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July 12, 2004

Dr. Mark Bean  
Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness  
Whitfield Hall  
1100 College St W- 160  
Columbus, MS 39701

Re: Final Report

Dear Mark:

Attached is the final report following my visit to MUW in June. I have made several recommendations that I believe will simplify the planning and institutional effectiveness process of the University. Please review the report and attachments and let me know if you have any questions or comments.

It was a pleasure to work with you on this project. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet many of your colleagues and to tour the campus. Please convey my appreciate to Dr. Limbert and others.

Let me know if I can be of any assistance in the future.

Sincerely,

***Barbara H. Jones***  
Barbara H. Jones, Ed. D.

Attachments

## Introduction

I visited Mississippi University for Women (MUW) on June 8, 2004, at the request of Dr. Mark Bean, Special Assistant to the President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. The purpose of the visit was to review the institutional effectiveness and related processes of the University. Interviews were conducted with the IE/IR staff, administrators, and a cross-section of faculty and professional staff.

Dr. Bean provided several printed and web-based planning documents for review prior to the on-campus visit. These documents included the following:

- *Comprehensive Planning, Evaluation and Budgeting Guide 2003-2004*
- *Factbook 2003-04*
- *Guidelines for the 2004-2005 Institutional Effectiveness Reports*
- *W-2009 A Strategic Plan for MUW*
- *Fiscal Year 2005 Budget Calendar*
- SACS COC Letter

MUW conducted a SACS COC reaffirmation study in 2000-2003 and hosted a SACS visit in March, 2003. The SACS Reaffirmation Committee identified several issues related to planning and institutional effectiveness processes based on the requirements of the *Criteria for Accreditation*. The University responded to the SACS Criteria & Reports Committee (C & R Committee) and, according to a letter from Dr. James Rogers, must submit a follow-up report in September 2004 on *Criteria* Section 3.3.1 based on the following instruction:

*The institution has not yet demonstrated compliance because evidence of the use of results of the planning and evaluation process for educational programs is insufficient. Demonstrate and document the use of the results of planning and evaluation to improve educational programs, with particular focus on general education and the core curriculum. Demonstrate and document with greater detail guidelines and procedures for the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including the use of results to improve educational programs.*

In addition to the SACS issues, Dr. Bean and others expressed concern that the new planning and evaluation processes needed streamlining and refinement to produce greater benefit for the University.

It is important to note that MUW conducted its self-study process under the SACS COC *Criteria for Accreditation*, which has now been replaced by the *Principles of Accreditation* (<http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp>). References in the following sections to *Criteria* or *Principles* reflect the change in documents and accreditation requirements. MUW is caught in the transition from the two documents so it is important that the follow-up report show awareness of both. The following statements are those included in the *Principles* that apply to institutional effectiveness.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1: *The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.*

Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1: *The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.*

Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1: *The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies.*

## Findings

1. **MUW has made great progress** since the SACS COC Reaffirmation Team visit. The University has developed and implemented an institutional effectiveness process that addresses the core requirement of the *Principles of Accreditation* to provide evidence that it “*engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement, and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.*” (Core Requirement 2.5)

However, while the University is in compliance with the CR 2.5, there were several issues raised during the interviews about the extent to which the various processes were integrated. Concerns were expressed about the transparency of the budgeting processes. Another issue was the need to streamline and refine the planning and evaluation process, as well as demonstrating that planning activities play a critical role in the University’s decision-making and operational processes.

2. **Strategic and institutional operational planning** is coordinated by the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness with the involvement of a college-wide Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) Council. According to the Comprehensive Planning, Evaluation, and Budgeting Guide 2003-2004, the Council’s purpose is as follows:

*“The Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) Council is the principal instrument through which the University’s program of continuous improvement is administered. With the assistance of the University’s functional units, the PIE Council develops the University’s strategic plan, insures that budgeting is based upon sound educational planning, collects and analyzes data, monitors progress toward attainment of goals, reports results, and recommends actions to improve performance.”*

I met with members of the PIE Council and asked about their understanding of the Council’s purpose based on the above statement in regard to 1) strategic planning, 2) links between educational planning and budget planning, 3) the use of data, 4) goal attainment monitoring, and 5) recommendations for improvement.

**a. Strategic Planning:** Council members interviewed generally agreed they have input in strategic planning based on their involvement in developing *W-2009: A Strategic Plan for MUW*. The W-2009 strategic plan contains ten strategic goals and an assortment of subgoals (objectives) for each strategic goal. The strategic goals and subgoals are primarily descriptive statements without mention of performance indicators to track the

attainment over the five year strategic planning period. The target date to finalize W-2009 is January 1, 2005.

***Recommendation 1: The University should develop a set of performance indicators linked to the W-2009 Strategic Plan. MUW baseline data and benchmarked data from similar institutions can be used as indicators. Progress on the performance indicators should be made in an annual report to the University community and used to refine the strategic plan goals and objectives.*** Attachment 1 is an example of a strategic plan/performance indicators draft matrix to show a basic format.

**b. Educational Planning and Budgeting Link:** The University's IE process describes the link between sound educational planning and budget planning through the *2003-2004 University Priorities*. The University develops a list of annual priorities linked to the *W-2009 Strategic Plan* goals with specific annual objectives designated as priorities.

Budget planning has been revised as part of the University's response to the SACS COC visit. I reviewed a calendar "For Preparation of the FY'05 Budget" that lists various deadlines and actions. The link between educational planning and the budget process appears to be the PIE Council's involvement in recommending University Priorities to the President and cabinet. The calendar states that "*Budget priorities should reflect University priorities established by the President.*" This is a confusing statement since the development of "University priorities" appears to be PIE Council assignment. The priorities are then submitted for review to the President's Cabinet. The cabinet reviews and approves the priorities and developed "initiatives" or action plans for the next IE cycle (Attachment 4).

I interviewed several educational division heads and asked if they considered the link between educational planning and budget preparation to be sufficient to demonstrate that educational planning drives the budgeting process. Their responses confirmed that the link between these two processes needs to be strengthened. One of the concerns was that the budget cycle and planning at the unit level are out of sequence; with budget information due before unit level planning occurs. Unless unit level planners see a clear link between planning for educational improvement and the budget process, the perception that budgeting drives planning will remain.

**Recommendation 2: I recommend that the University establish a budget planning cycle and calendar that clearly shows that educational planning drives budget requests.** Attachment 2 is an example of an 18-month planning calendar that links academic year planning with budget planning. Attachment 3 is a sample planning, evaluation and budgeting calendar that also shows the cycle.

**c. Use of Data:** MUW has an institutional research office that provides numerous data resources for the University. In addition to reporting statistical data for IHL and other external agencies, the IR Office collects and reports data on student achievement, demographics, accreditation, and responds to specific data requests throughout the University. Since one of the PIE Council's purposes is to collect and analyze data, I asked questions about the accessibility of data as well as the use and analysis of data in the decision-making process. My impression was that even though the data is available,

there is limited evidence that the use of data is consistently linked to the decision-making process.

d. Goal Attainment Monitoring: The *W-2009 Strategic Plan* and the *2003-2004 Presidential Initiatives and University Priorities* do not include measurable indicators of progress toward meeting goals, initiatives, and priorities.

e. Recommendations for Improvement: The last part of the purpose statement for the PIE Council is that the Council “*recommends actions to improve performance.*” The annual development of University priorities is intended to address this purpose.

One concern is that there are almost too many plans, planning components and planning documents. This leads to confusion and negatively impacts the improvement focus of planning and evaluation activities. I am not sure if there are too many plans or that the links between plans needs to be defined and the process simplified. I have attempted to do that graphically in Attachment 4.

**Recommendation 3: The PIE Council’s role should be expanded to include clear responsibilities for: 1) monitoring the planning and evaluation processes; 2) serving as a quality control group for unit planning documents and processes; and 3) representing their areas of the college in an annual evaluation, reporting and goal setting workshop/retreat.**

- 3. Unit level planning** for educational, administrative, and academic support units is coordinated by Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. Based on the assistance of consultant following the last SACS COC visit, the University developed a unit planning process that addresses the instruction to provide evidence that planning and evaluation results in the use of results to improve educational programs. The specific instruction was to “*Demonstrate and document with greater detail guidelines and procedures for the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including the use of results to improve educational programs*”

The tool for unit level planning consists of the *Guidelines for the 2004-2005 Institutional Effectiveness Reports*. The guide contains instructions for unit planning using a form that is similar to the five column Nichols’ model. Academic units plan by degree programs within the various academic divisions. Administrative and academic support units also use a similar format.

The format used for unit level planning contains all the necessary components based on the requirements of the *Criteria*. The new *Principles*, however, give the University more flexibility for unit level planning and I have included an example in Attachment 5.

The IER form includes a field for “actual results” and “use of results.” It is the “use of results” field that is of special concern given the instructions from SACS for the September follow-up report. The best evidence of the use of results is in the development of new educational outcomes that have already led to improvements in the general ed curriculum.

**Recommendation 4: The current IER form and procedure should provide sufficient evidence to address the follow-up report if each planning unit completes the forms appropriately by documenting the use of results for improvement. The sample IER's in the Guidelines document should be the standard of quality for all unit IER's. In addition, I recommend that additional evidence be summarized on an educational division level to highlight curriculum improvements resulting from the IER process.**

**Recommendation 5: The link between unit level planning and the budget process does not appear to have been established. It is critical that the planning/budgeting cycle be amended to include unit planning as a component of developing University priorities.** An example of a multi-year planning, evaluation, and budgeting cycle is listed below and in Attachment 2. An example of an electronic Resource Allocation Form is Attachment 8.

I believe the process would work better using the following sequence:

#### December/January

The PIE Council and designated additional stakeholders (cabinet, student and community reps) meet for a one or two-day retreat to:

- Review University Performance Indicators Report linked to strategic plan
- Review prior year's progress on University priorities
- Identify external and internal influences/impacts for coming year
- Identify University needs
- Identify new/revised Annual University Priorities
- Cabinet and President identify President and Cabinet Annual Initiatives

#### January/March

- Educational, administrative and support units review evaluation data on prior year's Unit Educational Outcomes
- Units develop new Annual Unit Educational Outcomes linked to new University Priorities
- Unit budget needs identified, linked to new Annual Unit Educational Outcomes and transmitted to division heads through RAF's (Resource Allocation Forms)

#### March/May

- Unit level evaluations of previous Annual Unit Educational Outcomes continue
- Budget hearings conducted by unit managers, priorities communicated to cabinet
- Cabinet approves budget priorities
- Budget is finalized based on IHL decisions

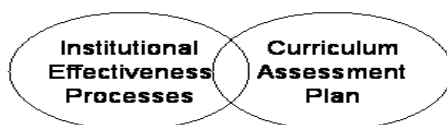
#### May/June

- Division directors receive budget allocations
- Directors provide feedback to unit heads

**Recommendation 6: Reorganize unit level planning by moving from the major program focus to divisions.** An institution the size of MUW should have 30-40 planning units, instead of the 90 or so that now exists. The rule of thumb is that similar programs

should plan together rather in small groups of 2-4 faculty teaching in the same program. I have included a unit planning matrix (Attachment 6) that shows units based on the University's organizational chart. The PIE Council and Cabinet should try to reduce the number of individual planning units by combining offices, programs and services that have similar purposes can plan together. This could lead to planning for all science programs or combining units of the college that deal with admissions and recruiting. It will take a cycle or two to refine the unit planning matrix structure. One example would be to combine biology, microbiology, physics and chemistry into a "natural sciences: unit. Another would be to combine "student development, student involvement, and residence life" into one planning unit.

Note that unit planning for student learning outcomes is best separated from the IE process through developing a Curriculum Assessment Plan (CAP). An example of a curriculum assessment model provided by AAHE's Assessment Forum is included as Attachment 7A-C. A CAP should be developed for each major program of study at the University.



Some of the division directors of separately accredited programs asked if their CAP could be the discipline-specific accreditation processes. I believe that is allowable as long as the process focuses on student learning and shows evidence of improvement tied to the analysis of data.

- 4. The use of results with respect to general education and the core curriculum** is one of the follow-up areas identified in the SACS COC letter. I reviewed some of the committee minutes related to the general ed/core curriculum changes and had several questions of how the revision process currently underway was linking changes in the curriculum to a needs assessment. (I was not able to meet with Dr. Patricia Donat, Director of General Education, who was away from campus.) The response to my questions is that the link to a needs assessment was present but that the committee minutes did not adequately describe the links.

Based on the instructions in the SACS letter, I believe the assessment of the general education component is the University's greatest risk of having to do another follow-up after the next C&R Committee review. I recommend that the IE/IR staff work closely with the General Ed Committee to ensure that the IE cycle of *Assessment* → *Planning* → *Budgeting* → *Implementation* → *Evaluation* → *and Use of Results* is clearly evident. The use of results can be shown by highlighting any improvements in the general ed curriculum based on the committee's work to date. This includes improvements linked to needs assessments for faculty development, course syllabi changes, educational support activities, assessment techniques, etc. It is also important to stress that student learning outcomes (through the Curriculum Assessment Plan for General Education) are the key measures of accountability for all courses and programs. A typical IE warning is that an institution should avoid at all costs the "we're fixin'

to get ready to” response to the C&R Committee. Actions taken, results realized, and improvements documented should be very strongly emphasized in the September follow-up report to SACS.

5. There is one other suggestion that I believe will make the process more user-friendly. Many colleges now use online unit planning documents, accessible through the University’s intranet website. This will eliminate the awkward forms, reduce paper costs, and provide everyone at the college with information about the plans of each unit. An example of a simple online planning site can be found at ( <http://www.somerset.kctcs.edu/cgi-bin/unit/viewplanning.cgi> ). The program is written in PERL script and can be adapted to almost any college website. Other, more complex software programs are available commercially but I have found that most institutions have programmers on their IT staff with sufficient skills to do this internally.

An additional attachment (#9A-B) contains two examples of IE models. I suggest that MUW consider developing a similar model.

Respectively Submitted

**Barbara H. Jones**

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Dr. Barbara H. Jones

Attachments (9)