies, analytic expertise, educational programs, and programming) to support decentralized institutional research and evaluation activities and, 2) to communicate with all campus units what resources exist to support their evaluation planning activities.

While the Committee has identified several weaknesses in the University's assessment program, a solid base has been established through the coupling of the Strategic Plan and

unit evaluation activities. The University is to be commended for the visible integration of these two processes. As proposed, making the program review process a visible component of the evaluation and planning cycle will significantly strengthen the University's assessment program. It is obvious, however, that data access to the campus must be improved and that an infrastructure must be put in place to facilitate and define institutional research functions and responsibilities.