

# **ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT**

## **Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE)**

### **Western Carolina University**

**April 26, 2013**

#### **I. Introduction**

The three-member review team conducted an on-site series of meetings with campus officials April 15-16, 2013, to gather opinions of OIPE staff and services. The review team consisted of Ms. Fay Parham, external reviewer, retired Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research at Middle Tennessee State University, Professor Debra Burke, Associate Dean, WCU College of Business, and Ms. Diana Catley, HR Consultant, WCU Office of Human Resources.

Meetings were held with each staff member and student worker in OIPE and the following individuals and groups familiar with OIPE services and staff.

- A. Chancellor David Belcher
- B. Ms. Dianne Lynch, Chief of Staff
- C. Dr. Melissa Wargo, Asst. Vice Chancellor, Planning & Effectiveness
- D. Executive Council
  - 1. Dr. Mark Lord - Interim Associate Provost for Dr. Angi Brenton, Provost & Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
  - 2. Mr. Robert Edwards - Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance
  - 3. Dr. H. Samuel Miller, Jr. - Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
  - 4. Mr. Craig Fowler - Chief Information Officer
  - 5. Ms. Mary Ann Lochner - General Counsel
  - 6. Ms. Dianne Lynch - Chief of Staff
  - 7. Mr. Randy Eaton - Director of Athletics
- E. Council of Deans
  - 1. Dr. Brian Railsback - Honors College
  - 2. Dr. Marie Huff - Health & Human Services
  - 3. Dr. Darrell Parker - Business
  - 4. Dr. Dana Sally - Library
  - 5. Dr. Robert Kehrberg - Fine & Performing Arts
  - 6. Dr. Mimi Fenton - Graduate School
  - 7. Dr. James Zhang - Kimmel School
  - 8. Dr. Richard Starnes - Arts & Sciences
  - 9. Dr. Dale Carpenter - Education and Allied Professions

## 10. Dr. Regis Gilman – Educational Outreach

### F. Functional Directors

1. Phil Cauley – Admission
2. Larry Hammer – Registrar
3. Shawna Young – Student Affairs
4. Wiley Harris – Space Management
5. Bobby Justice – Administration & Finance
6. Renee Corbin – EAP Assessment Director
7. Chesney Reich – QEP Assessment

### G. Program Directors & Department Heads

1. Mary Jean Herzog – Faculty Chair
2. Jennifer Hinton – Recreational Therapy
3. Will Peebles – Music
4. Mike Smith – Construction Management
5. David McCord – Psychology
6. Brian Gastle – English

On Tuesday afternoon, the review team conducted an exit meeting with Chancellor Belcher, Ms. Dianne Lynch, Dr. Melissa Wargo, and Mr. David Onder to review highlights of the team's findings.

## II. Analysis of the Program

### a. Primary functions

The primary function of the office is to provide support for high-level decision-making for the campus. This support is provided through OIPE's assessment and institutional research activities.

### b. Unit activities and/or services

OIPE is responsible for a myriad of activities; many are typical of such an office structure and some are atypical. Unfortunately, the atypical responsibilities assigned to the office consume a large percentage of personnel time. The result is less time available for responding to customary/required reporting and special data requests from the University of North Carolina General Administration (GA), the Chancellor, state legislature, deans and department heads, non-academic units, committees, and others on campus. The office is heavily involved in support efforts for strategic planning, data warehouse planning and

implementation, and the program prioritization undertaken by the campus during 2012-13.

Each year the Director of Assessment oversees 8-9 program reviews in both academic and administrative areas. Conducting program reviews can be very labor intensive, and the Director enlists assistance from other personnel in OIPE. Scheduling of on-site meetings, travel arrangements for external reviewers, etc. are handled by this office as well. Data support is provided for academic reviews for both accredited and non-accredited programs. OIPE is involved with SACs accreditation reporting and academic program assessment, and provides graduation and academic progress reports for NCAA requirements.

OIPE has been given responsibility for oversight and training for the following campus-wide computer systems: CoursEval, R25, Digital Measures, and Compliance Assist. When an ERP system such as Compliance Assist is added, an additional FTE is needed to oversee its installation, modification, training of campus employees, etc. The time of approximately one staff FTE is currently consumed by these systems that should be maintained outside OIPE. The time requirement will increase in 2013-14 when all faculty will be required to use Digital Measures to record faculty out-of-classroom activities and all units will be required to use the assessment modules of Compliance Assist.



The office publishes an annual Fact Book online that includes some of the most-often-requested data for WCU.

### **c. Planning and assessment strategies**

Each year the office holds a retreat for its staff to discuss and evaluate the previous year's activities and plan the anticipated activities for the next year.

There is currently no *formal* process to routinely assess OIPE's activities and services. For example, the office responds to a large number of ad hoc requests each year—approximately 75-100 during a long semester was reported in the office's self-study document. However, it cannot document the precise number of requests, what time of the year they are received, what types of requests are submitted or by what area of the University. This presents a gap in its internal planning effectiveness and will be addressed further in the Recommendations section of this report. This is only one area in the office that could benefit from a systemic approach to analysis.

During 2012 OIPE surveyed faculty and staff to assess the demand for particular services and the satisfaction with the work performed by the office. Of the 30 written comments from users of OIPE services, only 5 were negative while the others were either positive or a combination. Overall, the survey showed a favorable impression of the staff and their work. A few remarks pointed to slow responses to special requests and referenced the department's heavy workload. One or two mentioned problems reconciling data provided by OIPE with data the user had extracted directly from Banner. That leads the reviewers to assume the problem was that of trying to compare "live" Banner data to "official" census-date data that would be provided by OIPE—a dilemma common to all institutional research offices. It was also stated during at least one meeting that the office had willingly met with them to reconcile any data discrepancies thought to exist in reports.

### **III. Analysis of Staff**

#### **a. Qualifications**

The staff are basically qualified for their positions. Additional training, particularly in programming, would be appropriate for most positions. The desire for more training opportunities was voiced by most staff members during individual meetings with the review team.

#### **b. Resources and support**

All personnel reported they have the resources they need to perform their duties. They all believe their AVC, Dr. Wargo, and the Chancellor support them and their work. They also stated they would like to have more direct contact with Dr. Wargo and believe the lack of contact is largely a result of the physical location of OIPE facilities related to Dr. Wargo's office.

#### **c. Professional activity and service**

Each professional employee has been permitted to attend at least one professional conference per year. The number of conference presentations made by the staff is commendable and speaks well of their professionalism and the respect they enjoy from others in their field.

#### **IV. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget**

##### **a. Facilities**

Each member of the professional staff has a private office with ample space to work and house needed files and equipment. Computers are updated on a regular cycle. Any needed software can be quickly acquired through regular University channels. No additional technological needs were reported to the reviewers.

##### **b. Budget**

Although WCU has experienced budget cuts from the state over the past several years, OIPE has been somewhat sheltered from budget reductions. It has been able to meet the day-to-day financial needs of the office, in part, by utilizing computer resources to distribute most of its output.

Each IPE professional has been able to attend at least one professional development meeting per year. Unfortunately, they do not attend the annual Association for Institutional Research (AIR) conference. AIR is the international professional association for personnel working in institutional research, planning, and assessment. The presentations are excellent, focus on current methods, practices, and new software in the fields, and can add significantly to the necessary skills of the employees. As with all good professional meetings, the personal contacts made and nurtured can be invaluable in meeting future demands on the office. It is recommended that at least one employee attend the AIR conference each year.

#### **V. Summary of unit strengths and areas for improvement**

##### **a. General Impression**

The Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness provides needed data and services to areas across campus, both academic and administrative. It has a heavy workload with activities normally associated with offices of this nature, but it has also been given responsibility for some campus-wide computer systems that are not typically handled in this area. These systems are discussed in more detail in the *Analysis of the Program-Unit Activities and/or Services* section of this report.

## **b. Areas of Strength**

Personnel take their jobs seriously and have earned the respect of the divisions and units across campus with whom they work. They have been able to produce an amazing amount of work with few real errors. There is a collegiate atmosphere in the office, and the employees are always eager to help each other as well as assist those outside the office when requested. Everyone reported they have what they need to do their jobs and they do their jobs well. The office is well-respected across campus.

## **c. Possible Areas for Improvements**

The small size of the staff results in a "silo" type of work assignments. The office could benefit from more cross-training to help it continue to function in the event of extended absences by staff. At this time, a prolonged absence by any member would be detrimental to the services provided by OIPE.

A formal system for submission and tracking of ad hoc requests would be beneficial to not only OIPE but to persons submitting the special requests.

Other areas for improvement are listed in the Recommendations section of this report.

## **VI. Summary of Recommendations**

OIPE has made many improvements over the last few years and has excellent plans for future changes, as referenced in the self-study. The following recommendations are made with the intention of enhancing the services the office provides to the campus, improving the timeliness and deeper analysis of reports provided by the office, and improving the working conditions in the office by lowering the stress levels now experienced by the staff. Changes in specific reporting procedures or campus policies are considered to be outside the scope of this report and are not covered. The administration may want to consider a separate administrative audit to examine these areas. Some states also examine procedural issues in academic departments utilizing the "Academic Audit" process.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**Add a senior programmer/statistical analyst to OIPE. This person should provide sophisticated forecasting, predictive modeling, and also statistical analyses of routine and ad hoc reports, when appropriate.**

It was commonly recognized during on-site meetings that the office suffered a great loss when its previous programmer/statistical analyst left. This position should be reestablished as soon as possible. There is currently no one in the office who could assume these duties, and this expertise is very much needed and desired by many departments.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**Review possible reassignment for administration and user training for the following enterprise systems: CourseEval, Digital Measures, R25, Compliance Assist.**

ERPs are not typically managed by institutional research, planning, and assessment offices. It is recommended that there be an evaluation of the feasibility of housing CourseEval, Compliance Assist and Digital Measures be housed in the Provost's Office or an appropriate office that reports to the Provost. Primary responsibility for the R25 system would more appropriately be assigned to the Registrar's Office. Facilities should be responsible for updating the system regarding campus rooms and buildings.

It should be noted that Compliance Assist includes an excellent module for recording faculty out-of-classroom activity. It meets reporting requirements for SACS as well as the types of faculty reporting required by many discipline-specific accrediting agencies such as AACSB. Depending on the setup specifications of Digital Measures, it might be possible to programmatically transfer the data currently entered into Digital Measures to the Compliance Assist module. Digital Measures is currently only used by two colleges, but all faculty will be required to enter their activity in the near future. This could be the perfect time to switch this data to Compliance Assist.

Two benefits immediately come to mind.

(1) Faculty and staff would only need to learn one system rather than two, thereby eliminating additional training and possible frustration between the two systems.

(2) Once the migration to Compliance Assist has been completed, the University would no longer have the expense of maintaining a second system (Digital Measures) that only had one purpose.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

#### **Install and implement an electronic system to support ad hoc data requests.**

The system should provide a formal method for submitting data requests, assigning requests to staff, providing initial confirmation of receipt of the request and expected date of completion, contact information for the person completing the request, and a method of tracking the status of the request as needed. If a similar system is currently used by IT, it might be possible for OIPE to use the same system with some tweaking (by IT) to customize it for OIPE use. FootPrints is an excellent system for this purpose and is highly customizable. The current version of Sharepoint might be able to meet these requirements and should be one of the possibilities reviewed by OIPE.

A good tracking system will help prevent a request from "slipping through the cracks" when OIPE is working through a period of particularly high workload. Also, it will probably confirm that some offices request the same data annually at the same point in time. Such reports could be moved from an "ad hoc" to a "standard report" status and possibly be completed in conjunction with similar reports at a time better suited for the office.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

#### **Consider putting academic program reviews on a 7-year cycle.**

Oversight of program reviews can be very time intensive. The current 8-9 reviews conducted annually is a large number for the people in OIPE involved with them, especially when the rest of their workloads are taken into account. Part of the solution could be to put the reviewed department in charge of scheduling on-site meetings and taking care of travel arrangements for the external reviewers. These tasks are currently handled in the OIPE office. A standard set of data reports to be provided by OIPE in support of each review should be established. The standard reporting would facilitate better scheduling in OIPE and provide a valuable service to the area being reviewed. A collective "kick-off" meeting with the units to be reviewed the next year should be held during the previous spring semester to review the procedures to be used for the review and responsibilities of each area. Encourage special

requests for data be submitted to OIPE during the summer when the institutional research part of the office should be least busy.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Reduce the amount of data provided on reports, and add qualitative analysis when appropriate.**

A number of officials interviewed stated that some reports contain so much data across a page that it cannot even be read because the font is so small. Best practices dictate that the amount of data presented on a single report should be limited to make it more relatable and easily understood. The preferred practice is to breakdown the data into multiple reports rather than one large one that is difficult to use. This would require redesign of some reports and additional time would initially be needed to accomplish this. The intended users of the data should be consulted during the redesign process for best results.

Qualitative analysis would help users of the data better apply the results to their operations. At a minimum, data definitions should be provided on the report when deemed appropriate. Additional time to produce the reports would be needed if other than definitions are included, and training should be provided to ensure the analysis provided would be accurate and useful.

This would be an excellent time to review standard reports produced by OIPE. The recent program prioritization process has made deans and department heads more aware of what data they really need and the limitations of the current Banner system. Conversations should be held with users of the reports during the review and redesign process. When needs are confirmed, discussions should be held with IT regarding customization of Banner to add the necessary data elements. Banner's base package is normally customized by the institution in order to produce what is required "in real life". Although it makes Banner updates more time consuming, it is necessary to make Banner truly functional for the campus and the benefits will be realized daily. The University must be able to access data at the level requested by GA, the legislature, and the impending performance funding standards. It needs to be proactive in making this data available, as it will take a period of time to complete the modifications to the system, develop data definitions and coding standards, and load the data.

The construction and implementation of the Finance and Student Data Warehouse will benefit from Banner improvements. The planned dashboard will meet some of the needs expressed by Deans, Department Heads, etc., and it will provide the self-service features needed through an easier-to-use interface.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6:**

#### **Reduce by half the number of external surveys completed each year.**

One staff member currently spends more than a third of his time completing external surveys. Only a portion of those surveys are beneficial to the University and, thus, completing the others is not a good use of the employee's time. Some survey submitters can be referred to WCU's Common Data Set rather than the employee actually completing the survey form for them. The Common Data Set is already constructed by OIPE and included on the OIPE web site.

The AVC should be involved in deciding which surveys would still be completed and which could be eliminated.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7:**

#### **Add Retention and Graduation Rates to Fact Book.**

Fact Books are used by persons outside the university as well as faculty and staff of WCU. A well designed Fact Book can ultimately save OIPE time spent on special requests, phone calls and e-mails.

It is recommended that a five-year (minimum) timeline of WCU's six-year graduation rates be added to the Fact Book. It is also recommended that the Fact Book include a five-year timeline of one-year retention rates for the University. It is *not* recommended that the Fact Book include retention or graduation rates by college or other subunit of the University. That information is best distributed only on-campus through standard reporting procedures. Comparisons to other North Carolina campuses should be added for both graduation and retention rates. If WCU has an established list of peer institutions, those comparisons should also be added.

It is recommended that links be added within the online Fact Book to permit users to navigate back to the Table of Contents from any point within the Fact Book. Links should also be added to each page listed in the Table of Contents to send users directly to the section they need.

## **RECOMMENDATION 8:**

### **Modify the OIPE Web Site.**

The current web site does provide some useful information. As with most sites there are items that could be presented more effectively. There are two areas that list topics covered on the site. The two should be combined into one. A list of services available through the office should be added to the main page. The listings should be in a clearly discernible order (e.g., alphabetical) to help users quickly locate the information they need.

I was pleased to see aids such as the Handbooks for program reviews were available on the web site. A listing of program reviews scheduled per year would also facilitate planning by the departments.

The A to Z Index from WCU's home page lists OIPE as "Institutional Research and Planning". The name of the office should be corrected to its current wording.

## **COMMENDATIONS:**

 All members of OIPE are commended for the quality and quantity of work they produce in an extremely busy office. Special commendation goes to Dr. Melissa Wargo and Mr. David Under for their leadership skills that have raised the stature of the office in the minds of campus constituents over the last few years.

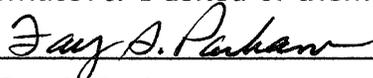
Respectfully submitted:

  
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As external reviewer and Chair of the review team, I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Debra Burke and Ms. Diana Catley for their help in conducting this program review. Their participation during meetings and their willingness to do whatever I asked of them were valuable contributions.

  
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Fay S. Parham