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Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

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Standard Two

Planning and Evaluation

The University of Connecticut has a strong commitment to planning and evaluation processes that consist of continuous loops, beginning with planning, followed by implementation and evaluation; and then repetition of the process. Our planning, based on our mission statement, has guided our actions.

The University continually collects data used for planning and evaluation. Much of these data are available from our Office of Institutional Research. This information has facilitated both short- and long-term planning efforts. Institutional decision making is usually an open process, involving senior administration, deans and department directors. Consultation occurs and reports are available to different constituencies which may include, as appropriate, faculty, staff, students, union representatives, or representatives of the state and communities. The University Senate and the University Graduate Council, both elected, regularly receive reports on and have input into, planning efforts. The institution has a long history of recognizing the concept of shared governance through each of these important constituencies. As a result, faculty, staff, students and other relevant constituencies (as befits a public institution) are a part of planning efforts.

The University regularly evaluates the different activities needed to achieve its academic objectives as defined by its mission statement. Reviews of programs, both at the university-level and within the individual units, are subject to evaluations, and the results are used to assess both educational achievements and resource allocations.

PLANNING

Our planning process has governed much of what we have done in a broad array of areas related to both our academic and support missions. Prime examples include: (1) the University's Academic Plan; (2) UCONN 2000 and its new phase, 21st Century UConn, both used for development of our campus; (3) the Information Technology Task Force; (4) the Diversity Task Force; (5) the Task Force on Substance Abuse; and (6) the development of a new "downtown Storrs" as a result of a partnership between the University of Connecticut and the Town of Mansfield. These examples are indicative of our efforts, and they have been absolutely critical to achieving our goals. Because planning and evaluation is embedded into the campus culture, it is not possible to discuss all of the planning efforts that have been undertaken. This chapter will describe the six planning exercises just identified as representative samples of how the culture of planning works at UConn. It should be noted that all of these planning efforts have involved iterative steps, in which assessment of planning outcomes took place before the next step began. Another important example of planning and evaluation includes important senior administration reorganizations that have occurred within the self-study period. This example is discussed in Chapter Three under the section on Chief Executive Officer and Administration.

Academic Planning: the Academic Plan and Program Assessment

Academic excellence demands effective planning. The University's Academic Plan, created in 2002 and accepted by the Board of Trustees in 2003, can be found in Exhibit 2.1 and at <http://www.academicplan.uconn.edu>. It provides a set of planning principles and objectives to assist trustees, administration, and faculty in choosing academic priorities over the next decade, including 21st Century UConn and capital projects and functions as a general roadmap for capital and operating expenditures.

The Plan's goal is to use selective strategic investments to bring the University into the top tier of public universities. The Academic Plan sets out six strategic Areas of Emphasis to focus the creative energies of faculty. The resource reallocation model builds on existing processes that have been concentrating University resources on selected programs through budgetary realignment and strategic hires.

Key components of planning and prioritization supporting the Academic Plan are the Provost's Annual Budget Hearings, which link academic priorities and budget allocations, and Academic Program Reviews. These budget hearings are used to evaluate resource allocations to all areas that report to the Provost, including the schools and colleges, the regional campuses and support academic units, such as the Library. As implementation of the Academic Plan has moved forward, there has been ongoing assessment of the effectiveness and changes have already occurred. Major outcomes of the assessment of Academic Plan implementation include linking the plan to the budgeting process, launching an initiative to obtain funding from the Connecticut General Assembly to hire more faculty, and conducting an administrative reorganization of schools and colleges.

Program Reviews and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Program Reviews

Between 1998 and 2004, Academic Program Reviews were carried out for departments and non-departmentalized schools, using a procedure developed by a faculty/ administrator Task Force in 1996. The Report of the Program Assessment Task Force, which outlines the procedure, is contained in Appendix 2.1 and is on the Provost's website at www.provost.uconn.edu. The heart of the procedure was a self-study, followed by a visit by a team of outside evaluators. The outcomes of these assessments are used to revise, or even eliminate, programs as needed.

Based on an assessment of program review procedures and following the first cycle of departmental reviews in academic year 2004-05, the Provost's Office decided there should be an appraisal of the myriad centers and institutes under the purview of Academic Affairs. This assessment is taking place before revising procedures for and initiating a new round of academic departmental assessments. The decision to review centers and institutes prior to a new round of academic department program review was motivated by the Report of the President's Research Administration Committee (contained in Appendix 2.2) and a realization that the institution needed to take a look at centers and institutes that are free-standing, but usually aligned with departments or academic programs.

The review of centers and institutes has been divided into two parts. In 2005, Provost Nicholls established the Provost's Major Centers and Institutes Review Committee (MCIRC), under the leadership of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Research, to examine the operation of six major centers. The MCIRC examined the role, expectations, general operating principles and funding of these centers and issued a report in April of 2006, contained in Exhibit 2.2. Also in 2005-06, the Vice Provost for Academic Administration established a Committee on Centers and Institutes to create a definition of what constitutes a center or institute and develop a process and criteria for their review. This committee also issued its report including guidelines for assessment, in April of 2006 (see Exhibit 2.3 or http://www.provost.uconn.edu/textfiles/MCIRCfinal_report.doc). These two documents, drafted by committees with overlapping memberships, will serve as the guide for the next stage of program reviews of centers and institutes. As discussed above, it is envisioned that this process will be followed by another round of academic departmental/school reviews based on revised guidelines that incorporate "lessons learned" from the first round. (2.5)

Assessment of Student Learning

The University of Connecticut as a whole has an uneven record regarding the extent to which it assesses student learning. Some programs or schools, notably those whose accreditation requires it, have thorough assessment of student learning outcomes in place. Many professional programs, notably in the Schools of Law, Medicine and Dentistry and the physical therapy and accounting programs, are required to pass state or national examinations administered by professional outside evaluators. The Provost's Office has assigned the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Regional Campus administration the responsibility for enhancing assessment of student learning outcomes across the curriculum at Storrs and the regional campuses. The newly revised General Education Requirements mandate that the faculty in the Gen Ed courses assess student learning outcomes. For a fuller discussion of assessment activities, see Chapter Four, Academic Programs, in the Assessment section. (2.6)

UConn 2000 Capital Projects Planning

As discussed in Chapter 8, the University of Connecticut has benefited from a \$2.3 billion capital projects budget funded by the State of Connecticut. UConn 2000 and its successor 21st Century UConn, comprising a twenty-year program in four phases, has been the centerpiece of the unprecedented transformation of the University as it strives to be recognized as one of the top public research institutions in the country.

Because of the magnitude and complexity of this undertaking, planning has been the cornerstone of the project. The planning and oversight process includes a university community advisory committee (the Capital Projects Planning Advisory Committee), which meets quarterly; the Building and Grounds Committee, an operational planning committee composed of senior administrators (including the Provost, COO & CFO) plus two deans and two representatives appointed by the University Senate Executive Committee, which meets bi-weekly; a committee of the Board of Trustees (the Building, Grounds and Environment Committee); and a Construction Management Oversight Committee, whose membership is defined in Public Act 06-134 (a list of the current members of the CMOC is contained in the NEASC reference room). The deliberations of these groups are based on the University of Connecticut Master Plans, which were developed by a Master Plan Advisory Committee consisting of over forty people from all university constituencies. The groups mentioned above are constantly monitoring and making revisions (as appropriate) to construction plans. Please see Chapter Eight for more discussion of UConn 2000.

Information Technology

In 1998, a review of our Information Technology (IT) environment led to a proposal to combine the University Computer Center (now known as University Information Technology Services or UITS) and the Library into a single operation. The initial phases of their consolidation eliminated a number of redundancies. However, subsequent evaluation demonstrated that this combination was not meeting the institution's needs. Additionally, it was not cost effective. This led to a further reorganization through bifurcation, with UITS reporting to the Chief Operating Officer, and the Library reporting to the Provost. However, these two units now have a closer working relationship than prior to the merger. This recent history, all of which occurred during this self-study period, illustrates that although the institution values and utilizes planning, it also is committed to evaluation of plan implementation and is willing change plans and go in a different direction if the outcomes seem to so warrant.

Under the auspices of the University's Chief Operating Officer, beginning in 2003, the University developed an *Information Technology Strategic Plan*, contained in Appendix 2.3, to ensure that information technology is integrated into and supports its academic mission. After being discussed in the university community and presented to various representative and decision-making bodies, this plan was finalized in January 2006. The membership of this committee included those involved in University Information Technology Services, administrators responsible for Teaching & Learning, Cooperative Extension, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, University Libraries, Graduate Education, Athletics, Deans and faculty members. There were a number of working groups populated by appropriate individuals from pertinent constituencies. The monies to implement the recommendations of the *Information Technology Strategic Plan* are derived primarily from UCONN 2000 capital funds.

It is understood that the University does not have the financial capacity to fulfill all of its technological demands. The Information Technology Strategic Plan recommends that funding priority should be given to those projects that have the greatest impact on enhancing the University's Academic Plan and national presence. To facilitate an integrated IT (information technology) environment, the University needs to be able to set minimum University-wide IT standards. IT at the University must allow for decisions to be made and priorities to be set at all appropriate levels. The Strategic Planning process has identified eight major goals for IT at the University of Connecticut for 2006-2010. Achievement of these goals needs to be overseen by a management structure that accommodates the needs of the entire University community and has the budgetary authority to ensure completion of the various projects. Constant communication among various groups will be essential so that the decisions of one group are in accord with the direction of other groups, and with the University as a whole.

The organizational structure includes an IT Steering Committee, charged with making major decisions related to policy, prioritization and budget; an *IT Visioning/Coordinating Committee*, charged with ensuring that the University keeps abreast of the latest applications; a Faculty/Student Users Committee, charged with ensuring faculty and student input into the decision making and priority setting process for IT; and an *IT Operations Committee*, charged with ensuring that the University maintains the required IT infrastructure. These groups, based on feedback from pertinent constituencies, are continually assessing their plans and activities. For a further discussion of the University Information Technology Services, see Chapter Seven.

Diversity

Among the eight strategic goals articulated in *Beyond 2000: A Strategic Plan for the University of Connecticut* approved in 1995 was an emphasis on diversity, in recognition of the importance of educating students to live and work in an increasingly diverse society, and in achieving the mission of American higher education. The strategic plan also recognized the need to have a faculty and staff which mirrors the diversity among its students, and complements and augments it. Although the plan reaffirmed the University's commitment to creating and maintaining a campus community which reflects the rich diversity of our nation, it did not articulate a university-wide implementation or action plan with concrete strategies for achieving this diversity commitment.

To fill this void, on January 12, 2001, the Diversity Action Committee was established with the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Vice Provost for Multicultural Affairs as co-chairs. The Committee's charge was to prepare a diversity strategic plan that would recommend initiatives to be taken over the subsequent five year period to:

1. Create a more welcoming campus environment for all of our students.
2. Enhance our efforts to recruit and retain a diverse student population.
3. Enhance our efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.
4. Diversify university leadership and management.
5. Assign accountability to achieve the goals outlined in the action plan it presents.

The President and Chancellor charged the Committee with developing a unified vision of Diversity for all components of the University of Connecticut (Storrs, Health Center, regional campuses, and the Schools of Law and Social Work). They asked for a consolidated, unified approach, marked by ongoing innovation and insight, which noted both commonalities and differences. The Board of Trustees accepted the Diversity Action Plan at their April 2002 meeting. See Appendix 2.4 for a full copy of the Diversity Task Force Report.

The Office of Multicultural & International Affairs (OMIA) has moved forward on a number of activities emerging out of the Diversity Action Plan. The Board of Trustees has taken great interest in the implementation of the Diversity Action Plan, and mandates that the Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs present an annual briefing to it. Appendix 2.5 contains the latest report of the VP/MA to the Board.

In order to implement the provisions of the Diversity Task Force report, some of the more prominent activities include: Task force and committee membership, diversity training for executives and directors, and launching of the diversity web-portal. OMIA participates in and provides leadership to several campus and statewide taskforces and committees. During the 2002-03 academic year, the Associate and Assistant Vice Provosts, provided leadership to three Diversity Action Plan Committees focused on Student Issues, Faculty/Staff Issues, and Campus Oversight. These committees met on several occasions to establish an operational plan for enabling various components of the Diversity Action Plan. These meetings resulted in several new operational initiatives out of OMIA including:

1. University wide diversity web-portal;
2. Committee to support minority faculty and staff mentorship and recruitment;
3. Revision of University admissions publications to reflect greater levels of diversity;
4. Outreach initiatives for Native American youth;
5. Academic Leadership Development Programs for African American, Latino/a, and Native American students majoring in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.
6. Institute on Leadership and Diversity focused around issues of citizenship, diversity education, and leadership in the 21st century for key undergraduate student leaders.

OMIA also participated in a number of other campus-wide committees to enhance the overall climate at the University and insure that the interests of diversity were included in decisions and policies that emerged. Some of these include:

1. Academic Plan Committee
2. Senior Year Experience Committee
3. Athletics Review Committee
4. Retention and Graduation Task Force
5. Alcohol and Campus Life Committee

In addition, OMIA has actively worked with schools and colleges to assist in the recruitment of new minority faculty and staff to the University.

Diversity Training and Communication

Working collaboratively and through the leadership of the Office of Diversity and Equity, OMIA offered diversity training to all university executives and directors during the second semester of the 2002/2003 academic year. The Assistant Vice Provost, a Diversity Consultant, and the Director of the Office of Diversity and Equity developed the curriculum and workshops, and distributed materials for all training participants. Training sessions were designed to accomplish a number of learning goals for participants:

1. To overview federal and state statutory provisions concerning discrimination and hate crimes directed at protected classes;
2. To overview processes and procedures for reporting discrimination and hate crimes on campus;
3. To overview the educational and institutional benefits of diversity;

4. To engage leaders in a case study of one diversity management issue in higher education

Over eighty percent of supervisory personnel participated in diversity training including the President, Provost, and several Deans and Directors from around the University. In total, ninety-eight participants took part in six sessions to a high level of success, as nearly seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that the program effectively addressed the challenges that they face as a higher education manager. Furthermore, nearly eighty-eight percent of respondents rated the quality of the training program as either effective or very effective.

Project activities are underway to develop and launch a new institution wide diversity web-portal for students, faculty, staff, and community members. The overarching goal of this new web environment is to provide comprehensive information regarding diversity at the University of Connecticut and extend the university's perspective regarding diversity to the external community. Some sample capabilities of the new site include:

1. Contact information for all units, programs, and initiatives related to diversity at the University of Connecticut;
2. Electronic cataloging of diversity training tools to help faculty, staff, and administrators to conduct independent and continuing diversity training activities in their respective units;
3. Teaching and learning tools to help faculty better understand the dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation within the classroom environment.
4. Additional resources to enhance professional and support staff's understanding of federal and state statutory requirements regarding reporting of discrimination and hate crimes.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Multicultural Affairs is constantly reassessing how best to foster diversity at the University, in accordance with the Diversity Plan.

The Task Force on Substance Abuse: Student Affairs Planning

The Division of Student Affairs has engaged in a number of planning exercises since the last self-study, including the Task Force on Substance Abuse. Following wide-spread concerns about student substance abuse, in 2002, the President created this Task Force. The Task Force, consisting of approximately 24 members chosen from a broad community base, was charged with developing a plan to reduce problems resulting from substance abuse, primarily alcohol.

The Task Force met over a period of three months and gathered information from different areas, including student affairs, public safety and students. Fifty-one recommendations were developed and presented to the University Community. The report is in Attachment 2.6. Most of the recommendations have now been implemented.

The Mansfield Downtown Partnership (The University of Connecticut and Town of Mansfield)

As a result of long-term evaluation of student and various constituency (faculty, staff, alumni, etc.) satisfaction with the University of Connecticut over many years, a common theme emerged: dissatisfaction because of the lack of a "university town" adjoining the main campus at Storrs. Extensive surveying of potential and matriculated students, as well as those who left the university before their courses of study were completed, dramatically emphasized that this was the most often cited negative associated with UConn.

Pursuant to extensive conversations between UConn and Town of Mansfield officials, beginning in 1999, a plan was undertaken to build a "downtown Storrs" with a "university town" ambience, i.e., mixed uses of dwellings and businesses in the area directly adjacent to the heart of the campus on Route 195 in Storrs. To this end, the Mansfield Downtown Partnership was formed. The Downtown Partnership, a non-profit organization with a full-time Executive Director, has undertaken a Municipal Development Project (MDP) as provided for in state statute, and, through a competitive process, selected a private developer that will make the new "downtown Storrs" a reality.

The planning effort, with evaluative iterations, has been very extensive and is ongoing. It is subject to constant assessment and refinement as the multiple public boards that must be involved in such a development process have provided input and direction. Appendix 2.7 contains detailed information about the history, activities and plans of the Downtown Partnership.

Other Examples of Planning and Evaluation

Planning and Evaluation efforts in the area of Enrollment Management called for in the 1995 Strategic Plan have reaped impressive results, not only in terms of significant increases in the quantity, quality, and diversity of

undergraduates at UConn, but in our ability to retain and graduate students. The Retention and Graduation Task Force, an ongoing committee reporting to the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, includes broad-based representation from across the University. It has nurtured initiatives that have contributed to increased student satisfaction, garnered feedback via surveys of entry-level expectations and mid-career and senior satisfaction and increased the likelihood of continued enrollment at and graduation from UConn via analysis of quantitative student data and qualitative phone survey responses of students who choose to leave. This Task Force, its efforts, and resulting outcomes are discussed in greater detail under Chapter Six: Students.

Another planning initiative discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six is the "Enrollment Management Vision." This is an approach that views the University's relationship with its undergraduate students as an ongoing one across an enrollment continuum that stretches from a student's identification as a prospective enrollee early on in high school through recruitment, admission, and enrollment, and on to graduation and beyond as an alumnus. It is based on tailoring a personalized message to meet the unique needs of the individual students by building a relationship whereby the student and university can make decisions that are data-driven and result in a successful experience for both. This initiative is already having measurable effects on student recruitment and retention and satisfaction reports regarding the quality of student life.

Accrediting Bodies

Many individual Schools, or programs within Schools and Colleges, regularly undergo accreditation reviews, specified by national organizations associated with the discipline. The standards for these disciplinary accrediting bodies invariably require creation and implementation of various types of plans, especially strategic plans.

Appraisal

The discussion above illustrates the culture of planning that permeates every initiative or change that the University of Connecticut undertakes. Evaluation of planning outcomes is a key principle embedded in university initiatives. For example, in addition to the planning activities described above, in furtherance of a culture of planning, the Provost has mandated that every School and College undertake strategic planning. The plans will include expected outcomes and mechanisms for assessing whether the academic units are making progress towards obtaining their goals. Further, the Provost has initiated a second round of refinement in the Academic Plan that should be completed by the end of academic year 2006-07.

Projection

The University of Connecticut recognizes that it cannot fulfill its mission and aspirations without careful planning and is committed to continuing and fostering a planning culture. Many of the initiatives or activities discussed above are in the midst of refinement and assessment and will continue to be in the future.

Because of the University's special visibility within the state of Connecticut and its stature as the state's flagship public university, its planning and activity outcomes are continually monitored by state government, the media and the public as a whole. Further, the University Board of Trustees, the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, and the General Assembly (as part of the biennial budgeting process) now and in the future will continue to expect and mandate extensive planning efforts by the University, containing statements of assessment mechanisms and outcome expectations.

EVALUATION

At the University of Connecticut, as described in detail above, planning and evaluation are inextricably linked. This part of the report will consist of a short summary of the evaluation portion of some of the planning initiatives discussed above and recent reorganizations in Academic Affairs at Storrs and in the School of Dentistry at the Health Center. Additionally, we will focus on two major evaluative processes: the evaluation of faculty member performance under the university Promotion, Tenure and Reappointment processes, and the BEST administrative process quality improvement program.

Evaluation of Planning Efforts Including Reorganization Planning

Academic Organizational Planning at Storrs and the Health Center

The Academic Plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2003. As its implementation has begun, evaluation has shown that some fine tuning or collateral efforts have been necessary. For example, the new Provost (who joined

UConn in March of 2005) decided to suspend implementation of the Grant Competition called for by the Academic Plan in order to address other pressing budgetary and organizational priorities. He made organizational restructuring a high priority, as an essential underpinning to Academic Plan implementation. As a result, at his and the President's recommendation, in 2006, two schools were abolished and the College of Continuing Studies was converted to a Center reporting to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education & Regional Campus Administration. At the Health Center, a similar type of evaluation focused on attaining effective management resulted in the collapsing of the School of Dentistry's nine departments into three. The Health Center administration worked with all interested parties in evaluating the best structure for the School of Dentistry, and the reorganization plan is based on this evaluation. These reorganization activities are the direct result of evaluation of existing conditions creating change. The outcomes of these changes will be closely monitored.

Information Technology Planning

The evaluative process for the Information Technology Strategic Plan, discussed above, specifies that evaluation must take place at several levels. The tactics to achieve these strategies which lead to attainment of the goals and assessment measures for each of those tactics need to be established by the four management committees. They will be responsible for the development of the appropriate metrics and assessment measures based on the goals for each of the tactics as they relate to the separate strategies.

In 2002, the University Libraries developed a strategic plan to create, manage, provide access to, preserve, and integrate digital resources with traditional library collections. Based on the teaching, research and service objectives of the University, the program will assess the value and use of digital collections, draw on collection development and other funding, and adhere to international description and access standards.

Diversity Planning

As mentioned above, the Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs evaluates the success of the implementation of the Diversity Action Plan and reports to the Board of Trustees annually on its progress.

Illustrative Evaluation Procedures at the University of Connecticut

Academic Evaluation: the PTR Process

The University has well-established procedures for Promotion, Tenure and Reappointment (PTR) that have been adopted by the faculties of the University (except for those of the School of Medicine and the School of Dental Medicine) under the authority of the *Laws, By-Laws and Rules of the University of Connecticut*. Tenure-track faculty members are reviewed annually until tenure is awarded. Following the award of tenure, faculty members may request consideration for further promotion, typically to full professor. The review process involves the following levels:

1. Departmental PTR Committee, elected by the department advises the Department Head
2. Department Head makes recommendations to the Dean
3. Dean's PTR Committee, with representatives from each of the Departments advises the Dean
4. Dean makes recommendations to the Provost
5. Provost reviews all reappointments for probationary appointments and all tenure and promotion cases
6. Faculty Review Board serves in an advisory capacity to the Provost to review all cases in which there are differences in recommendations from the Department Head and Dean. Cases referred by the Provost for further study and cases that come because individual faculty request review of their case; this committee is made up of six non-administrative, tenured Full Professors elected by the University Senate.
7. Provost makes recommendations to the President for presentation to the Board of Trustees for all tenure and promotion cases.
8. President may refer an appeal from the Provost's decision to the Committee of Three, a group of elected tenured faculty members.
9. The Board of Trustees approves all promotion, tenure and reappointment cases

The University of Connecticut's PTR process is rigorous and takes almost nine months to complete starting with submission of the PTR dossier by the candidate in early September and concluding with Board of Trustee action in

April. Appealed cases may take longer. Although the process is arduous, the university is committed to it, because its outcome is vital to the strength of the organization. Commencing in 2004, the Office of the Provost and the University Senate have sponsored a PTR Forum for untenured faculty held in the late spring. Junior faculty have been very enthusiastic and evaluation of the forum's success supports its continuation. Assessment feedback on the program from the junior faculty, presenters and Deans has made the program more effective each year, and such assessment will continue in the future.

Administrative Improvement Processes – the “BEST” Program

The University is using a new program to improve the efficiency of a wide range of administrative processes based on a detailed understanding of how they work and where and why problems arise. Teams of people with a stake in a particular process - both providers and users - collaborate to develop a long-term solution that works for all involved.

The program, known as “BEST” (Breakthroughs, Excellence, and Success through Teamwork), was launched at both Storrs and the Health Center in fall 2004 under the leadership of the Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

Members of the UConn community were invited to identify administrative bottlenecks. The issues tackled initially at Storrs included expediting the search and hiring processes; ensuring timely payment of temporary employees on the University's “special payroll;” reducing the time it takes to complete minor maintenance tasks; and developing an application that sends vendors purchase orders electronically.

The BEST process involves front-line staff as well as managers and “customers” as members of a team addressing a particular issue. After receiving training, the team begins by clearly stating the problem and taking into account the different perspectives of all those involved. The next step is to gather information, quantify the problem, and set targets for improvement. Thus, the BEST program is data driven. A discussion of improvements to processes such as minor maintenance timely completion and improving timeliness of payments to faculty can be found on the UConn Advance newspaper website.

The BEST program includes implementation, oversight, and evaluation, to ensure that the improvements are lasting. Using a “train the trainers” approach, team members who have completed their tasks help train - and in some cases serve on - new teams, so the system perpetuates itself.

At the Health Center, the BEST program has been coupled with a more comprehensive program for clinical activities. There, BEST teams tackled a range of issues aimed at reducing hiring time, reducing capital purchase requisition time, improving patient appointment scheduling, reducing late charges, and reducing grant closeout processing delays.

Plans by the administration call for embedding the BEST approach throughout the University's administrative structure. Many administrative processes are so complex that the University can only tackle them in a piecemeal approach, but this program has begun to break down the silos, allow people to work in collaboration, and provide an objective framework for assessing progress. It is teaching a new way to approach every problem. See Appendix 2.8 for a description of the BEST program and its project outcomes. Continual assessment and refinement of processes is built into fundamental BEST procedures.

Appraisal

Evaluation is often more difficult than planning. All institutions at some level fail to evaluate (or even implement) their plans. As noted several times in this chapter, the University of Connecticut has a culture of planning and evaluation. This attention to both planning and evaluation is motivated by its status as a public institution, which has a very direct linkage to its stakeholders, particularly the people of the State of Connecticut. As described above in the planning and the evaluation sections, assessment is built into the program development process, particularly for on-going activities such as the building program, implementation of the Academic and the Diversity Plans, and the BEST program. Because the University is answerable to its public stakeholders, constant evaluation and assessment is a necessary ingredient in all its undertakings.

There have already been a number of “mid-course corrections” resulting from assessment of the implementation of these plans. For example, as the Provost's Office began implementing the Academic Plan, it was determined that a reorganization of the Colleges and Schools would be desirable, and this re-organization has occurred. Similarly, as is discussed above and in more detail in Chapters Eight, Ten and Eleven, assessment of the outcomes, processes and procedures of the building construction program led to creation of new offices such as the Office of the Fire Marshal and of Construction Assurance, and the development of formal guidelines for construction processes in UCONN 2000 projects. (These guidelines are contained in Exhibit 8.7.)

Projection

As discussed and illustrated above, evaluation will continue to be a cornerstone of the University of Connecticut culture. Issues that will certainly be the subject of evaluation in the near future include the effectiveness of the latest academic reorganizations, and implementation of administrative changes recommended by BEST program studies, the building program plans, and the Academic Plan.

The University of Connecticut is still in an incipient planning stage of assessment and evaluation of student learning outcomes, particularly at the undergraduate level. However, the Provost's Office has made assessment of student learning outcomes a high priority for the institution, and the process is well underway, with dedicated resources attached. See Chapter Four, Assessment section, for more discussion on this topic.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

As an institution that has inculcated a culture of planning and evaluation into a myriad of its activities, the University of Connecticut is very much in compliance with the planning and evaluation standards. The institution needs to move forward rapidly and aggressively in the area of assessment and evaluation of student learning outcomes, but it has made a good beginning and is committed to progress in this area.