

# **ASSURANCE SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

University of Central Arkansas  
Conway, Arkansas

3/8/10 – 3/10/10

FOR

### **The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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## **I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**

### **A. Purpose of Visit.**

The purpose of this visit was to conduct a comprehensive evaluation, site-visit review for continued accreditation.

### **B. Organizational Context.**

The University of Central Arkansas (UCA) was established as Arkansas State Normal School by the General Assembly of Arkansas in 1907, with statewide responsibility for preparing citizens to teach Arkansas children. The first diploma granted by Arkansas State Normal School was the Licentiate of Instruction; the first baccalaureate degrees were granted in 1922. The name of the institution was changed to Arkansas State Teachers College in 1925 and by legislative enactment the Board of Trustees was given authority to grant appropriate degrees. In 1967, the name of the institution was again changed by the state legislature to the State College of Arkansas, expanding its role to a multipurpose institution. On January 21, 1975, the governor of Arkansas signed a bill granting university status to the institution and naming it the University of Central Arkansas.

Today, the University of Central Arkansas is a comprehensive university offering degree programs at the associate, bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral levels. Beginning around 2005, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) undertook a multi-year process to review and revise the Role and Scope designations of all public institutions of higher education in Arkansas. As a result of that review, UCA's audiences were defined to include: residents of the state, particularly those in central Arkansas, who have completed high school and are seeking either a college degree or continuing professional education; public and private region and state employers; economic development interests and entrepreneurs in the region and across the state; the community and area through academic, cultural, and public events; area K – 12 schools seeking college-level general education courses for advanced students; and two-year college transfer students. Among special UCA features are its support of the Arkansas public schools through the Arkansas Center for Mathematics and Science Education, the Arkansas Public School Resources Center, a regional center of the Asian Studies Development Program for the East-West Center, and the Community Development Institute.

The University of Central Arkansas has been continuously accredited since 1931 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

UCA seems to have been reasonably well-funded and to have had a normal development track for institutions of its size, mission, and program array when the last HLC comprehensive visit occurred in 2000. Three concerns were listed in the 2000 team report: 1) Comprehensive long-range planning; 2) Governance processes and structures; 3) Review of policies and procedures for meeting diverse student and employee needs, where diverse is broadly defined. A report of coordinated planning and

assessment of student learning was required in 2005, which received staff review and was accepted. Assessment also figured into the recommendation of a 2007 focused visit team to review campus progress to seek approval to expand the Statement of Affiliation Status stipulation in distance education to read, "No prior Commission approval required for graduate programs in Health, Business, Information Systems, and Education." This request was approved with a required report "on the inclusion of on-line delivery comprehensive assessment plan." The plan was submitted in December 2008 and approved by HLC staff. Moreover, two additional Requests for Institutional Change have been approved by the HLC since the 2000 visit, one for a Consortium Ph.D. program in Communication Sciences and Disorders with University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and the other for an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Leadership Studies. By letter dated March 12, 2009, after review of recent financial ratios and composite scores, the HLC mandated that UCA submit a Financial Recovery Plan due to HLC staff by 7/31/09, which was accepted with an additional progress report due by the end of calendar year 2009.

Leadership issues became increasingly pronounced during the 2002-2008 presidency of Lu Hardin, which ended abruptly near the beginning of AY 2008-09. While the fall appears to have been triggered by a compensation question in the summer of 2008, numerous years of spending beyond income had resulted in depletion of reserves. At about this time, the depleted reserves, as reflected in key ratios reported to the HLC, triggered a financial crisis in fall 2008 and a required Financial Recovery Plan due to the HLC in July 2009, with significant budget cuts in AY 2008-09, a wage freeze in AY 2008-09 and AY 2009-10, and some vacant faculty lines were unfilled. The state audit report and Management Letter for FY 2007-2008 (dated April 23, 2009) outline significant deficiencies and a list of eleven items brought to the attention of management during the course of the audit.

UCA is currently still in the wake of a tumultuous period. It is still deep in recrimination and finding it difficult to trust. This is a kind of institutional mourning period that must transcend the stages of grief. While the president and board from 2002-2008 seemed to be bent on competing with the University of Arkansas (rapid growth at all costs, physical plant improvements, and the move to Division I athletics), the institution has fallen back into a comfort zone that can be just as limiting. Team members repeatedly heard the statement that "we are the best second-best we can be." While this may be, for the time being, more realistic in terms of fiscal capacity, in the opinion of the team this view sells UCA short.

UCA's people have demonstrated a resiliency and a deep commitment to their lived mission and to their students and each other. They kept the machinery running even when turmoil swirled around them and even with apparently arbitrary appointments at unreasonable salaries made by the president. They have continued to attract students who are academically very competitive. They have attractive facilities and an attractive campus in a great location. And, although it has come at a high price and could have been achieved in a more balanced and planned manner, they have come through a decade of considerable growth, campus enhancements, new programs, and upgraded athletics. How those same resilient people now use these elements to the advantage of the university will determine the next ten years of UCA's history. If the blame and

distrust continue for long, real opportunities to become a comprehensive university that can compete across its region and realistically aspire to be among the best of class in the country could be lost. If the past can be put to rest and the future faced with confidence, these aspirations could become reality.

**B. Unique Aspects of Visit.**

None.

**C. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited.**

None.

**E. Distance Education Reviewed.**

UCA is not authorized to deliver undergraduate programs on-line and no proposals to do so are currently being considered. A Request for Institutional Change resulted in a 2007 focused visit to review campus progress to seek approval to expand the Statement of Affiliation Status stipulation in distance education to read, "No prior Commission approval required for graduate programs in Health, Business, Information Systems, and Education." This request was approved with a required report "on the inclusion of on-line delivery comprehensive assessment plan." The plan was submitted in December 2008 and subsequently approved by HLC staff.

**F. Interactions with Constituencies.**

Academic Planning and Assessment Committee (6)  
 Admissions Director  
 Affinity Groups, African American and GLBT Student Representatives (50)  
 Assessment Director  
 Assistant Controller for Student Accounts  
 Assistant Physical Plant Director  
 Associate Director for Academic Affairs, Arkansas Department of Higher Education  
 Associate Director of Media Relations  
 Associate Provost  
 Associate Vice President and Chief of Police  
 Athletic Director  
 Board of Trustees (3)  
 Board of Trustees Chairman  
 Business Office Staff – Accounts Payable  
 Chief of Staff  
 College of Health and Behavioral Sciences (6 chairs; dean)  
 Community Members (10)  
 Council of Deans (8)  
 Counseling Center Director  
 Dean of Academic Outreach  
 Dean of Learning Communities  
 Dean of Students

Department Chairpersons (15)  
 Diversity Support Programs (7)  
 EEOC Officer  
 Faculty Forums (33, 44)  
 Faculty Senate (30)  
 Financial Aid Director  
 Finance Officer, Arkansas Department of Higher Education  
 General Counsel  
 General Education Council (8)  
 General Education Director  
 Graduate Council (15)  
 Graduate Dean  
 Honors College Dean  
 Housing Director, Interim  
 Human Resources Director  
 Information Technology Director, Interim  
 Information Technology Staff (3)  
 Institutional Research Director  
 Instructional Development Center (4)  
 Internships (Director, Assistant Director, 2 student interns)  
 Library Staff (10)  
 On-line Programs (21)  
 Registrar  
 Physical Plant Director  
 President  
 President's Executive Staff (11)  
 Program Review Process (2)  
 Provost  
 Self-Study Academic Affairs Task Force 1, Chair  
 Self-Study Academic Affairs Task Force 2, Chair  
 Self-Study Steering Committee and Some Task Force Members (15)  
 Senior Female Athletic Administrator  
 Sponsored Programs (3)  
 Staff Senate (20)  
 Student Complaint Committee (4)  
 Student Senate (40)  
 Student Senate Executive Committee (6)  
 Undergraduate Council (11)  
 University College Director  
 University Research Council (9 members; 15 graduate students)  
 Vice President, Finance and Administration  
 Vice President, Institutional Advancement, Interim  
 Web Director

**G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed.**

Academic Planning and Assessment Committee, 2005 – 2008  
 Academic Records, Undergraduate Bulletin, 2.05

Admission to Graduate Study, Graduate Bulletin, 2.05  
Admission to the University, Undergraduate Bulletin, 2.03  
Application for Degree and Graduation, Graduate Bulletin, 2.08  
ADHE Existing Program Review Policy  
ADHE MOU Form  
ADHE Review of Institutional Mission and Scope, 2008  
AHECB Approved Degree Program Lists  
Assessment Forms  
Assessment Plan Library  
Assessment Process Guide  
Audited Financial Statements, 1999 – 2008  
Board of Trustees Information, Membership, Minutes, Policies  
Board of Trustees Policies (omnibus document)  
Board of Trustees Policy 200 Series, Admission to the University and its Programs  
Board of Trustees Policy 351, Searches for Tenured or Tenure-Track Positions  
Board of Trustees Policy 361, Guideline – Graduate Assistants  
Board of Trustees Policy 500 Series, Human Resources  
Campus Master Plans  
Centralized Student Learning Support Services Information  
Computer Use Policy  
Copies of Contracts  
Correspondence between HLC and UCA since 2000 (as sent to team members)  
Council of Deans, Minutes and Records, 2000 – 2009  
Curriculum Development Process Guide  
Curriculum Forms  
Documentation of Accreditation  
Enabling Legislation, ACA 6-67-101 through 6-67-114  
Existing Program Review Policy, Revised  
Faculty Handbook, May 2009 ed.  
Faculty Roster for Spring Semester 2010  
Faculty Senate, Bylaws and Constitution  
Faculty Senate, Minutes and Records  
Federal Compliance File  
Financial Recovery Plan (July 2009) and Progress Report (December 2009)  
General Education Assessment: Results Examples  
General Education Council, Minutes and Records, 2002 – 2009  
General Requirements for Graduate Study, Graduate Bulletin, 2.06  
Graduate Council, Minutes and Records, 2005 – 2009  
Graduate Bulletin  
HLC 2010 Self-Study Steering Committee, Minutes and Campus Updates  
Human Resources Information/Guidelines/Policies  
Library Policies and Procedures  
List of Accreditations  
Nursing Undergraduate Degree Completion Program  
Operating Budgets, FY 2001 – FY 2010  
Organizational Charts  
Petition for Candidacy and Program of Study, Graduate Bulletin, 2.07  
Program Review Document, Departmental

Program Deletion Protocol  
Public Comment Notice Information Filed with HLC  
Public Comment Posting  
Registration and Credit, Undergraduate Bulletin, 2.04  
Report of a Requested Focused Visit for Change, Assurance Section, 10/31/05-11/01/05  
Report of a Requested Focused Visit for Change, Assurance Section, 09/10/2007  
Report of a Visit to UCA, 04/09-12/2000  
Satisfactory Academic Progress (Financial Aid)  
Staff Handbook  
Staff Senate, Bylaws and Constitution  
Staff Senate, Minutes and Records  
Student Handbook, 2009 – 2010  
Task Force 1: Academic Affairs 1, Task Force Reports  
Task Force 2: Academic Affairs 2, Task Force Reports  
Task Force 3: Financial Services, Task Force Reports  
Task Force 4: General Administration 1, Task Force Reports  
Task Force 5: General Administration 2, Task Force Reports  
Task Force 6: Student Affairs, Task Force Reports  
Title III Eligibility and Financial Aid Waiver Letters  
Third Party Comments  
Title III Grant Reports  
UCA Directory  
UCA Factbook, 2008, 2009  
UCA Foundation, Inc.  
UCA Organizational Profile  
UCA Self-Study, Comprehensive Evaluation 2010  
UCA Strategic Framework  
Undergraduate Bulletin  
Undergraduate Council, Minutes and Records  
Undergraduate Program Completion Plans  
Viewbook, 2009 – 2010

## **II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW**

### **A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process.**

The Self-Study outlines the process UCA initiated to prepare for the 10-year reaccreditation review. The Self-Study Coordinator and Self-Study Steering Committee were appointed in spring 2008 when appropriate charges were made by President Hardin, reaffirmed by Interim President Courtway in October 2008, and again by President Meadors in August 2009. Steering Committee members each led one of six Self-Study Task Forces, created to mirror the UCA organizational structure, two in academic affairs, two in general administration, one in financial services, and one in student affairs. These Task Forces contributed to the Self-Study, including the Criteria chapters, as appropriate.

Beginning in June 2009, the Steering Committee published a monthly Self-Study update

for the campus and posted it on the web site created specifically for the Self-Study process. It was apparent that the Steering Committee, other members of the six Task Forces, the administration, and key directors were very engaged and knowledgeable about the process. In the experience of a number of team members, however, the communication to the entire campus community was not as effective as they usually experience, when multiple strategies beyond a monthly web site posting are frequently used to make it almost impossible not to see information about the visit weekly, if not almost daily, as the dates approach, and do not rely on individual willingness to read a web site posting.

#### **B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report.**

The UCA Self-Study is organized into three sections: Introduction and Overview, Federal Compliance Program, the Five Criteria for Accreditation. Overall, team members found it to be well-written, descriptive, and not inaccurate. Until the actual visit began, the team did not appreciate the tumultuous years UCA experienced in any depth.

Several team members commented that it would have been helpful to have had earlier access to the documents in the electronic resource room or to have been able to locate important documents on the UCA web site as part of their preparation. Once on campus, questions were answered with consistent straightforwardness and requested materials were promptly forthcoming.

#### **C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges.**

The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be inadequate.

The 2000 team identified three areas of concern that UCA was mandated to address:

- 1) comprehensive long-range planning,
- 2) governance processes and structures, and
- 3) policies and procedures for meeting diverse student and employee needs.

Moreover, that team required UCA to submit a progress report of coordinated planning and assessment of student learning outcomes by March 1, 2005. Ongoing challenges are addressed by the 2010 team in Criteria One, Two, and Three.

#### **D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment.**

Requirements were fulfilled.

One comment concerned the timely completion of the BSN degree. Like many peer institutions, the UCA BSN is a tightly scheduled four-year program, with nursing courses introduced in the sophomore year. Students who successfully enroll and complete the course enrollment plan will graduate after eight semesters. This program does not offer summer nursing courses. The complete course enrollment plan and pre-requisite requirements, with course equivalents, are provided to all interested students.

### III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

- 1. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition:** The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

- 2. Student Complaints:** The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints for the three years prior to the visit.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

- 3. Transfer Policies:** The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

- 4. Verification of Student Identity:** At this time, the institution verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided through distance or correspondence education using the UCA ID.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

- 5. Title IV Program and Related Responsibilities:** The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program. The team has reviewed these materials and has found no cause for concern regarding the institution's administration or oversight of its Title IV responsibilities. Program articulation agreements are now monitored carefully to assure that students complete less than 50% of the degree-required coursework off-site. The Perkins Loan default rate increased from 10.19% in 2004-2005 to 15.85% in 2006-2007, but UCA is currently not under a default management plan for either this program or for the Family Federal Education Loan Program.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

- 6. Institutional Disclosures and Advertising and Recruitment Materials:** The institution provides accurate, timely, and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about their accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies, about their programs, locations, and policies.

The Admissions Office works directly with the Publications Office and a contracted advertising agency to develop and produce printed materials and commercials for UCA. The Publications Office writes copy and coordinates with appropriate campus offices to ensure accuracy of all information. As one example, all academic materials go through

the Provost's Office for review.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

**7. Relationship with Other Accrediting Agencies and with State Regulatory Bodies:**

The institution appropriately discloses to the Commission its relationship with all specialized, professional, or institutional accrediting agencies, as well as with the Board of Trustees and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

#### **IV. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA**

**CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met.**

UCA's mission states explicitly what UCA's commitments are. There are six clearly articulated accompanying principles that guide UCA in interpreting its mission. As is readily apparent, the mission includes a strong commitment to high academic standards, "excellence in teaching and research," which both sustain and advance excellence in education.

The mission also underscores that UCA recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituents, and the global community. The six accompanying principles reinforce the mission's emphasis on diversity by supporting multiple teaching methods, by pointing out the value of embracing diversity, and by suggesting that a university maintains its viability by engagement with the global community.

UCA is one of 33 public institutions of higher education in Arkansas and as such also has a Role and Scope assigned by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. Most recently updated in 2008, this document identifies the institution's audiences and its array of programs and services. This document also identifies special features of UCA, which include supporting public K-12 schools via the Arkansas Center for Mathematics and Science Education, serving as the regional center of the Asian Studies Development Program for the East-West Center, and serving communities and their leaders via the Community Development Institute. UCA's academic liaison at the ADHE commented positively on the responsible and thoughtful manner in which UCA manages its program submissions and overall interactions with the academic division of ADHE.

There is clear evidence that both internal and external stakeholders in UCA believe that UCA's mission is to educate its students well. The chair of the Board of Trustees said that UCA's mission was "to educate the masses." Students, who are engaged in research with the faculty, said that the faculty members strive to prepare them for graduate school. Faculty members concurred that their main focus is on producing well-

educated students. At the first open faculty meeting, there was consensus that the mission was to provide excellent undergraduate and graduate education. The Self-Study Steering Committee explained to team members that UCA's core value is to "educate students." Department chairpersons attested that UCA's mission is to produce "excellent students."

Under its new president, who began in July 2009, the university is once again embarking on a strategic planning process. They anticipate it will take approximately 18 months to complete and once accomplished, strategic directions will guide allocation decisions and all constituents will understand the process.

Members of the Faculty Senate believe that shared governance at UCA is much better than it was six years ago. Evidence cited included the existence of a Budget Advisory Committee, the decision to give chairpersons control of departmental budgets, and the roles played by the faculty, staff, and student membership of the more than 40 standing university councils and committees. Moreover, discussions during faculty and staff open forums, interviews with administrators, conversations with external constituents, and a meeting with several Trustees confirm that all seem at least cautiously optimistic that the current governance and administrative structures being put into place will enable UCA to make positive progress toward fulfilling its mission.

There is clear evidence that the university's integrity has been seriously challenged in the ten years since UCA's last comprehensive visit. However, in May 2009, the Board of Trustees passed several new policies intended to eliminate recurrence of the financial bad judgment the previous president was allowed to exercise for a number of years. Specifically, the three new policies establish 1) a Board of Trustees' Audit Committee to which UCA's Director of Audits reports; 2) uniform contract review procedures; and 3) a representative committee to determine how scholarships will be awarded for students in exceptional circumstances, replacing the unmonitored presidential discretion that was earlier permitted and sometimes encouraged.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

The mission statement appears in the Undergraduate and Graduate bulletins, both of which are linked to the UCA web site under, respectively, "General Policies and Information" and "About the University of Central Arkansas." In neither bulletin is the UCA mission listed in the table of contents, nor can it be found under "M" of the UCA A – Z index on the web site. The mission statement is not contained in the Student or Faculty Handbooks. When asked about the mission, the self-study Steering Committee said that prior to the current President's arrival, there had been no discussion on campus of the mission or the strategic plan since the mission's adoption by the Board of Trustees in 2004. Without the assistance of the Self-Study, it would have been difficult to locate the mission.

Although all internal and external constituent groups agree that the purpose of UCA is to

educate students, numerous interviews revealed that the members of the UCA community have only a limited understanding of the formal mission. When students, faculty, staff, administrators, external constituents, and board members were asked to share their understanding of the UCA's mission statement, the first response was for the interviewees to look at one another blankly. At one session, it became clear that a college mission statement was believed to be UCA's. Another interviewee, an alumnus of UCA and a long-time employee, said, "I don't have a clue, I'd have to look it up." The first page of the Self-Study asserts that UCA's "goal is to be the best and most beautiful public university." A participant at another meeting volunteered that UCA's mission is to be the second-best institution in Arkansas. The team found scant evidence that the mission statement played a meaningful role in university-wide, formal decision-making over the past decade. While in the earliest stage of the current effort, it is encouraging that one of the initial strategic planning work groups is focusing on Core Ideas that incorporate mission, vision, and values.

Self-Study Steering Committee members indicated that organizational structure still lacks clarity and additional work is needed. They also indicated that numerous important procedures are not well-defined. For example, Steering Committee members indicated that although the process for curriculum decisions is articulated and understood, more complex decision-making processes still need attention. Specifically, members cited the lack of clear delineation about precisely how a number of decisions are made at UCA. Without intentional progress to formalize and institutionalize practices into procedures that are widely understood, ongoing speculation can contribute to making it more difficult to build trust and confidence in leadership decisions and actions.

Numerous groups expressed concern about the lack of effective communication. One manifestation this concern takes is that there is a belief among the Steering Committee members that good communication takes place at and below the level of the deans, but that communication does not seem to travel any further upward. Faculty representatives at open meetings scheduled as part of the visit indicated that information tends to flow upward from them to the administration, but not in the other direction. At an open faculty forum earlier in the year, it was reported that the faculty went to what they expected to be a dialogue session with the new administration and instead found that they were on the receiving end of an informational session that did not provide opportunity for them to ask their prepared questions. Faculty Senate members were unable to say on what basis the EEOC officer might hold up a faculty search. Participants at an open faculty meeting during the site visit reported that the new administration withheld information from the Budget Advisory Committee and did not listen to the Committee's concerns. Whether accurate or not, the perception was not contradicted and is important to understand. Members of one UCA office indicated that effective consultation and/or communication from above depends on the personality of the individual, rather than on policy or procedure. UCA is making progress implementing strategies to communicate more effectively with its constituents, and the team encourages sustained attention to this goal.

Moreover, while organizational changes are still ongoing, a number of individuals related to team members that reporting lines that were in place for much of the previous decade created entire departments with no "seat at the table." While it is not the role of the team

to propose an organizational structure for UCA, or to respond to questions about why the chief of police is a member of the leadership team and the IT director is not, it is appropriate to encourage campus leadership to communicate its decisions to assure campus constituents that that all campus units have qualified representation on the president's leadership team.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

Because the mission is not contained in either the Student or Faculty Handbooks or in the university's marketing materials, the message about diversity contained in the mission is potentially compromised. For example, the Faculty Handbook contains only two mentions of diversity. The first reference is as part of a commitment to an "effective affirmative action program that encourages racial and cultural diversity and interactions among faculty, students and staff," and the other one is to specify that membership on one of the standing university councils and committees, the Institutional Research Board, should be diverse.

The mission documents contain language that should provide a basis for UCA's basic strategies to address diversity. However, this does not seem to have occurred, even in procedures as critical as employee recruitment and hiring. Academic departments do their own advertising; HR's role is to place the advertisements on the UCA web site. Members of the Faculty Senate stated that advertising for faculty positions was limited to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and their professional journals/conferences. When asked if advertisements were placed in journals such as *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* or *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, faculty senators present appeared not to have heard of them. The approval for hiring form must be signed by the EEOC office, but knowledge was not widespread about the rules that an individual might apply to determine whether the hiring request would be approved. Applicants for classified positions are screened for job qualifications by HR, which then sends qualified applicants to the departments for interviews. Applications for non-classified positions go directly to the hiring departments, although HR does receive those applicants' EEOC forms. HR does not have any policies relating to the diversity of the applicant pools.

There is no evidence that the university has made strategic decisions in relation to its mission between its last comprehensive visit and the arrival of the new President. The university-level planning processes seem to have died in 2004 with the production of the Strategic Framework. No further progress on the UCA strategic plan was reported to any of the consultant-evaluators. In fact, the Self-Study states that the goals and objectives developed as part of the 2004 strategic thinking initiative "have been for the most part ignored..." Ultimately UCA was driven to an untenable financial situation. In the absence of transparent planning and budget processes, the team cannot assert that the planning and budget priorities flow from and support the mission.

UCA does not seem to have any pathway through which learning outcomes assessment results are communicated above the level of the deans. The Steering Committee indicated that there was a real need to get that information in front of the central administration. The consultant-evaluator team observed that the majority of the annual

reports for the colleges are simply compilations of the component units' annual reports and do not provide any synthesis of the data. The team believes that this is one factor that contributes to the opinion that learning outcome results seem to dissipate at the level of the deans.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

None noted.

**Recommendation of the Team.**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

**1. Evidence that the Core Components are met.**

UCA has met this core component primarily in two ways:

First, over the past ten years individuals and individual departments have gone about their business as defined by their understanding of the university's and their unit's missions and have, in the process, assessed the external trends that affect their work. Departments and colleges have developed academic programs to meet evolving needs as in health care, technology, and education. The UCA Foundation conducted a successful comprehensive campaign. Financial aid professionals met student needs in a volatile economy. Assistance to faculty in pedagogy and technology developed and expanded in this period to meet the changing learning environment that evolved over time. In this way, at the individual and unit level, there was planning, environmental scanning, support for innovation and change, preservation of strengths, and adaptation to technology and the economy. And these efforts, at times put forth in trying circumstances, have maintained academic and student support programs at a competitive level that continued to attract very capable students to UCA.

Second, UCA meets this core component through its more recent actions undertaken since the summer of 2008. Under the very dedicated leadership of an interim president and now under the leadership of its new president, the university has committed to seriously undertake a broad-based, participative strategic planning process. These efforts already began in February 2010. The planning process is structured to incorporate environmental scanning, assessment of strengths, and emerging trends.

The Self-Study fully documents the changes in UCA's resource base that resulted in deficit in 2007 and beyond. This development argues *ipso facto* that the university did

not have a resource base sufficient to support its educational programs and assure their quality. Many of the causes of the deficit growth, however, were unrelated to academic program quality and quantity. These causes are identified in the Self-Study document and below and include facility purchases, tuition discounting that grew fourfold from 2002 to 2007, and considerable expenses related to the move of athletics from Division II to Division I. Isolating academic programs from these ancillary spending patterns indicates a set of behaviors that support the mission of the university.

Over this time, an ever increasing number of students attended UCA, received quality instruction from dedicated faculty and benefitted from existing and new academic programs. As across public higher education in the United States, UCA has experienced declining public funding that results in a lower per student allocation and the consequent increase in workload for everyone from faculty in the classroom to academic advisors to counselors. Individuals and units across the university continued to provide instruction and support for an increasing number of students. They planned and implemented new academic programs, some receiving funding adequate to do so. Over time, as the current administration gains control over spending and rebuilds budget capacity, those efforts ought to result in a very competitive array of academic programs and options for students that will in the long run form a continuum of building excellence rather than a period of discontinuity.

Satisfaction of this core component, like many others, occurred at the level of the individual and the unit rather than across the organization. Primary compliance can be found in the academic units that continued to conduct annual reviews and periodic (10-year) program reviews that have continued on a published schedule. Individual performance is evaluated in many areas of university activity. Faculty are subject to annual review that includes student evaluations, evaluations by peers, and evaluation by department chairs. Chairs and deans are evaluated through the provost's office annually incorporating faculty input. Classified staff on probation are evaluated through a formal process.

Evaluation and assessment of teaching, learning, and scholarship are addressed elsewhere in this report. Annual reports from departments and colleges, however, were identified as important tools for identifying strategies for improvement and for developing academic program plans.

It is noteworthy that the 2000s have comprised a decade at UCA that was marked by considerable growth in enrollment and staffing, expansion of the physical plant, the adoption of many new academic programs, and enhancement of athletics. To be sure, these accomplishments overextended the university's financial capacity and will now require correction. These events also occurred in an atmosphere that was not conducive to shared governance and broad participation. The present perspective on how governance worked should inform future improvements and appear already to have done so, as faculty and staff have been invited to become more involved in decision-making and have accepted that invitation. With an improved set of decision processes in the future, UCA can maximize the advantages that it has achieved.

Alignment of planning to mission exists where there is planning, primarily at the level of the individual and the department or unit. As indicated throughout this criterion, planning has continued at the level of the academic college and department and within offices across other divisions. To the extent that there has been such planning, it has coincided with that entity's determination of its own mission and the role that its own mission defines within the overall mission of the university. One might conclude that everyone at UCA knows "a mission." It might be the mission of the unit in which that person is employed or it could be the university mission. Absent institution-wide planning and with limited participation in decision-making throughout much of the decade from 2000 to 2010, this is an understandable consequence.

The present administration has committed to institution-wide planning and broad participation in planning. One of the initial work groups is focused on Core Ideas that incorporate mission, vision, and values and that will keep the mission statement at the core of planning so that a strategic planning process will either reaffirm the existing mission and align planning with it or result in a rethinking of the mission statement to more accurately reflect the current and future directions of the university.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

The institution is completing an enterprise system installation (Banner). The IT report in 2008 questioned whether there was sufficient testing of data and processes because of staffing levels. There were also comments from many interviewed regarding the integrity of data, particularly financial data, from the period prior to 2007. These doubts about the integrity of data within the enterprise system require attention and documented verification, if the institution is to enter into a more data-driven decision-making process in the future.

The institution understands that spending needs to be brought into alignment with resources. The present administration understands that this will require close scrutiny of programs to assure that they are mission-critical. The new ADHE process for review of programs with low enrollment or graduation numbers will be one way for UCA to approach such scrutiny. UCA is prepared to alter its program review process to incorporate the ADHE expectations.

Most evaluation and assessment at UCA is, as planning, at the individual or unit level. The range of assessments related to institutional performance are outlined in the Self-Study and in the three evidentiary statements beginning with the first full statement on page 18 of this report. Academic program and student learning assessment are discussed in appropriate Criteria sections.

As the university develops a strategic plan and then moves to implement that plan, it must establish institutional performance standards (key performance indicators) that measure the overall health and direction of institutional performance as an aggregate or collections of units. Those indicators and expectations must be incorporated into unit plans and annual reports. It is openly admitted in the Self-Study, and was widely acknowledged in conversations on campus, that UCA lacks a formal strategic plan that

has been successfully implemented. This recognition alone will help in developing a measurable plan and the assessment tools to determine progress.

### **3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

Both the 1990 and 2000 accreditation team reports noted that UCA had not developed comprehensive academic or institutional plans. Between 2000 and 2010, initiatives were undertaken to address the concerns of the accreditation report. These efforts are well documented in the institutional Self-Study, and they include a “Strategic Framework” developed and disseminated in 2004 and a campus master plan developed in 2006. The Self-Study acknowledges that even these planning processes and documents fell short of the expectations set by the 2000 accreditation report. These planning shortcomings were evident across campus in terms of comprehensiveness or participation in their development by a broad base of campus constituencies.

The Strategic Framework set out six strategic goals. To be sure, these goals are cited in annual reports and in proposals of units as goals to which those departments or units contribute. But in 2010, there is little of substance believed to be remaining of the Strategic Framework. The Self-Study and interviews indicate that there is widespread belief that the Strategic Framework, while it may capture broad intentions of the university, has not become an operational guide for the university and its elements.

For many reasons, a culture of “institutional” planning has not yet fully evolved at UCA. Most planning has occurred at the department/college and unit level. As is well documented in the Self-Study task force reports, colleges engage in at least annual retreats. There, the specific challenges and opportunities before the college are addressed. These challenges are largely operational. There is less evidence that there are any institutional-wide strategic goals or objectives that are measured or to which colleges identify their contributions. In the Division of Student Services, there has been no division-wide retreat involving all directors in four to five years according to the task force report. A similar environment was documented by a 2008 external review of information technology at UCA, which noted the institution’s focus on implementing new enterprise systems and the absence of either a plan for IT within the learning and service context of the university or even an identifiable organizational unit that could initiate such a plan. “UCA currently lacks a coordinated IT decision-making structure,” and “There is currently no mechanism in place for strategic IT planning conversations to occur,” noted the authors of the report. Conversations with enrollment directors confirmed that there was no institutional enrollment management plan in place over the past ten years, but that growth was pursued in every way possible by administrative direction (including a presidential decision to lower admission criteria). There is little evident planning related to diversity and internationalization of the campus. At a time in which even HLC Criteria specifically address diversity on campus, hardly any conversation during the site visit incorporated discussion of diversity unless the visiting team facilitator asked about it. While general education requires student coursework in world cultural traditions, neither students, faculty, staff, or administrators were able to articulate an understanding of expectations of living, learning, and working in a multicultural society. All of this attests to not only a belief, but also to a behavior, that

indicates that the campus community does not perceive there to be a common set of strategic objectives toward which they work.

The absence of a culture of “institutional-level” planning as compared to unit-level planning makes it more difficult for those environmental factors that are outside the institution (state financing, community expectations, demographics, diversity, and even university-level budget) to receive consideration within unit-level planning. In college-level discussions about “capacity,” for example, the discussions reportedly focus on office space, classroom size, and budget (or spending authority) as opposed to broader discussions about enrollment directions and decisions or the human resource capacity (faculty available relative to the curriculum to be offered). Capacity in technology areas is defined in terms of equipment and bandwidth, instead of in terms of ability to fulfill expectations of faculty, students, and staff to use technology in a variety of ways. “Planning” therefore defaults to annual operational thinking, instead of multi-year, cross-unit dialogue. Years of unilateral administrative decision-making have separated many in leadership roles at the university from larger questions about the university as a whole.

The university’s new president has committed to a participative, broadly-based strategic planning process that will build on the historic and emerging strengths of the institution. The university has initiated the environmental scanning process necessary to inform this planning process in February 2010 with the creation of four task forces to look at Core Ideas, Planning Assumptions, Institutional Distinctiveness, and Driving Forces. The university has also engaged a national enrollment management consulting firm to develop a long-term enrollment, recruitment, and retention plan.

This new planning process will need to be aggressive and persistent over a period of years to overcome what was expressed as a significant element of disbelief in administrative commitment to planning and to broad-based involvement in planning. In a meeting with faculty, it was expressed that there was still a willingness to give this new process a chance and to participate, but that it needed to be consistent and lead to results for faculty involvement to continue. The university leadership anticipates that the strategic planning process recently initiated will be completed within 18 months. The team notes that continued Commission attention is needed to assure satisfactory completion of this process and its on-going implementation across the campus and in campus budgeting processes.

At the time of the HLC peer review team visit, UCA was under a mandated HLC Financial Recovery Plan. This plan resulted from a period of declining financial ratios beginning in the 2003 – 2004 academic year and continuing through 2008. The causes of this period of financial stress are well documented in the Self-Study. Although they include external contributors such as state budget difficulties that led to reduced per-student funding on the UCA campus as a consequence, a larger portion of the origin of the cash shortage is attributable to decisions made by the campus administration and by campus units. These, in turn, occurred because the campus did not succeed in complying with the recommendations of the 2000 visiting team or the subsequent 2005 progress report commitment regarding strategic planning. Consequently, considerable

expenditures resulted from initiatives that were not anticipated in either planning or budgeting processes.

The ten years from 2000 to 2010 included the addition of a number of new academic programs, some at the doctoral level, while only three programs seem to have been eliminated (an associate degree program, entry level PT programs with the advent of the DPT, and the International Business MBA) as defined in the task force report on academic programs. The university grew quickly from 2003 to 2008, incorporating many new students who were admitted as contingent students who did not meet expressed admission criteria. Additional faculty hiring was approved and faculty and staff were added. The university engaged in considerable facility improvements, including the purchase of numerous houses and apartment complexes in the vicinity of the campus, but without any apparent plan (e.g., contiguity) to explain these purchases. In 2004, the university committed to advancing its athletics from Division II to Division I (FCS in football). These decisions were made by the president, apparently with little consultation of university officers. At the same time, the state finances prevented continued growth of the FTE-based funding model. Also, additional burdens were imposed by a liability tort, decisions to increase scholarship funds from tuition revenue, and the unexpected need to rapidly deploy a new technology enterprise system. As a consequence, university cash reserves dwindled and went negative in 2007. This resulted in a Financial Recovery Plan imposed by the Commission.

Following presidential turnover in 2008-2009, a number of measures were introduced to prevent repetition of the events of 2002-2008. A Budget Advisory Committee representing shared governance participation in budget recommendations was re-established in 2008. Its future role will need to be clarified. The Board of Trustees, in May 2009, enacted three new policies that strengthened the role of internal audit and established a Board Audit Committee, required multiple officer review and signature on contracts in place of presidential signature alone, and removed discretionary scholarship funds from the office of the president to a representative committee.

The new administration has taken steps to restore fund balances. These are documented in the December 18, 2009 report to the HLC regarding the Financial Recovery Plan. Key officers of the institution indicated optimism regarding the financial status of the university, and a number of elements that will more favorably affect the budget are in progress, such as a stabilization of athletic costs along with student fees and games scheduled to generate considerable revenue. It is anticipated that the university will end the current year with significant cash balances. It will, however, take additional years to fully correct the spending trends and to gain reliable information and controls on spending. There remain large dislocations that resulted from the prior administration, for example, persons hired without searches and at disproportionate salaries to their duties, "favored" programs that received budget allocations, and infrastructure budgets (like information technology) that require assessment in terms of the performance expectations.

Regaining balance and confidence in the budget and the budgeting process will take additional time, continuous communication, and persistent and consistent behaviors to curb and redirect spending. Consequently, the team notes that continued Commission

attention is needed to assure that UCA develops a strategic plan and that it creates the mechanisms and relationships needed to prioritize budget decisions toward implementing its strategic objectives.

Most evaluation at UCA is at the “local” level, the department, the division, and the individual. The Commission should make viable measurements and their annual follow-up a key target for investigation in the proposed four-year follow-up visit that will determine if the strategic plan has been implemented.

The UCA Self-Study and numerous discussions on campus during the visit openly conclude that there has been, over the ten-year period since the last accreditation visit, a failure to plan and therefore a failure to plan in alignment with mission. This has had the unfortunate consequences that resulted from unilateral presidential and board decision-making, unrelated to mission and unencumbered by participative process. These include a significant loss of fund balances and subsequent deficit status leading to a Financial Recovery Plan, decisions on spending that effectively altered the mission trajectory of the university by “trying to compete” with the state’s flagship university, enrollment growth at the expense of admission standards and scholarship award consistency, and enhancements that the university did not adequately project in terms of costs in regard to physical plant, facility purchases, and athletics.

It is essential that the Commission follow up as recommended by the team to address first the creation of a strategic plan through participative processes that supports the mission and second the implementation of that plan through performance measurements, assessment/continuous planning, and transparent budgeting based on strategic directions.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

None noted.

**Recommendation of the Team.**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met.**

UCA demonstrates some progress and certainly a desire to assess student learning. The university has a senior level administrator assigned the responsibility for both assessment and program review. There is in place an Academic Planning and Assessment Committee made up of faculty and staff. Both undergraduate and graduate

programs are required to have updated assessment plans on file and departments are also required to keep these up-to-date for the cycle of program review.

UCA has continuing commitment to general education. General education in the undergraduate colleges is largely uniform with some variation by college. There is a strong General Education Committee and an Undergraduate Council that reviews curriculum proposals, course proposals, and new programs. This shows evidence of a strong review and recommendation process; final approval is with the Deans' Council.

UCA offers support for the development of effective teaching. One of the best examples is the Instructional Development Center (IDC), which provides a central facility to assist faculty in their continued improvement of teaching and learning. The varied activities and the number served by this center is impressive and the comments positive. The University Research Council (URC) also supports faculty development through funding for research and creative projects.

UCA also rewards effective teaching. The reward system involves both recognition and financial awards. There are both college-level and institutional recognition.

The University College is a strong asset to the institution providing valuable instruction, advising, and tutoring to help ensure the success of students. This entity will probably expand in the light of the new scholarships in Arkansas for students who hold appropriate grade point averages.

UCA employs a variety of technologies to provide teaching and learning resources to its faculty and students regardless of their location. There is an ever growing list of on-line instruction and a complex system of development and implementation of on-line courses and degrees. There is a strong committee that oversees these functions, yet the office that controls this area is not the office of the Provost.

The UCA Torreyson Library is indeed an asset for the institution with an extremely talented Dean and dedicated staff. Students are assisted in all facets of their education. Impressive services are provided with limited resources.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

The assessment effort at UCA is mixed, at best.

The relevant campus committee is the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee, which seems to combine functions of program review and assessment of learning. Review of the recently developed (after the Self-Study was underway) program assessment plans shows a confusion among program review, direct and indirect measures of learning and also of student satisfaction, and grading of students as opposed to program analysis over time. Also, assessment goals and objectives are often abstract and general, even when clearly stated, which makes it difficult to state whether effective assessment is possible.

First, it would require a program review. Second, relying on the assessment requirements of specialized program accrediting agencies serves some departments well, but others far less so and each should be scrutinized on a case-by-case basis in comparison with UCA learning goals and outcomes. Third, given the importance of the assessment of student learning and the amount of work to be done, UCA should consider separating assessment from the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee and create a new, separate Assessment Committee with a clear charge and direct, high-level support from at least the Provost.

### **3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

First, to answer the question of assessability would require a much deeper review of individual programs than is current required. Second, this many years into the assessment process, recognizing that the 2000 comprehensive review team recommended a progress report by March 1, 2005 on coordinated planning and assessment of student learning, one would expect that expectations would be explicitly stated, as would be the evidence that a program would have, or would need to have, to be considered successful. Third, there is an absence of a recognized culture of assessment of student learning.

While UCA reviews general education, it appears unable to think broadly about the skills and attitudes this critical program implies for the students. UCA is aware of evidence that parts of its program are ineffective, specifically the sciences. While it might be accurate that the CAAP did not address the aims of the sciences, when the CAAP in Scientific Reasoning for UCA was below the national level in 2003/04 and declined further in 2007/06, it is time to explore why. In conversations during the site visit, team members were told that students do not understand why they need to take further coursework in the sciences or history, for example, when they already have high school coursework in these disciplines behind them. Student understanding that there is more to learn, as well as appreciating that university expectations are measurably different than those experienced in high school, are key elements of becoming a life-long learner. Team members agree that on-going discussions about adding upper-level General Education courses are wise to pursue.

The assessment effort appears to have lagged the Self-Study by about a year. For example, the Self-Study Coordinator went to the General Education Council in January 2009 to explain what needed to be done. The Self-Study document promised some closure in general education assessment by January 2010, which seems not to have been done, with the date moved back to the end of spring 2010. This meant inadequate materials available for team review and judgment. Moreover, team members found no evidence that curricular review of General Education was discussed with various external stakeholders. Nor had the faculty, at least at the time of the site visit, engaged in focus group conversations with the students or shared assessment results effectively with each other or with UCA students.

Currently, there are no demonstrated learning outcomes for UCA's General Education program. The assessment plan for General Education indicates that assessment of the various general education courses is done by the departments that teach them. This is not supported by any evidence available to the team. A review of the 2008 annual reports of the College of Liberal Arts found limited attention to assessment of courses offered within General Education.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

None noted.

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE.**

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met.**

UCA prides itself on faculty scholarship that includes strong emphasis on faculty-student collaboration across a wide range of research and creative activities and is seen as an integral part of the teaching-learning mission of the institution. The University presents an annual University Research Award and each of the Colleges has individual awards recognizing faculty and student scholarly achievements. Multiple examples of collaborative research projects between students and faculty were found in the annual report data of departments and colleges. Students identified mentor faculty as committed and supportive of a well-understood, collaborative model of faculty-student research. Interviews with faculty, administrators, and students verified the engagement of the institution in the acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge as an integral part of the teaching, learning process and the scholarly work of faculty at UCA.

In response to a growing number of graduate programs at UCA, the Graduate Dean, in collaboration with the Graduate Council, led a two-year process for revising the criteria for Graduate Faculty appointments. In this process, the Graduate Council established general core categories for graduate faculty status. Then, in turn, each department with graduate programs created their specific expectations for graduate faculty. Interviews with faculty and the members of the Graduate Council confirm that this intensive process has resulted in enhanced communication across the campus about the role of graduate education, created a set of institutional standards, and verified expectations within the disciplines that are consistent with the scholarly work in that discipline.

UCA has a growing Residential College program for undergraduate students. The program has grown from two colleges, Hughes and State established in the late 1990s,

to four colleges currently with plans for an additional college in the area of science and math education this coming year. Currently, roughly 70% of all first year students are part of this residential college program. Data to date supports a 10% increase in the student retention rate and a 12% increase in graduation rate for students participating in this residential program. The program is engaged in assessment of student learning through both direct and indirect measures, along with looking at national benchmark data for student living and learning experiences. The assessment data from this robust program on co-curricular activities appears to be important, relevant assessment data, yet there is no structural or organizational connection that links evidence of co-curricular activities and the student experience to the overall curricular assessment process of student learning.

All of the professional, graduate programs on campus use community advisory boards, along with selected departments in business, arts and science. These board members report that they are active participants, frequently asked for input, and have excellent working relationships with the faculty and administrators. For example, in 2008, the Hewlett-Packard (HP) Corporation opened a service and support center in Conway with plans to employ 1200 individuals. The university has a close working relationship with HP and the Conway Chamber of Commerce in supporting HP in their employment efforts. The HP Director of Sales serves as the university liaison and is a member of UCA College of Business Administration Advisory Board.

The institution has invested in the continued development and support for sponsored research and research integrity through the growth of the Office of Sponsored Programs. The Director of Sponsored Programs, who also serves as Assistant Provost, came to the institution with a depth of experience from a larger research intensive institution. He now directs an office with five staff members, which has been engaged in substantial review and revision of existing policies and procedures for ensuring the integrity of research on the UCA campus. The institution uses the CITI web-based program for IRB and IACUC training and certification of faculty and graduate students. The growth of graduate programs and increased expectations for faculty scholarly work has resulted in a growing need for support of research. UCA has had a continual increase in sponsored funding growing from 2.8 million dollars in 2004 to close to 10 million dollars in 2009. The growth of graduate education has also brought increasing research and scholarly expectations for faculty and students. This increase in institutional research activity and growth of both human and animal research bring with them a need for continued careful monitoring, as well as support from the Office of Sponsored Programs.

UCA states clearly that students must attain both the general skills and knowledge that support additional learning, as well as the domain-specific knowledge and approaches of their chosen discipline. During the difficult times of the past decade, campus units and offices remained dedicated to high quality teaching; accessible student support; and effective, innovative, and creative learning experiences.

Board of Trustee documents explicitly state that the Board respects freedom of expression and acknowledges that there are multiple ways of understanding the larger world. Departmental documents show a strong interest in what is taught and in the future of the student. Faculty-mentored student research suggests attention to long-term

processes and orientations to learning. Moreover, annual reports express support for liberal learning and provide documentation that departmental faculty propose and offer new coursework.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

Budget reductions continue to impact support for scholarly work. Departmental support for faculty travel for conferences has been reduced over the past several years (to a current level of \$400 per faculty member) and faculty and administrators both expressed frustration with the inadequacy of these funds. The Council of Deans described the use of piecemeal strategies as the current model of working creatively and collaboratively to try to support faculty professional development needs. The University Research Council has an annual fund of \$125,000 to allocate for internal faculty research/scholarly awards during the academic year and summer research stipends, down from \$180,000 two years ago. Faculty sabbatical leaves are still being granted, however, the budget for funding replacements for faculty on sabbatical leave has remained level. A budgeted \$15,000 fund for student research and travel, which was in place for more than a decade, was eliminated from the budget in 2008-09 and has not yet been reinstated. While expectations for faculty productivity continue to increase with the growth of graduate education and institutional aims, the current levels of funding are not adequate to support these growing demands and needs of the faculty and students.

Similarly, UCA appears to be deficient in training and development for classified and unclassified staff. UCA is fortunate in having a capable and dedicated classified and unclassified staff and a well-organized Staff Senate to represent them and to support the life of learning at UCA. It is somewhat saddening that it is necessary for the Staff Senate to undertake fundraising for staff development resources. The needs of a contemporary information-technology, knowledge-based economy are the needs of UCA as well. It is to the advantage of UCA as an employer, and as a model to the community, to have a comprehensive training and professional development program for its staff and non-faculty professionals.

While UCA does demonstrate that the acquisition of breadth of knowledge and skills are integral to its educational programs by requiring general education courses in its undergraduate degree programs, up to now UCA does not go so far as to assessment delivery or learning on a campus-wide basis. A review of assessment outcomes in the 2008 annual reports of a group of general education providing departments shows serious inconsistencies in the role of the discipline in general education, what is assessment and how it is done, and the use of the results, if any.

In the key area of how UCA positions its graduates to live and work in the world they will face, articulation of how General Education considers the global, diverse, and technological society in which we live was largely absent. The Self-Study's discussion of Core Component 4c is oriented toward program reviews, effectiveness, and assessment "in relation to its purposes/goals and its intended outcomes/objectives." The examples given largely refer to basic workforce readiness in the particular field, or mandates of the specialized accreditations or licensing. While the phrase "global, diverse, and

technological” is much repeated, there is no discussion of what that means for the place of UCA as a whole in the world context. More critically, there is no discussion of what “global, diverse, and technological” mean for the students and graduates over the course of their lives and careers, which will run some fifty years after graduation. Given that there is no sense of context in the Self-Study, it is no surprise that there is no focused campus-wide assessment on the UCA’s organizational effectiveness on these issues.

While there is evidence that UCA is relatively current and forward-moving in the use of technology and education for the use of technology, there are important gaps in how diversity is handled. Elsewhere in this report there is consideration of needed improvement in the compliance aspects of diversity, which suggests there are opportunities for gains in easy enhancements in services, training, orientation, and cultural events as well. UCA is further along in its programming for things international and global, although the elements are widely scattered around the institution. If all the pieces were viewed as a potentially coherent package and mission-driven program, and publicly supported by the campus-wide leadership, UCA could come to be viewed as quite advanced in global themes.

For example, UCA does require two courses in global affairs as part of the subsets of requirements for general education, it was unclear that the institution has a goal or coherent approach to preparing students for an increasingly global, diverse, and technological society. Some community stakeholders told team members that they wished UCA would pay more attention to diversity, literally and intellectually. At present, there is no residential international house, often popular with native and international students in peer institutions. During the current fiscal climate, it is not surprising that it was difficult to find support for study abroad, though UCA should be commended for faculty-led summer programs and participation in international programs through the State of Arkansas.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

None noted.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

None noted.

**Recommendation of the Team.**

Criterion met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met.**

Consistent with UCA's mission to serve the broader community, the university strives to meet the needs of all of its constituencies on campus and through outreach activities. There appear to be numerous informal communications with external constituents through faculty involvement with local organizations and in a wide range of community activities, including involvement with the regional economic development committee and Chamber of Commerce. Stakeholder advisory panels, meeting annually and sponsored program participant surveys, are the stated primary formal tools for assessing program effectiveness and community needs. Community stakeholders, present at the luncheon meeting with the HLC review committee, referred to open and receptive communications between the university and its community and business partners.

Academic Outreach and Extended Programs appear to be skillfully directed and adequately staffed (24 full time staff) and funded (adequately self-supported). While some provided and sponsored activities are operated at a loss as a community service, the substantial number of income-positive sponsored activities allows the department to generate a significant revenue stream for the university. The number of, and level of participation in, sponsored programs has continued to grow over the period since the last accreditation review, with the total number of participants in sponsored programs during the decade exceeding 70,000.

The university has developed new service learning and internship opportunities for students and is committed to expansion in this area through seeking additional funding. There is substantial participation by area businesses in providing internship opportunities for UCA students. The Colleges of Business and Education, along with the departments of Political Science, Nursing, Geography and Physics report strong efforts in this area.

Campus facilities have undergone considerable expansion in the last 10 years and many of these facilities serve community needs as well as campus needs. A beautiful center for performing arts seats 1,200 and is utilized for many events open to the greater community. Expansions of athletic facilities, including the football and baseball stadiums, allow for increased attendance at athletic events. UCA's facilities are extensive, attractive, and well-maintained. An extensive campus-wide tour of facilities provided by the director of the Physical Plant provided evidence that campus beautification and maintenance are top priorities.

A large number of programs open to community members are sponsored, including educational programs targeting area senior citizens and art patrons. The annual reports from Academic Outreach and Extended Programs profile continuing growth in the number of "life-long learning" courses available to community participants. Participation in these classes and other sponsored or hosted programs has increased dramatically; nearly 30% from 2008 to 2009.

UCA's move to Division 1 A for football has resulted in greatly increased attendance at football games, which in turn resulted in a positive impact on the local economy through increases in game weekend motel occupancy and income for local restaurants and businesses.

UCA responds to the needs of area business by providing well-prepared graduates as new hires and professional development and training opportunities to meet specific corporate needs. A representative from Hewlett Packard reported that the presence of a high quality university was an important factor in the selection of Conway for the construction of their new facility. He also valued the pre-employment training that UCA provides for all new Hewlett Packard employees.

While UCA views itself as primarily a campus-based institution, it has increased the number of Internet delivery courses in order to better serve distant students and those whose employment and family commitments do not allow them to attend campus classes.

Community and business partners who attended the Monday luncheon during the site visit were highly complementary of their symbiotic relationships with UCA. They included community leaders, business managers, and representatives from economic development organizations with strong relationships to the university. Additionally, NSSE survey data indicate general satisfaction among the campus community with programming and services provided by the university.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

Although the university reports positive feedback from all of its internal and external constituencies, there is little evidence of systematic analysis of sponsored program participant surveys or of university response to input received from advisory panels. While substantial data are collected as a result of surveys and committee minutes, there do not appear to be processes in place to adequately analyze this data so that it might effectively be used to improve existing efforts to serve the university's constituencies or to identify opportunities for new initiatives to meet community needs.

The university acknowledges a need to provide additional support and funding to promote more substantial service learning opportunities for its students. Pockets of excellence in this area exist on campus and can be used as models for future service learning growth. Additionally, plans are in place in some departments but are awaiting funding to support plan implementation.

While the university clearly makes the effort to respond to the needs of its campus and external constituencies, it does so predominately through informal communications strategies and annual advisory panel meetings. This process could be enhanced by the creation of additional systematic processes for the ongoing collection of community needs data, in order to facilitate responding to those needs in a timely fashion.

Although there is substantial anecdotal and informal evidence that external constituents highly value the services that the university provides to the community, a more systematic effort at collecting and analyzing evaluative data from the participants in sponsored and hosted events and would allow the university to more accurately assess the effectiveness of its efforts to serve its campus and external constituencies.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

None noted.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

None noted.

**Recommendation of the Team.**

Criterion met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**V. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS**

**A. Affiliation Status.**

No change.

**B. Nature of Organization.**

**1. Legal status.**

No change.

**2. Degrees awarded.**

No change.

**C. Conditions of Affiliation.**

**1. Stipulation on affiliation status.**

No change.

**2. Approval of degree sites.**

No change.

**3. Approval of distance education degree.**

No change.

**4. Reports required.**

**Type of Report:** Monitoring Report.

**Topic(s) and Timing:** The team recommends a monitoring report on the status of UCA long-range planning, processes, and procedures, due to the HLC by May 1, 2012.

The monitoring report will review and document the results of the strategic planning process at UCA, which will lay the foundations for implementation of the long-range plan. HLC staff will expect to see a completed, comprehensive, long-range plan ready for implementation. At a minimum, this plan will include processes and procedures to implement and monitor the plan, as well as to take action for 1) meeting the needs of diverse students and employees and provide for full inclusion of diverse groups into the life of the university; 2) incorporating shared governance, transparent communication, and an organizational and administrative structure with well-defined roles and responsibilities; 3) establishing a culture of assessment of student learning that is aligned with the mission of the university; and 4) evaluating and measuring institutional effectiveness in non-instructional programs, institutional outreach, and student support for all instructional delivery modes.

**Rationale and Expectations:** Both the 1990 and 2000 accreditation team reports noted that UCA had not developed comprehensive academic or institutional plans. Between 2000 and 2010, initiatives were undertaken to address the concerns of the accreditation report. These efforts are well-documented in the institutional Self-Study, and they include a “Strategic Framework” developed and disseminated in 2004 and a campus master plan developed in 2006. The Self-Study acknowledges that even these planning processes and documents fell short of the expectations set by the 2000 accreditation report, nor were efforts the result of wide participation by a broad base of campus and external constituencies. Consequently, the team notes that continued Commission attention is needed to assure that UCA develops a long-range plan and that it creates mechanisms and relationships needed to prioritize budget decisions toward implementing its strategic objectives.

## 5. Other visits scheduled.

**Type of Visit:** Focused Visit.

**Topic(s) and Timing:** If the monitoring report meets expectations, the focused visit will occur two years later, in spring 2014. If HLC staff determines that the monitoring report fails to meet expectations, the focused visit will occur one year later, in spring 2013. The focused visit team will expect to see the comprehensive, long-range plan fully established. Successful results of the implemented plan will include a budgeting process that reflects allocations based on strategic priorities, which in turn advance diversity, governance, communication, assessment of student learning, and assessment of institutional effectiveness. Members of the 2010 team are unanimous in recommending that the team be large enough to include expertise needed to examine UCA’s progress in these critically important areas and further recommend that one or two experienced members of the current 2010 team be appointed to the focused visit team.

If both the monitoring report and the focused visit affirm that expectations are fully met, the focused visit team could consider moving the next UCA comprehensive visit to 2019-2010. However, if at the point of the focused visit, in whichever year it occurs, the focused visit team determines that expectations are not fully met, the team could recommend that the comprehensive visit be moved up or that further

monitoring or even a sanction be imposed, if necessary.

**Rationale and Expectations:** This new planning process will need to be aggressive and persistent over a period of years to overcome what was expressed as a significant element of disbelief in administrative commitment to planning and to broad-based involvement in planning. In a meeting with faculty, it was clear that there was still a willingness to give this new process a chance and to participate, but that it needed to be consistent and lead to results for faculty involvement to continue. The university leadership anticipates that the strategic planning process recently initiated will be completed within 18 months. The team notes that continued Commission attention is needed to assure satisfactory completion of this process and its on-going implementation across the campus and in campus budgeting processes.

**6. Organization Change Request.**

No change requested.

**D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action.**

None recommended.

**E. Summary of Commission Review.**

**Timing for Next Comprehensive Visit:** Academic year, 2016-2017.

**Rationale for Recommendation:** This is a time of ongoing transition for UCA. While the journey over the past decade since the 2000 site visit team was on campus was at times difficult, UCA has moved to a higher level, growing beyond an historic intention to stay small, operating within the scope of what was comfortable and familiar.

The 2000 team identified three areas of concern that UCA was mandated to address: 1) comprehensive, long-range planning, 2) governance processes and structures, and 3) policies and procedures for meeting diverse student and employee needs. In the judgment of the 2010 team, consistent with the analysis provided in the latest Self-Study, progress over the decade was not evident enough in any of the three areas to enable us to conclude that the concerns were appropriately addressed. Yet, all team members found considerable evidence that the campus is now positioned and committed to making substantive progress toward addressing past concerns and to moving forward intentionally to come together to set a course based on shared decision making; transparent communication; and effective strategic planning, resource allocation, and assessment of student learning and assessment of institutional effectiveness.

The team feels a sense of urgency, which members believe is shared by all UCA stakeholders, campus constituencies, and leadership. The team recommends re-accreditation for seven years, with a comprehensive visit in 2016-2017, a monitoring report on strategic planning due by May 1, 2012, and a focused visit on plan implementation no later than spring 2014. Moreover, the team also believes it is

essential to emphasize how critically important it is that the HLC continue to monitor financial recovery closely until all financial ratios are within acceptable ranges.

If the work begun over the past 18 months is continued for the next two years, fiscal stability should, if not fully restored, be measurably closer to realization and a comprehensive, inclusive strategic plan will be in place. Two years after that, in spring 2014, implementation of the strategic plan should have reached the stage where results are evident.

## **VI. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND EXPLANATIONS**

The University of Central Arkansas has been tested in extraordinary ways since the 2000 site-visit team was on campus. Individuals in leadership, governance, and regulatory roles failed to perform with the integrity and professionalism that UCA was entitled to expect. Political expediency, a certain level of favoritism, and a good deal of bad judgment were evident for a number of years. Even decisions that will ultimately prove beneficial for UCA were made abruptly, with little or no discussion or consultation. And yet, campus units and offices remained dedicated to high quality teaching, accessible student support, and effective and innovative learning experiences. Alumni, students, and the community hold the campus in high regard. Faculty and staff want to move forward and are at least cautiously – and some genuinely – optimistic that this will now occur within the next four or five years.

Campus leadership strives to improve communication and convinced the team that they are committed to restoring trust and engaging the campus and the community in an inclusive planning process that will advance the university's mission; result in increasing effective shared governance characterized by the freedom to debate and question in an atmosphere of intellectual rigor and mutual respect; and establish processes and procedures germane to the evolving University culture, independent of which individual holds a particular position.

# **ADVANCEMENT SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

University of Central Arkansas  
Conway, Arkansas

3/8/10 – 3/10/10

FOR

### **The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

### **EVALUATION TEAM**

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**OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

The University of Central Arkansas (UCA) was established as Arkansas State Normal School by the General Assembly of Arkansas in 1907, with statewide responsibility for preparing citizens to teach Arkansas children. The first diploma granted by Arkansas State Normal School was the Licentiate of Instruction; the first baccalaureate degrees were granted in 1922. The name of the institution was changed to Arkansas State

Teachers College in 1925 and by legislative enactment the Board of Trustees was given authority to grant appropriate degrees. In 1967, the name of the institution was again changed by the state legislature to the State College of Arkansas, expanding its role to a multipurpose institution. On January 21, 1975, the governor of Arkansas signed a bill granting university status to the institution and naming it the University of Central Arkansas.

Today, the University of Central Arkansas is a comprehensive university offering degree programs at the associate, bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral levels. Beginning around 2005, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) undertook a multi-year process to review and revise the Role and Scope designations of all public institutions of higher education in Arkansas. As a result of that review, UCA's audiences were defined to include: residents of the state, particularly those in central Arkansas, who have completed high school and are seeking either a college degree or continuing professional education; public and private region and state employers; economic development interests and entrepreneurs in the region and across the state; the community and area through academic, cultural, and public events; area K – 12 schools seeking college-level general education courses for advanced students; and two-year college transfer students. Among special UCA features are its support of the Arkansas public schools through the Arkansas Center for Mathematics and Science Education, the Arkansas Public School Resources Center, a regional center of the Asian Studies Development Program for the East-West Center, and the Community Development Institute.

The University of Central Arkansas has been continuously accredited since 1931 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. UCA seems to have been reasonably well-funded and to have had a normal development track for institutions of its size, mission, and program array when the last HLC comprehensive visit occurred in 2000. Three concerns were listed in the 2000 team report: 1) Comprehensive long-range planning; 2) Governance processes and structures; 3) Review of policies and procedures for meeting diverse student and employee needs, where diverse is broadly defined. A report of coordinated planning and assessment of student learning was required in 2005, which received staff review and was accepted. Assessment also figured into the recommendation of a 2007 focused visit team to review campus progress to seek approval to expand the Statement of Affiliation Status stipulation in distance education to read, "No prior Commission approval required for graduate programs in Health, Business, Information Systems, and Education." This request was approved with a required report "on the inclusion of on-line delivery comprehensive assessment plan." The plan was submitted in December 2008 and approved by HLC staff. Moreover, two additional Requests for Institutional Change have been approved by the HLC since the 2000 visit, one for a Consortium Ph.D. program in Communication Sciences and Disorders with University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and the other for an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Leadership Studies. By letter dated March 12, 2009, after review of recent financial ratios and composite scores, the HLC mandated that UCA submit a Financial Recovery Plan due to HLC staff by 7/31/09, which was accepted with an additional progress report due by the end of calendar year 2009.

Leadership issues became increasingly pronounced during the 2002-2008 presidency of Lu Hardin, which ended abruptly near the beginning of AY 2008-2009. While the fall appears to have been triggered by a compensation question in the summer of 2008, numerous years of spending beyond income had resulted in depletion of reserves. At about this time, the depleted reserves, as reflected in key ratios reported to the HLC, triggered a financial crisis in fall 2008 and a required Financial Recovery Plan due to the HLC in July 2009, with significant budget cuts in AY 2008-09, a wage freeze in AY 2008-2009 and AY 2009-2010, and cuts for some faculty. The state audit report and Management Letter for FY 2007-2008 (dated April 23, 2009) outline significant deficiencies and a list of eleven items brought to the attention of management during the course of the audit.

UCA is currently still in the wake of a tumultuous period. It is still deep in recrimination and finding it difficult to trust. This is a kind of institutional mourning period that must transcend the stages of grief. While the President and Board from 2002-2008 seemed to be bent on competing with the University of Arkansas (rapid growth at all costs, physical plant improvements, and the move to Division I athletics), the institution has fallen back into a comfort zone that can be just as limiting. Team members repeatedly heard the statement that “we are the best second-best we can be.” While this may be, for the time being, more realistic in terms of fiscal capacity, in the opinion of the team this view sells UCA short.

UCA’s people have demonstrated a resiliency and a deep commitment to their lived mission and to their students and each other. They kept the machinery running even when turmoil swirled around them, including with apparently arbitrary appointments at unreasonable salaries made by the President. They have continued to attract students who are academically very competitive. They have attractive facilities and an attractive campus in a great location. And, although it has come at a high price and could have been achieved in a more balanced and planned manner, they have come through a decade of considerable growth, campus enhancements, new programs, and upgraded athletics. How those same resilient people now use these elements to the advantage of the university will determine the next ten years of UCA’s history. If the blame and distrust continue for long, real opportunities to become a comprehensive university that can compete across its region and realistically aspire to be among the best of class in the country could be lost. If the past can be put to rest and the future faced with confidence, those aspirations could become reality.

## **II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM**

### **A. Assessment Processes at UCA**

The institution has engaged in a continued process of developing an assessment system and establishing a “culture of assessment” at UCA. A progress report to HLC on planning and assessment was submitted and accepted in 2005. In 2008, a progress report was required for the inclusion of on-line delivery in a comprehensive assessment plan. There is good evidence that institution has been responsive and successful in implementing several structural pieces and required processes for

assessment. All departments have assessment plans and assessment evidence of student learning is a core component of each department's Annual Report. The institution is well-positioned to take important next steps in further developing a more mature and interdependent institutional assessment process.

UCA will continue to seek full participation of all program areas at all levels in an institutional assessment process. Strong assessment programs of teaching and learning assist the institution in distributing funds to strengthen programs needing improvement and expanding programs that show growth and achievement of student learning outcomes. Linking resources to improvement in such a fashion reinforces continuous improvement and institutional partnerships with individual faculty and programs.

The team makes the following additional suggestions for UCA's consideration:

- 1) Work towards a more consistent or standard reporting process.  
There are several scattered examples in the annual assessment reports of excellent summary tables. The College of Health and Behavior Science has many good examples. These five or seven column summary tables are excellent ways to be able to evaluate quickly across all units and see the linkages from stated program outcome to measures (both direct and indirect) to evidence gathered (real data) and then one of the most important categories – what has changed as a result of looking at this evidence?
- 2) Consider either separating or pulling out the assessment report from the annual report.  
Institutions want to be able to demonstrate the dynamic work of assessment across the campus and campus units to be able to learn from one another. It is difficult to see the richness in the data that may lie across units (departments and colleges) when the data is embedded in these annual reports. Eventually you will want to find ways to make your assessment data public.
- 3) Consider splitting the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee into two committees.  
Within the academic area, the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee should be split into two committees: an Academic Planning Committee and an Assessment of Student Learning Committee, with separate leaderships. The Assessment Committee should have a clear charge and support from the Provost and President to focus on assessment of student learning over time in skill and content areas central to the programs and on assessment of student learning for the purpose of program improvement. This Committee should be exempted from other methods of evaluation and review, which the team found in many program assessment plans. These other methods might then be reserved for other committees or offices within UCA. For example, indirect measures, such as exit, alumni, and constituent surveys might be assigned to the Academic Planning Committee, while reviews of average grades and grade distributions, as well as student, faculty, and course evaluations, might be reserved for the academic deans and department chairs. By allowing a dedicated Assessment

Committee to focus on assessment, it might be possible for the President and Provost to learn if the students are learning the right things, if they are doing better over time, and if any faculty efforts at program improvement are having the desired results. If the President and Provost have these answers, then they can make the claim or not that UCA is the center of learning in Arkansas, or is on its way to becoming the center of learning in Arkansas.

- 4) Use your assessment process to more visibly align your teaching and learning process with the institutional mission.  
UCA could start with the University Academic Planning and Assessment Committee and have the committee work to determine (most likely uncover) broad statements or assessment goals at the University level. This broad framework then serves as a guide for the crafting of College assessment goals. Each department can then align their assessment goals or program outcomes that are also aligned at the College level and at the University level. Curricular matrices serve as a very effective and simple tool for looking at links between assessment goals (or program outcomes) and specific courses.
- 5) Integrate co-curricular experiential data with the curriculum/assessment data.  
The team observed, read, and verified that UCA has strong data regarding co-curricular activities. The Residential College program, and the data from that program, should be linked with the curricular assessment data. John Dewey was well known for his strong views on the critical importance of student experiential learning that occurs outside of the classroom. HLC Criterion Four speaks specifically to the linking of co-curricular and curricula activities.
- 6) Integrate scholarly work into your assessment process.  
The use of small seed grants for assessment work can be an excellent incentive for cross-disciplinary work that is grounded in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The assessment piece is the necessary component, since it is the evidence of student learning.
- 7) Put a University Assessment Coordinator in place.  
Having a university expert is an important signal and resource for the campus. It is not the responsibility of the assessment director to do the assessment, but this person is the one who leads faculty development activities, chairs a university-wide assessment committee, and puts in place the university wide accountability measures.
- 8) Link curriculum and assessment committees.  
It can be a transformative experience to have both a curriculum committee (within units) and an assessment committee with some cross representation within each committee. Often assessment gets little emphasis except for doing a report, since curriculum committee demands are generally constant. This strategy can transform the understanding and support for assessment as units can see the value of the evidence of student learning that can be used in various ways from course or program change to marketing data.

- 9) Build and develop your assessment team.  
UCA would benefit greatly from engaging in the HLC Assessment Academy. In this process the institution could develop a strong unified plan for moving the institutional assessment process forward.
- 10) Set in place a process for consistent assessment evaluation of all UCA offices, units, and functions.  
The process will be most useful if it includes assurance that the mission or charge for the unit is consistently understood by both the unit and the institution, that the goals are consistent with the mission and responsibilities, that the achievement of goals and improvement is monitored and reported, and that the unit's contribution toward the institution's comprehensive, long-range plan is evaluated. Results of evaluation can also be a credible source for information for the planning process that UCA is embarking upon.

#### B. Board of Trustees

UCA's Board of Trustees requires considerable attention. One can only wonder how this Board would have approached the 2010 re-accreditation visit if a presidential transition had not occurred. If the previous president had been allowed by this Board to continue the behaviors and patterns exhibited from 2002 through 2008, how would the University of Central Arkansas have even begun to approach the five criteria, let alone respond to the standing criticisms of 1990 and 2000? With no strategic planning in place, a continued deficit operating budget, little effectiveness in shared governance, and all of the criteria deficiencies noted in this report, how could UCA have engaged in a Self-Study and survived an accreditation visit without sanctions?

The work of the university is done in the departments and offices of the campus, but the tone for leadership is set by the Board of Trustees and the administration. The new administration understands the task before it and has begun to undertake the difficult work of mending a campus and rebuilding on strengths.

It is not apparent that the Board of Trustees as a group understands the task before them. Only three of seven were available to attend the meeting with the visiting team. The Board chairperson, who was unable to attend the scheduled meeting with other Board members, met by phone with two of the consultant-evaluators on the visiting team. That conversation was troubling to the team members. The Board chairperson exhibited little understanding of the seriousness of the institution's financial situation as a public institution, calling it "just a cash problem." He referred to a private line of credit subsequently deemed illegal by the state as just a "need to borrow some money." He seemed uninformed about the university. The role of the President was to "run the university" and the Board would only step in if the President "got out of whack." Asked if the Board had had to step in on a president in the past, he said "no." He said the Board got along amicably, but then noted a couple of situations in which Board members repeatedly play out personal animosities (these were confirmed by administrators).

This Board of Trustees requires continuous training in the proper role of a board. It should not become a micromanager, but it does need to understand the right questions to ask in the context of its responsibilities as a public university board. The current President initiated training through Association of Governing Boards (AGB) and offered that training locally for the current Board members. The Board should take upon itself a continuous assessment facilitated by outside consultants (AGB would be a good source) in order to improve its awareness and level of responsibility. For many years, a president took on arbitrary decision authority that created financial difficulties and even ethical dilemmas for many faculty and staff members. Throughout this period, the Board never asked the probing questions, never asked for detail behind the finances, nor questioned the financial presentations they were given. Now, at least one Board chairperson does not appear to understand that this was a problem. This Board, except for the newer members, dramatically failed in its stewardship of UCA and its good people.

#### C. Business Processes

The team recommends that UCA review seemingly mundane processes and practices to maximize fairness, transparency, and correct conduct. UCA should undertake a review of its internal operating policies and procedures to insure fairness and perception of fairness, transparency in governance, and integrity in general. Although much of the meetings with the constituencies focused on past problems of leadership and ethics at the top, there was a sense that there were some breakdowns in ordinary institutional processes. Personnel processes (hiring) and pay equity were mentioned. This is of concern because for UCA to be a happy place to work, staff and faculty need to have a sense of being treated fairly in the ordinary employment relationship.

The team encourages the full review of ordinary business and personnel processes as well as grievance, complaint, and appeal processes, to ensure that existing practices and policies are consistent with national best practice. The review should ask if there are areas where there need to be additional fairness policies and that if the existing, revised, and additional policies and practices operate to maximize fairness. It is possible that inequities, for example, in pay and job duties, have built up over time and will need to be remedied. In the academic area (for both faculty and students), the academic impropriety and integrity policies need to be reviewed to see if they have kept up with the emerging research environment, standards of professional conduct, and the use of online and web resources.

#### D. Diversity

Also in recognition of expectations established in its own mission and values statements and accreditation documents, UCA should review and reorganize its structures to support effectiveness in building a diverse community, honoring differences, and providing any needed supportive services. A start would be a single high-profile committee to look at all the possible needs and to determine if they are comfortably met within the present system. The leadership of the committee should be of such a stature that it can work with all of these issues. The

committee should be charged with considering organizational changes and changes in the physical location of activities and services, with recommending training, and with early recommendation of additional more focused committees, recognizing that the concept of diversity itself is defined initially by what is non-diverse, in other words by the undifferentiated majority community.

Utilizing a reflective process inclusive of diversity across a spectrum of experiences transforms the organization and structure of the academy to prepare students to meet the demands of all human endeavors. The University of Central Arkansas will be the best institution of learning where leveraging diversity and inclusive excellence into teaching, research, and service is a foundational institutional value.

#### E. Information Technology

UCA has vigorous on-line teaching programs and a rapidly growing amount of sponsored research. Estimates for the current year suggest sponsored research volume may reach \$11 million. Information technology has been unable to keep pace with the growth, partly because there is no information technology (IT) plan, nor a strategic plan, to guide them. Moreover, IT does not have a dedicated budget. Thus, is it literally impossible for UCA to plan for IT and to pursue its objectives consistently by funding its needs. The university strategic planning process should consider the role of IT and the team suggests that it might consider offering guidelines for IT short, medium, and long-term planning across the university.

Planning, consistent with current practice in the institution, is highly decentralized. Departments, colleges, and units decide what to buy and then try to gain IT's support for desired purchases. The institution would benefit from more centralized planning. UCA might consider having some IT purchasing of new technologies handled by IT itself, in consultation with the larger university. For example, only in recent years, after an external study of the institution's technology, has the office had authority to sign off on the purchase of IT equipment. IT has stopped some purchases with the new approval process that would not have worked physically with other systems; no doubt units with the original purchase need wonder why, but each unit needs to relate their needs to the capacity, actual or planned, of the institution.

The lack of planning and consistent updating is having a negative impact on learning. At present, there is no satisfactory streaming video software for the university, according to team interviews. The institution is, however, actively working on this. Nevertheless, with a growing on-line education effort, this difficulty needs to be addressed. Student complaints on the National Survey of Student Engagement sometimes mentioned outdated computer equipment. IT indicated that its oldest computers are about nine-years old and that students quite probably do experience failures and frustrations.

The entire university may be limited by their information capacities. For example, the institution noted that in 2006, short-term storage was increased from 10 MEG to 500 MEG. At first, the visiting team thought this was the email allocation, which would be a generous amount of storage. On further exploration, however, it proved to be the

home directory storage, in which case the storage was seriously inadequate. The institution is aware of the problem and has, since 2006, continued to add capacity. Students have 100MB, staff 500MB and faculty, including research active faculty, have 1GB. UCA might compare their storage with that of peer institutions, and, especially, with aspirational peer institutions, given University of Central Arkansas' new attention to active and on-line learning, as well as to research. It is fairly common elsewhere for students to have 1GB and faculty considerably more (5-15GB); depending on the research, terabytes might be needed for some projects. Finding and updating the "right amount" would entail joint planning and implementation by academic affairs, housing, institutional research, IT, and sponsored research. This example is only a single instance of the need for IT planning to be intra-university in nature.

#### F. Institutional Recruiting Strategy

The University of Central Arkansas, like many public institutions, is re-examining itself and its core function to educate and prepare students for responsible participation in society. By its own admission, however, UCA has been slow to systematically plan for the future. In the UCA 2004 Strategic Framework, the mission statement indicates that UCA is to be a "leader in 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education...and is dedicated to intellectual vitality, diversity and integrity." Unfortunately, as noted in the Self-Study, these goals and aims have largely been ignored during most of the past decade. Throughout the visit, faculty, staff, and students corroborated there has been little to no evidence of systemic planning. In addition, there was little comprehension of the merits of diversity as an imperative in today's higher educational institutions. One of the areas many higher educational institutions embed diversity in is within its systemic planning in an organizational recruitment and retention strategy. Integral to this strategy is the compelling national higher education agenda to pair the benefits of diversity with academic excellence. We propose the University of Central Arkansas consider such a framework in future planning. The team makes the following specific suggestions for UCA's consideration, along with selected resources to assist in planning:

1. Develop an aggressive and strategic recruitment strategy as part of the comprehensive institutional master plan, with appropriate benchmarks, prioritized by responding to emerging institutional and national trends.

<http://www.aacu.org/LEAP/index.cfm>

<http://strategicplan.psu.edu/emergingfields>

<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=3A4E6CED-BDDE-B576-209C3DB7F68A4ED6&flushcache=1&showdraft=1>

2. In collaboration with governance establish a recruitment policy and recruitment procedure consistent within the institutional framework for the future.
3. Build an infrastructure for administering and assessing recruitment progress using:

- An integrated plan with targeted strategies for faculty, staff, and student recruitment.
- A comprehensive enrollment management effort with appropriate recruitment strategies that consider both 1) the institutional priorities that distinguish UCA from other comparable state institutions and 2) student attributes that make UCA an institution of choice.

<http://www.shepherd.edu/university/enrollment/v9/sem.html>

<http://www.educationstrategy.com/SuccessStories/CaseStudies/TiffinUniversity/tabid/1943/Default.aspx>

[http://www.neitheramoment.com/\\_documents/StrategyPractice-en.pdf](http://www.neitheramoment.com/_documents/StrategyPractice-en.pdf)

- A faculty recruitment approach, where inclusive strategies address the retention of domestic diversity and international faculty and instructional staff.

<http://med.stanford.edu/diversity/recruiting/>

- Re-examine the faculty language proficiency requirements in its tenure and promotion performance review policy to assure equity for all faculty and instructional staff. The Self-Study and conversations during the visit report a paucity of international and bi-lingual or multi-lingual faculty and staff.

<http://strategicplan.psu.edu/emergingfields>

[http://web.jhu.edu/bin/m/h/Recruitment\\_Best\\_Practices\\_0902.pdf](http://web.jhu.edu/bin/m/h/Recruitment_Best_Practices_0902.pdf)

[http://www.rackham.umich.edu/student\\_life/gss/recruitment\\_outreach/](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/student_life/gss/recruitment_outreach/)

- Create a process for staff and administrative recruitment.

[http://www.rackham.umich.edu/student\\_life/gss/recruitment\\_outreach/](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/student_life/gss/recruitment_outreach/)

<http://www.northeastern.edu/diversity/recruit/recruitbasic.html>

<http://www.ohr.psu.edu/diversity/downloads/RecruitmentPlan.pdf>

<http://www.northeastern.edu/diversity/recruit/recruitbasic.html>

- Institutional advancement and marketing could to promote UCA as institution of excellence through effective recruitment strategies by communicating the merits of recruiting for inclusion as a mark of institutional excellence.

#### G. Institutional Research

Virtually everyone involved with UCA is at least cautiously optimistic about UCA's ability to engage in a constructive strategic planning process and to make sure that future goals and budget follow from and support the new strategic plan. In the opinion of the visiting team, these efforts would be greatly enhanced if, as these

processes moved forward, the university had available to it both the data to support future planning/decision-making activities and the analytical capacity to apply the data as appropriate.

For example, one specific planning issue that arose during the visit was future enrollment at UCA. There are at least two important components of decision-making about future enrollment that need good data and analysis: determining current capacity and modeling the impact of changes to enrollment incentives. UCA has an integrated database, Banner; thus, the data to support decisions about enrollment exist and could be made available. What UCA lacks is someone in the institutional research office with skills in data reduction and modeling who would be able to assist in interpreting the available data. The Board of Trustees currently does not know what UCA's current enrollment capacity is. An individual with a statistical background and extensive knowledge of higher education would be able to effectively support UCA's efforts to determine its current enrollment capacity. If it appears that UCA is operating either significantly above or below capacity, with such an individual on staff, UCA would be able to explore multivariate models showing the impact of changing one or more parameters (e.g., faculty numbers, program/course offerings, tuition rates, scholarship numbers and amounts) and the effect of their various combinations on future enrollments.

#### H. International and Global

The world is changing and there is a compelling interest in public universities to strive to educate students about the world they live in and help them acquire the information and skills they need for successful and productive lives. Closely linked with academic excellence is acknowledging the truly inclusive institutions prepare students to become global citizens. A new survey of employers indicates that they are seeking employees with broader skill sets and higher level of learning than in the past. Just one quarter of those surveyed believed colleges are doing enough to prepare students for the global employment (American Association of Colleges and Universities LEAP <http://www.aacu.org/LEAP/index.cfm>). The University of Central Arkansas is positioned to participate intentionally in such a charge by partnering inclusive excellence with academic excellence. Value-based leadership in support of a shared vision as expressed by the university mission gives credibility, meaning, and a sense of urgency to the interaction between institutional vitality, diversity, and integrity. (AACU/NASULGC, 2005) ([http://www.iupui.edu/~divrsity/assets/nitt\\_ebook.pdf](http://www.iupui.edu/~divrsity/assets/nitt_ebook.pdf)).

In recognition of expectations established in UCA's own mission and values statements and accreditation documents, UCA should review and reorganize its structures to support effectiveness in its international and global activities. A start would be a single high-profile committee to look at all the pieces to consider how they might fit together to support each other and also the educational mission of the university. The team noted that the relevant pieces are geographically and organizationally dispersed across campus, including those serving international students (admissions, housing, intensive English, immigration services), domestic students (short-term study abroad, semester-length study abroad), academic and

non-academic instructional programs (the prestigious Confucius Institute and the East-West Center's Asian Resource Development program), and faculty development opportunities. The leadership of the committee should be of such a stature that it can work with all of these issues; the committee should be charged to consider organizational changes and changes in the physical location of activities and services. Clear support and urgency should be signaled by the President and Provost, with follow up.

#### I. Long-Range Planning

UCA should move quickly to reaffirm its mission and goals and to develop a long-range planning process that can be a guide to resource allocation.

#### J. Shared Governance and Centralization/Decentralization

Given the work that needs to be done quickly at UCA at this time, and the likelihood that there will be directives from the higher levels of the organization, there is some danger of reinforcing the highly centralized leadership pattern of the last decade. The desired governance structure after the next two to five years might be very different from what is desirable after the backlog of tasks is addressed. For the long-run, questions need to be asked about what needs to be done centrally and what needs to be done "decentrally," and how the two should be linked. While decisions need to be made centrally in this moment of flux, there needs to be consideration of the final institutionalization of responsibilities, so that decisions will not always have to be made centrally and by fiat.

In recent years, UCA has experienced increasing strength and maturity in groups and levels across the administrative and unit structures. These groups are sources of strength for UCA. The rights and responsibilities of faculty, staff, student, and middle-management administration bodies should be recognized, including in the areas of access to information, deliberation, voice, and decision-making relative to the other groups and the central administration. There should be full transparency on budgeting and accounting as benefits a public institution.

#### K. Training of Faculty and Staff

Given that the information-technology, knowledge-based economy needs constant upgrading of the skills and knowledge of workers, UCA, as a forward and outward looking employer, should develop a training and professional development program for classified and unclassified professional staff to ensure that UCA is able to keep up with the world in terms of technology and associated skills of its workers and also the professional skills of its non-faculty professionals. Such a program should include both on-campus training and off-campus training, as well as specialized conferences.

It is the opinion of the team that an institutional priority for UCA should be to increase professional development funding for faculty research and that conference travel budgets should be increased and made easier to access. It is our understanding,

based on conversations on campus during the visit, that faculty members are able to cobble together funding packages from multiple sources for attendance at professional meetings where they will present. It seems like the time spent could be better used elsewhere. Similarly, funding for student research and conference presentation travel should be increased if the program of student research is to grow.

### **III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES**

#### **A. College of Health and Behavioral Sciences**

The sustained growth of programs and scholarly productivity of faculty in the College of Health and Behavioral Science.

#### **B. Financial Recovery Progress**

Documented progress addressing the financial issues that developed from 2002 to 2008; recently hired Vice President for Finance and Administration is skilled and experienced.

#### **H. Graduate School**

The recent successful effort of the Graduate School in working across the campus to develop consensus-based graduate faculty criteria is an impressive achievement and valued by faculty.

#### **I. Instructional Development Center**

The programming and support provided to faculty members by the Instructional Development Center is outstanding.

#### **J. Physical Plant**

The physical plant is attractive and well-maintained.

#### **K. Relationship with the Community**

Strong and mutually supportive relationship is in place between the University of Central Arkansas and the community it works with and serves.

#### **L. Residential Program and Living Learning Communities**

The Residential Program and living and learning communities are a visible and important aspect of UCA undergraduate student educational opportunities.

*Team Recommendations for the  
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS*

**INSTITUTION and STATE:** University of Central Arkansas, AR

**TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS):** Continued Accreditation

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW (from ESS):**

**DATES OF REVIEW:** 3/8/10 - 3/10/10

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**Nature of Organization**

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**LEGAL STATUS:** Public

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** no change

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**DEGREES AWARDED:** A, B, M, S, D

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** no change

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**Conditions of Affiliation**

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**STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS:** Accreditation at the Specialist's level is limited to the Educational Leadership program. Accreditation at the Doctor's level is limited to the Ph.D. program in Physical Therapy; the Doctor of Physical Therapy; the Ph.D. program in School Psychology; and the Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders (in collaboration with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences; and the Ph.D. in Leadership Studies.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** no change

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**APPROVAL OF NEW ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS:** Prior Commission approval required.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** no change

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**APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES:** No prior Commission approval required for graduate programs in Health, Business, Information Systems, and Education.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** no change

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**REPORTS REQUIRED:** Progress Report due 12/31/2009: on extent of achievement in implementing the Financial Recovery Plan. Monitoring Report due 12/15/2012: on Finances in the form of a Financial Recovery Plan with the Commission that addresses the continued concerns about low financial ratios.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** Monitoring Report due 12/15/2012: on Finances in the form of a Financial Recovery Plan with the Commission that addresses the continued concerns about low financial ratios; **Monitoring Report due 5/1/2012: on status of long-range planning, processes, and procedures**

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**OTHER VISITS SCHEDULED:** None

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** Focused Visit scheduled for Spring 2014 on full implementation of comprehensive long-range plan, including budgeting process that reflects allocations based on strategic priorities.

*Team Recommendations for the  
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS*

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**Summary of Commission Review**

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**YEAR OF LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 1999 - 2000**

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**YEAR FOR NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2009 - 2010**

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**TEAM RECOMMENDATION: 2016 - 2017**

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## ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

**INSTITUTION and STATE:** University of Central Arkansas, AR

**TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS):** Continued Accreditation \_\_\_\_\_ No change to Organization Profile

### Educational Programs

	Program Distribution	Recommended Change (+ or -)
Programs leading to Undergraduate		
Associate	2	
Bachelors	78	
Programs leading to Graduate		
Masters	32	
Specialist	1	
First Professional		
Doctoral	5	

### Off-Campus Activities

<p>In-State:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Campuses: Additional Locations:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Course Locations:</p>	<p>Present Activity:</p> <p>None Ft. Smith (University of Arkansas, Ft. Smith) ; Pine Bluff (Southeast Arkansas College) ; Russellville (Arkansas Tech University) ; West Memphis (Mid-South Community College)</p> <p>17</p>	<p><b>Recommended Change:</b> (+ or -)</p>
<p>Out-of-State:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Campuses: Additional Locations: Course Locations:</p>	<p>Present Wording:</p> <p>None None None</p>	<p><b>Recommended Change:</b> (+ or -)</p>
<p>Out-of-USA:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Campuses: Additional Locations: Course Locations:</p>	<p>Present Wording:</p> <p>None None None</p>	<p><b>Recommended Change:</b> (+ or -)</p>

**Distance Education Programs:**

Present Offerings:

Certificate - 45.0799 Geography, Other. offered via Internet; Certificate - 51.1601 Nursing/Registered Nurse (RN, ASN, BSN, MSN). offered via Internet; Master - 25.9999 Library Science, Other. offered via Audioconferencing;Internet; Master - 44.0201 Community Organization and Advocacy. offered via Internet; Master - 45.0799 Geography, Other. offered via Internet; Master - 51.15 Mental and Social Health Services and Allied Professions. offered via Internet; Master - 51.1601 Nursing/Registered Nurse (RN, ASN, BSN, MSN). offered via Internet

**Recommended Change:**

(+ or -)

**Correspondence Education Programs:**

Present Offerings:

None