

Office of Institutional Effectiveness University of South Carolina Aiken Program Review 2002-2003

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Preface

This program review report was prepared between September 23 and October 15, 2003 by the new Director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), Dr. Braden J. Hosch, who assumed the post on September 8, 2003. Due to the short amount of time the incoming Director has been with the OIE, this report, especially in the articulation of the mission and future plans, is tentative in nature and should be considered an evolving work in progress.

The USCA Strategic Plan, Mission, and Values statement provide the overarching framework in which all activities of the OIE Office are performed. Several Strategic Goals make direct mention of the OIE while others will likely call upon the OIE to provide institutional data or assessment expertise to accomplish effectively. Among USCA values that deserve specific mention, however, is the value of collegiality. The OIE's mission of assessing our common progress as an institution is best accomplished when we maintain collegial respect for consultation and a free exchange of ideas in our internal operations and external relations.

A guiding principle directing the future of the OIE is a focus on the assessment of outcomes, especially in the area of student learning and a de-emphasis on opinion and satisfaction surveys. While a student's satisfaction with his or her educational experience does represent a valid outcome and offers some important feedback

regarding quality, satisfaction measures are not reliable enough to serve as *primary* measures of effectiveness. Beginning in 2003-04, the OIE will more actively promote assessment methodologies that take advantage of faculty expertise and also more directed self-assessments based upon sound learning objectives developed by the faculty themselves.

A second guiding principle is that the OIE will actively explore and implement ways to anticipate frequent requests for data and make this information available to appropriate constituencies on a regular and predictable basis. The OIE will also pursue means to empower faculty and staff to garner these data themselves without substantial training.

I. Mission and Goals

The overarching charge of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) at USCA is to provide internal and external constituencies with an accurate and complete understanding of how the institution is advancing its mission to “challenge students to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge and values necessary for success in a dynamic global environment.”

To meet this challenge, the OIE uses a multifaceted and dynamic approach that integrates the collection and analysis of institutional data with the coordination of the assessment of student learning outcomes from academic units, general education, and co-curricular programs in an ongoing effort to improve programs and services throughout the university. The OIE disseminates assessment results and institutional data to support institutional planning and decision-making as well as advancing quality and innovation in the teaching and learning process, co-curricular programs, and other administrative units.¹

Specific goals follow directly from this mission [The following 14 goals are from the pre-2003 mission and have not yet been revised]:

IR Goals:

1. To provide studies and reports, both routine and special, to on-

and off-campus units/constituents to assist with their efficiency and knowledge about USCA students, faculty, staff and constituents. (Linked to USCA Goal 2, Strategy B)

2. To provide accurate and timely performance funding information and data to the S.C. Commission on Higher Education, to on-campus and off-campus constituents as appropriate. (Linked to USCA Goal 3)
3. To serve on committees both on-and off-campus to further the visibility and use of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, and to act as a resource for the institution. (Linked to USCA Goals 2,4)
4. To conduct, process, analyze, report and disseminate information from scannable and electronic surveys, or non-survey methods used at USCA in a timely, user-friendly fashion. (Linked to USCA Goal 1, Strategy C)
5. To respond to requests for information from outside agencies, e.g., CHE, SACS, IPEDS, USC Columbia, etc. with timely and accurate data, as well as to review such data for accuracy when prepared by others. (Linked to USCA Goal 3)
6. To provide training in order for others to be able to use USCA data more effectively in their own areas.

¹ As noted in the Preface of this report, this mission statement represents only a first draft of a new and integrated mission for the OIE.

7. To seek, secure and support grant efforts for the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and for USCA. (Linked to USCA Goal 5, Strategies A,D)
7. To seek, secure and support grant efforts for the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and for USCA. (Supports USCA Goal 3-Strategy C; Goal 5-Strategy B)

Assessment Goals

1. Effectively assess the basic skills of entering freshmen and at appropriate points throughout the undergraduate years of all students. (Supports USCA Goal 1-Strategies A,C)
2. Coordinate and monitor the assessment of academic programs. (Supports USCA Goal 1-Strategies A,C)
3. Serve as the primary assessment consultant to the University administration, academic units, departments/schools, and faculty committees. (Supports USCA Goal 1-Strategies A,C; Goal 2 - Strategy G)
4. Serve as the primary academic assessment liaison to outside agencies and institutions.(Supports USCA Goal 3)
5. Conduct and analyze survey research of academic programs, as needed (Supports USCA Goal 1 - Strategies A,C; Goal 2- Strategy G)
6. Conduct faculty workshops, as needed, on assessment-related issues. (Supports USCA Goal 1- Strategies A,C; Goal 2-Strategy G)

Administrative Structure

Administratively, the OIE is under the direct supervision of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, although it responds to requests from all senior administrators and campus units. Full-time office personnel consist of one Director, two Statistical Analysts (II), and one Office Coordinator; funding for one student worker is also in the OIE budget.

II. The Year in Review

While the 2002-03 Academic Year proved to be another year of transition that presented multiple obstacles and challenges in an environment of administrative change, the OIE successfully completed all of its external reporting responsibilities, responded timely to hundreds of internal requests for institutional data, conducted a wide range of survey and assessment tests administered to over 10,000 individuals, placed important survey and assessment results on the USCA web site, and continued the coordination of academic assessment activities. Indeed, despite understaffing, office productivity in 2002-03 actually increased in terms of gross volume over 2001-02.

The year culminated with a successful search for a new Director, whose appointment began a few weeks into the 2003-04 Academic Year. Additionally, the physical space of the OIE was valuably consolidated to situate all Office personnel in one location in Penland 108; at the time this report is being prepared, furniture needs are still being addressed.

The OIE's successful performance during 2002-03 is to the credit of Maureen Bergstrom and Jodi Herrin, who took on additional leadership responsibilities, as well as the oversight of Asst. Chancellor for Enrollment Services Randy Duckett and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Suzanne Ozment.

External Reporting

Annual reports were submitted to:

- IPEDS (via USC Columbia)
- SC CHE (Performance Funding)
- SACS (Institutional Profile, Financial Report)
- *U.S. News and World Report*
- College Guide Publications (Barron's, College Board, Peterson's, etc.)

Internal Reporting

Between September 1, 2002 and August 31, 2003, the job request tracking log indicates that the OIE responded to 192 unique data requests made by 67 individuals in more than 30 different campus offices.² Requests ranged from specialized lists of majors for various department chairs to complex enrollment comparisons for the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services. The completion of these requests typically required the modification of an extant program in SAS or Data Analyzer and often some data reformatting.

Assessment

The OIE's coordination of assessment activities in 2002-03 continued in three major areas: the administration of almost 1,200 major field tests and general education testing; conducting surveys of students, alumni, and faculty (a total of 8,760 survey responses were processed); and working with the Academic Assessment Committee to review assessment plans and results of academic units. The Committee reviewed reports from Chemistry, Communications, and

² It is important to observe that many internal reports, such as those for enrollment comparisons, are not recorded on the log.

Education in 2002-03. During the summer of 2003 the Academic Council and the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs retired the Forms A, B, and C used by academic departments for reporting assessment results and in their place adopted a pilot reporting mechanism for assessment activities by incorporating them in the program review format.

Web Presence

The OIE continued the development of its web presence by placing all relevant reports and studies online. Nineteen of these surveys were conducted online.

Challenges and Obstacles

The OIE has been faced with two ongoing challenges in the areas of personnel and the structure of the USC System information management system. In the area of personnel, the OIE did not have a Director for the entirety of 2002-03; however, two searches finally resulted in the appointment of Dr. Braden Hosch as the new Director. Dr. Hosch will provide the OIE with valuable leadership and direction. Additionally Statistical Analyst II, Myles Black, who maintained the OIE web site, conducted online surveys, and processed optical scan surveys departed in early summer as a result of a spousal move. At the time this report was written, a second unsuccessful search to fill this position had just been closed; staffing this position will be a major priority for 2003-04.

The second ongoing challenge is the USC System information management system. The reporting delays caused by multiple layers of administrative locking

and database coordination among USCA, USC Columbia, and the South Carolina CHE have been documented in earlier program reviews submitted by the OIE (see 2001-02 Program Review). The underlying difficulty, however, resides in a data management system grounded in technology that is somewhat outmoded and requires a high level of specialized user training. Because the technical facility required to extract meaningful data from the system is high, only a few users at USCA are adept at gathering information critical to the day-to-day operations of the university. Solutions to overcome this challenge are outlined below (see Section III, Goal 6).

III. Major Goals

1. Continue to revise and refine the OIE Mission Statement, aligning it with the USCA strategic plan and other institutional needs; specific goal statements will be fashioned to reflect the new direction of the OIE.
2. Continue to provide accurate and timely data for major external reports (i.e. IPEDS, SC CHE Performance Funding, SACS, *U.S. News & World Report*, College Guides, etc.).
3. Monitor and shape new academic assessment process, placing significant weight on the assessment of learning outcomes, using measures that de-emphasize satisfaction surveys and place more weight on faculty assessments of student competence in specific learning goals and objectives.
 - a. Prompt the Assessment Committee to examine external models for academic assessment; review 2003-04 program review submissions (Biology/Geology, BIS, Business, English, Mathematics, and Visual & Performing Arts) and develop more detailed guidelines and criteria for 2004-05.
 - b. Build trust with department chairs and faculty to show that assessment is not a nuisance but a helpful tool.
- c. Prompt departments to create or refine goals for student learning; shift emphasis of goals from what the program/faculty will do to what the students will do or demonstrate. Print these goals in the University Bulletin once they represent sound and measurable outcomes.
4. Develop in consultation with the Assessment Committee a plan for assessing general education outcomes beginning in 2004-05.
5. Modify student, alumni, and retention studies to emphasize behavioral report over satisfaction measures:
 - a. Administer National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
 - b. Administer Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
 - c. Construct retention study based on nationally available research design, data, and internal needs
6. Create a user-friendly database of 50-100 critical variables attached to currently enrolled students, updated weekly, that can be manipulated in Excel on high-

- end desktop computers on campus. Expand access to this database, while maintaining data security.
7. Refashion web presence to provide a) the appearance of a seamless transition from the main USCA web site and b) a readily useful and intelligible set of university statistics and assessment information to a wide range of internal and external constituencies.
 8. Contribute actively to interdisciplinary campus initiatives, especially the American Democracy Project and the Foundation of Excellence for the First Year initiative, to formulate plans in terms of clearly identifiable outcomes that will indicate goals and success of programs.
 9. Identify external funding sources that will provide support for ongoing OIE initiatives; as a guiding principle in seeking funding sources, the receipt of external funding should not disrupt day-to-day operations of the OIE but rather ameliorate them.
 10. Provide consultation for developing outcomes measures and assessment methods to co-curricular programs (e.g. Student Life and the Writing Room have already approached the OIE); assist in formalizing and outcomes assessment process for these and other offices.
 11. Reassess personnel needs and refashion the job description of the fourth office member; conduct a successful search for this individual.
 12. Formalize office procedures for workflow, data reporting, and other office activities (closely linked to the results of Goal 6 and Goal 11).

IV. Assessment Activities

Due to the personnel challenges noted earlier in this report, assessment activities for the OIE were largely quantitative as efforts were focused to hire a Director and maintain the daily operations of the Office. Nevertheless, the volume of work processed by OIE was higher than in 2001-02, and taking into account the survey volume added by the FIPSE grant in 2000-01, the 2002-03 Academic Year was the most productive year to date.

Tests Given

	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
General Education			1,237	954	965
Major Field			215	217	208
Total	1,148	1,273	1,452	1,171	1,173

Surveys Administered

	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
Distributed	2,295	2,771	5,967	3,190	5,536
Processed	3,767	3,815	5,620	3,371	3,224
Total	6,062	6,586	11,587	6,561	8,760

Unique Data Requests Processed

	2001-2002	2002-2003
Total	142*	192

* Data requests tracked on the Job request log are not available prior to January, 2002.

As other portions of this report suggest, the continued emphasis on surveys, especially satisfaction surveys, as the primary means for collecting outcome data may not represent the best way for

collecting reliable data that can effectively be used to improve program quality.

Indeed, if the goals outlined in Section III are met (see especially Goals 3 and 5), then the total number of surveys processed by OIE in 2003-04 should actually *decrease substantially* from the 2002-03 levels.

This projected decrease should not be taken to indicate that assessment is not taking place but rather that more assessment activities are being performed by faculty members as they evaluate the performance of their students based upon broad departmental goals for student learning. The OIE may play a role in designing the collection instruments for this information about student learning outcomes, and in fact, the Bubble Publishing software package and scanner could possibly be used in processing the results.

As the mission and goals of the OIE are refined and revised along with the specific Goals for 2003-04 listed in Section III, specific performance measures for these goals will be developed and monitored.

V. Personnel and Program Resource Needs

Personnel Needs

The second unsuccessful search for a second Statistical Analyst II to replace Myles Black has prompted a reassessment of personnel needs. At the time of preparation of this report, this assessment has just begun, but the initial conclusions reached by the previous search committee are that an individual with the specialized skill sets listed in the position announcement may be very difficult to locate. The challenges observed about the data management system compound the difficulty of this search.

The OIE requests that the position remain open during this period of reassessment and possible reclassification of the position after an analysis of how the Office might shift some of the work burden away from the remaining Statistical Analyst II (Jodi Herrin). It is the intent of Goal 6 (Section III) to allow for this change in workflow.

A shared campus programmer on the USCA campus could also alleviate some of the work burden, although the real solution to this dilemma is to upgrade the data management system to a more user-friendly web-based interface, such as SCT PowerCampus or PeopleSoft. While this solution would be expensive, substantial gains in efficiency and quality of information would result from the investment.

Other Resource Needs

Following the OIE's recent move to Penland 108 in August 2003, a reorganization of furniture, office resources, and storage space has been underway. No additional needs are currently projected for 2003-04.

Needs for 2004-05 are under review. However, it is requested that the budget for OIE consolidate the previous budgets for Institutional Research Office and the Assessment Office to reflect the current administrative structure.