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Assessing the Effectiveness of SFA’s Mission

Our university community has recently completed a broadly based process resulting in recasting the [mission statement](#) for Stephen F. Austin. At its April 2007 meeting, the Regents approved the following revised mission statement:

Stephen F. Austin State University is a comprehensive institution dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative work, and service. Through the personal attention of our faculty and staff, we engage our students in a learner-centered environment and offer opportunities to prepare for the challenges of living in the global community.

This statement will become the university’s compass for determining future changes in faculty and staff support, student life and service areas as well as setting goals for academic programs. The expected outcomes expressed in the mission statement will give each segment of the university a yardstick to assess the success of its unique contribution to the overall university purpose. The opportunity to assess SFA’s mission will result from the process of setting program goals in support of the mission, measuring the effectiveness of the goals, and using the findings in future planning that will improve policies, procedures, and services.

Measuring Institutional Effectiveness

Assessment is often defined as the systematic evaluation of results. Through assessment there is an analysis of effectiveness in meeting stated goals. A variety of methods for collecting and evaluating the information enhances the reliability of the process. The resulting conclusions are used in bringing continuous improvement to services, facilities, and programs.

Two years ago the university began a systematic assessment of learning goals for the core curriculum. That has been followed by an initiative within the last few months to coordinate assessment plans campus wide in each academic program. Key questions for each program are: What is the program trying to accomplish? How well is the program doing it? What are some direct and indirect measures of results? How are the findings being used to improve student learning outcomes? Measuring core curriculum and program goals and providing evidence of improvement is not limited to just the academic programs. Similarly, all divisions of the university are becoming involved in measuring effectiveness of programs and services.

In the not too distant future SFA will be required to demonstrate to SACS reviewers that we have a plan in place to: 1) bring continuous improvement to the mission of the university and 2) provide evidence that improvements have been implemented based on the plan. This will be an opportunity for SFA to showcase the level of results that have given this institution an excellent reputation for superior teaching, excellent scholarship, creative works, and dedicated community service over many decades. The criteria for this demonstration of our commitment to quality, and the university’s desire to ensure that the same level of quality continues, are stated in the SACS Comprehensive Standards related to institutional effectiveness and offered here for review.

SACS Comprehensive Standards

3.3 Institutional Effectiveness

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)

- 3.3.1.1** educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- 3.3.1.2** administrative support services
- 3.3.1.3** educational support services
- 3.3.1.4** research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- 3.3.1.5** community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate

3.5 Educational Programs: Undergraduate Programs

3.5.1 The institution identifies college level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them.

Assessing the mission of the university is most effective when it is broad based and has the support from throughout the learning community. While assessment efforts may start small, the intention is to involve people from across the university community. Our learning community at SFA has a history of working together. Assessment is not a destination, it’s a journey!