

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT TO
THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION
OF THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS









*As we prepare to host the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA) **April 26-29, 2009**, for the University of Cincinnati's reaccreditation process, we welcome your participation. This document summarizes UC's self-study, our report of a comprehensive, university-wide evaluation. We appreciate the ongoing contributions of the university community throughout this process – students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners, and neighbors.*

THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION SELF-STUDY

Two years of evaluation and preparation have resulted in a comprehensive and inclusive self-study for the Higher Learning Commission. We submit this report to the HLC/NCA as evidence that the University of Cincinnati maintains a rich culture of student learning, data collection, assessment, reporting, and reflection leading to continuous improvement. Guided by the strategic vision of UC|21, the University of Cincinnati has become a model for the new urban research university.

The University of Cincinnati community has used this self-study process as an opportunity to reflect upon the culture of the university, take stock of our examples of excellence as well as our challenges, and suggest action steps leading to improvement. It has been a significant, once-in-a-decade opportunity for evaluation that complements our ongoing assessment practices. Openness, transparency, and broad campus participation have been expected, encouraged, and achieved.

THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

This self-study is organized in five chapters corresponding to the five criteria for accreditation as established by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA):

- Mission and Integrity
- Preparing for the Future
- Student Learning and Effective Teaching
- Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge
- Engagement and Service

The university assembled more than 50 faculty, students, and staff and administrators (a steering committee and five designated writing teams) to address these key areas. Guided by the steering committee, the writing teams worked over a span of 16 months to complete a detailed self-study report. Within each chapter, the writing teams assessed successes and challenges across the university, being open and inclusive with broad participation from faculty, administration, staff, and student representatives.



A team of consultant evaluators representing the HLC/NCA will carefully review this report before visiting the university campus for three days in late April. After this visit, the team of consultant evaluators will prepare a detailed report of their findings and final recommendations. The commission will issue its final report in fall 2009.

From a communications standpoint, our goals were to be transparent and enlist broad participation. The steering committee along with key personnel facilitated communications among faculty, staff, students, stakeholders, and the public—in person, in print, and via the Web. Meeting schedules, committee membership, reports, and data were made accessible to all university stakeholders. Interested parties were invited to attend working sessions to offer suggestions and provide comment.

As we make final preparations for the campus visit April 26-29, 2009, our goal is that the team of visiting HLC/NCA consultant evaluators has every opportunity to discover, by interacting with our campus and community, what we experience daily: **a continuously improving model of student learning for the new urban research university in the 21st century.**

To read the full self-study report, go to: www.uc.edu/hlcaccreditation/



CRITERION 1: MISSION AND INTEGRITY

UC MISSION STATEMENT

"The University of Cincinnati serves the people of Ohio, the nation, and the world as a premier, public, urban research university dedicated to undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, experience-based learning, and research. We are committed to excellence and diversity in our students, faculty, staff, and all of our activities. We provide an inclusive environment where innovation and freedom of intellectual inquiry flourish. Through scholarship, service, partnerships, and leadership, we create opportunity, develop educated and engaged citizens, enhance the economy and enrich our university, city, state and global community."

Through our mission statement, the University of Cincinnati affirms our strong commitment to excellence and diversity in our students, faculty, staff, and all of our activities. The university's goals and purposes are clearly stated and well understood by the board, the administration, the faculty, staff, and students. And now, perhaps more than ever, UC's planning, budgeting, and campus operations are becoming more integrated, helping to ensure that the university's actions and our organizational structures are congruent with our mission. Criterion 1 of the self-study demonstrates how the university is upholding its mission; how it is organized, governed, and effecting change throughout the community.

UC|21

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

THE EVOLUTION OF UC|21: DEFINING THE NEW URBAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

What began as the Comprehensive Academic Planning Process (CAPP) resulted in UC|21 – a strategic vision that is benchmarked and reviewed annually to align with the six goals and six core values. Since the beginning of its implementation, UC|21 has been broadly embraced, and now permeates all colleges and facets of the university.



PRESIDENT'S UC|21 DIVERSITY TASK FORCE REPORT, MARCH 2007

The primary outcome of the task force's work so far has been the incorporation of our commitment to excellence and diversity into the University's Mission Statement, the creation of an ongoing Diversity Council, and the new permanent position of chief diversity officer (CDO). The Diversity Council guides the university's efforts to conceptualize, define, assess, nurture, and cultivate diversity and inclusion as institutional and educational resources and serves as the university-level governance committee charged with building institution-wide capacity to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse campus that embraces diversity as one of its core values.

INTEGRATED DECISION-MAKING

In 2003, the first presidential leadership transition in nearly 20 years presented a unique opportunity to increase transparency and participation at all levels and to involve numerous university constituencies in the formulation of a new model for shared governance. Through the adoption of a single-provost model, policy recommendations now go through the Academic Coordinating Committee (ACC) and/or the Fiscal Coordinating Committee (FCC), in coordination with the Academic Operations Committee (AOC) and the Executive Committee before arriving at the President's Office and Board of Trustees.

DISCOVERIES FROM THE SELF-STUDY

PACING ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES WITH FACULTY AND RESOURCES

The success of our Strategic Enrollment Management initiatives requires the university to work diligently to ensure that the needs of the new student body match our faculty and academic resources. A larger, more talented student body brings with it new demands and UC will need to be vigilant about meeting those demands.

PRIORITIZING ACTION STEPS AND OBJECTIVES

More work needs to be done to wed the work of UC|21, the academic priorities work, and the developing integrated plan for academics, financial resources, and facilities.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF OHIO

UC must continue to work closely with the state and other public higher education institutions to maintain state support for higher education. Critical to this work is UC's involvement in, and relationship with, the University System of Ohio. In light of the USO's new strategic plan, UC will need to review its academic priorities, define centers of excellence, and consider the potential impact on governance, independence, and resources allocation.

CRITERION 2: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Criterion 2 addresses the allocation of resources in preparation for sustainability and growth of the university. UC's physical transformation, while spectacular and well recognized, was not always well managed financially and therefore continues to have resource repercussions. Cost overruns and associated debt, along with overspent budgets and escalating costs across the campus put an enormous strain on the university's fiscal health. To address the financial situation, the university immediately undertook numerous cost-cutting measures and began a journey to re-stabilize the university's financial picture. The university has since made remarkable progress toward fully realizing financial stability, and through various revenue-generating opportunities and long-term strategies is better positioned to advance the institution.

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

INTEGRATED PLANNING WITH ALIGNMENT OF ACADEMIC PRIORITIES

UC's new integrated approach to planning links academic, fiscal, and physical planning, with academic planning being the prime driver. Good planning includes sustained analysis and assessment of progress toward goals and objectives. Annual budget hearings give academic units the opportunity to provide an update to the provost on efforts to align college resources around the goals of UC|21, to identify new resources needed to implement college goals, and to provide updates on hiring plans and strategic planning processes in the colleges.

TECHNOLOGY PLAN

The University of Cincinnati has made a strategic decision to enhance technology over the past several years. The university adopted the Blackboard Learning Management system, and now over 70 percent of the faculty use the online platform and collaboration tools. The master plan has included the addition of technology to all but 32 classrooms across the university, and additional technology enhancements for the university include podcasting, online grading, and personal response systems for the classroom.

UNIVERSITY-WIDE ASSESSMENT

The UC|21 President's Report Card is presented annually to the Board of Trustees and to all university stakeholders. This evaluation mechanism charts the university's progress on various metrics in relation to each of UC|21's six goals.

UC|21



DISCOVERIES FROM THE SELF-STUDY

MASTER PLANNING IN FIVE, 10 AND 20 YEAR INCREMENTS

The university has begun an internal master planning process that annually reviews academic priorities and the support those academic priorities need from the institution's resources and facilities. Each unit on campus will develop a master plan that looks at the alignment of academic mission with the necessary resources and facilities.

ENROLLMENT AND BUDGET COMMITTEE (EBC) AND PERFORMANCE-BASED BUDGETING (PBB)

Following extensive discussions across campus, the EBC has developed a revenue cost model which will be used to implement PBB. University leadership will determine an institutional threshold, which is the difference between total net revenues and total expenditures; units who exceed their thresholds will receive an incentive, while units who fail to meet their assigned share will face a permanent budget adjustment in the following year. The EBC has accelerated the implementation of performance-based budgeting from its original target of 2010/11 AY to 2009/10 AY.

UNIVERSIS

The current student information system, UniverSIS, will prove to be a challenge within next five years. With reliance on aging technology and a home-grown system, maintenance of the system becomes increasingly challenging. One option being considered is to integrate UniverSIS into the university's financial system, by SAP.



CRITERION 3: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVENESS

Any appraisal of university faculty, resources, and facilities would conclude that our students enjoy richer opportunities and support systems than do students at the majority of American colleges and universities. The university strives to maintain a balance among the principal elements in its mission: research, education, and community engagement; but maintaining that equilibrium requires institutional leadership, commitment, resources, and vigilance.

As one would expect from a large, complex institution with more than 250 degree programs, the quality and completeness of such goals vary and generally reflect the extent to which the university, individual disciplinary fields, and external accreditors have led the efforts for greater program accountability. However the majority of programs at every level of the university do articulate learning outcomes, forming a basis for ongoing assessments of student learning.

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

CENTER FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING & LEARNING (CET&L)

CET&L serves as faculty members' primary source of information about faculty development opportunities at UC, maintaining a Web-based community and calendar of events. CET&L works closely with the vice provost for faculty development and other university offices to coordinate and deliver numerous programs and services intended to yield more effective teaching and greater student learning, including faculty peer consulting, and collaboration with the Academy of Fellows for Teaching & Learning.

STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS: FROM PRE-ADMISSION TO CAREER PLACEMENT

Efforts to prepare prospective students have become better coordinated and more comprehensive within the last decade. While raising the standards for admissions, the university has ramped up its programs to meet the changing needs of the entering student. Additionally, first-year and ongoing cohort programs to both socialize and support students at the university have vastly increased student engagement.

UC|21



UC|21 INITIATIVES AT WORK

UC|21 succinctly expressed the intent of many longstanding but non-unified efforts. It also sparked the creation of new efforts and mandated evaluation of the effectiveness of our progress campus-wide. UC|21 goals helped formalize the university's primary focus, to shore up ongoing efforts and initiate new programs focused on effective student outcomes. In addition to setting academic priorities at the university's highest level, UC|21 has provided seed funding for numerous projects, including those specifically targeting teaching effectiveness.

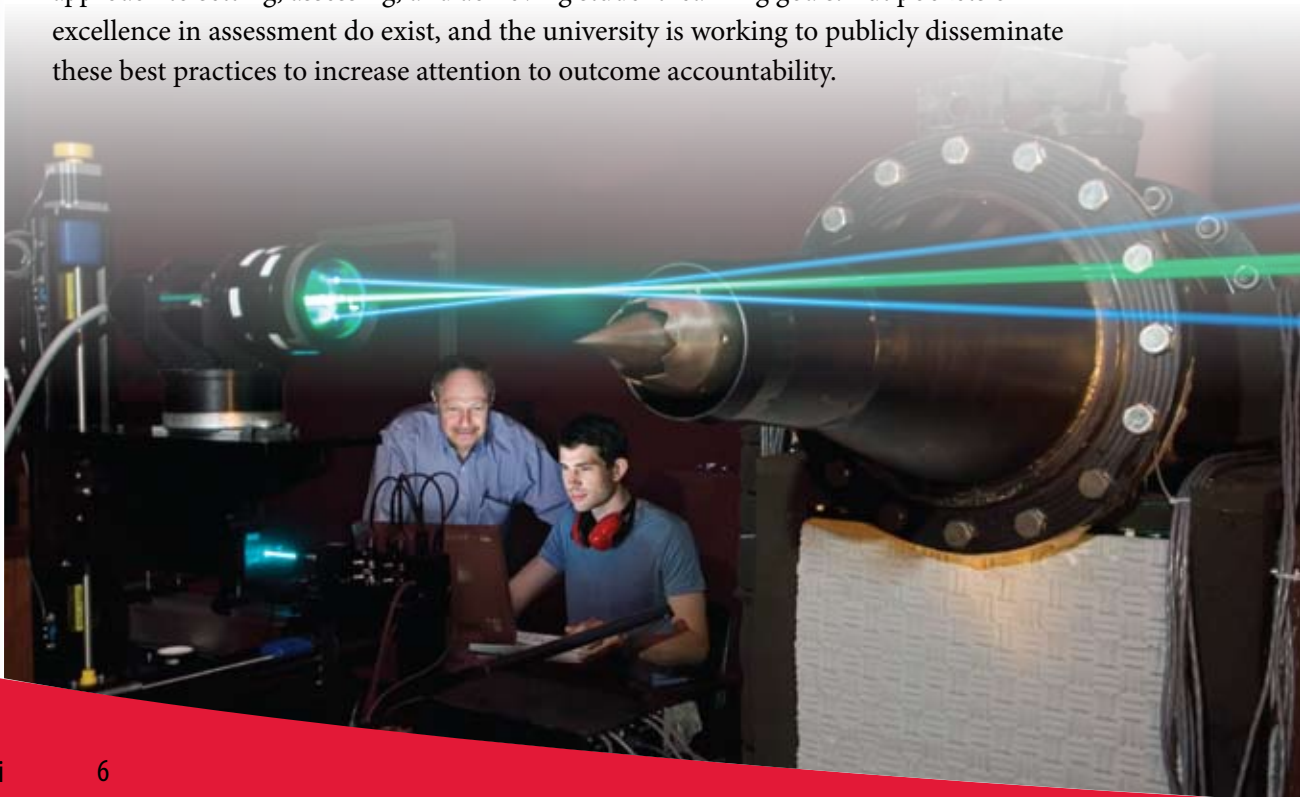
DISCOVERIES FROM THE SELF-STUDY

BALANCING RESEARCH AND TEACHING

For some faculty, the worry remains that research may come at the cost of student learning. However, the data suggests that increases in research funding over the years have provided the university with new and enriched opportunities to integrate student learning. Numerous measures and reports (the OBR Report Card, the UC Report Card, NSSE – National Survey of Student Engagement, student satisfaction surveys, external accreditation reports, etc.) indicate improvements in student learning, satisfaction, and engagement.

ASSESSMENT'S ROLE IN PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

Programs that undergo external accreditation show far better alignment with the culture of standards-based education and of accountability. Programs that do not undergo individual, external accreditation or review may lack the culture of a standards-based approach to setting, assessing, and achieving student learning goals. But pockets of excellence in assessment do exist, and the university is working to publicly disseminate these best practices to increase attention to outcome accountability.



CRITERION 4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

With a rich history of experiential and cooperative education, outstanding faculty and student researchers and scholars, dedicated and effective staff, and deep and meaningful ties to the community, our commitment to this goal is demonstrated in multiple contexts and environments. The University of Cincinnati thoughtfully leverages its resources as a complex, comprehensive urban research institution to fully support the acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge.

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

STRENGTH IN RESEARCH

As President Zimpher's letter in the 2007 Report on Research states, "Research is a major enterprise at the University of Cincinnati. Substantial dollars come in to support tens of thousands of faculty, staff, and students who keep working every day to grow UC's research excellence." The university has fared well even as research budgets have tightened across the nation. Ranked by Carnegie as a "very high research activity" university, the funding for UC and its affiliates has grown from \$163.5 million in 1998 to \$353 million in 2008.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

The formation of an undergraduate research council to coordinate research activities and services campus-wide also helps to further the mission of the university. Through centralized opportunities, undergraduate students can gain a better appreciation for research, as well as become more critical thinkers through their experiences.

INTEGRATED CORE LEARNING (ICL)

The evolution of a university vision of undergraduate education helps faculty focus ongoing curricular reform. ICL calls for the thoughtful integration of the General Education core, major course work, undergraduate research, practicum, and clinical placements, co-op and service-learning experiences, co-curricular activities, and faculty-guided reflection throughout the undergraduate curriculum. By underscoring UC's strengths and placing them within a holistic framework for student learning from the first undergraduate year through graduation, ICL envisions weaving high impact practices and experiences with high quality, rigorous instruction and helps students discover the linkages between the curriculum and inquiry, practice, creativity, and social responsibility.



UC|21

GENERAL EDUCATION EVOLUTION

The initial implementation of general education at UC began in 1996. While innovative and ambitious, the program was never fully realized, and the last HLC/NCA review found “uneven implementation.” Due in large part to this 1999 reaccreditation process, the HLC/NCA feedback pushed UC toward a total redesign of the program to be more inclusive of the diversity of the individual colleges, their missions, and UC’s organizational context while offering a framework that supports common knowledge, essential competencies, and their responsible application in a global context. UC’s new General Education program implemented in fall 2001 remains the foundation of our current program, with ongoing improvements and growth through assessment.

EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT:

GRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW, VSA, E-REVIEW AND I-LEAP

UC incorporates a tapestry of complex assessment across the university to understand the learning outcomes of the various components of our educational programs. These assessments include the Graduate School Program Review, the e-Review developed by the ACC (Academic Coordinating Committee), Integrated Learning Experiential Assessment Program (I-LEAP), where co-op employers, study abroad mentors, lab supervisors, and community partners assess student performance in experiential settings, and the VSA, or Voluntary System of Accountability mandated by the new University System of Ohio. The University of Cincinnati was the first Ohio institution to demonstrate public participation through its online “College Portrait.”

DISCOVERIES FROM THE SELF-STUDY

OVERHEAD AND INFRASTRUCTURE

All “very high-research” universities face challenges in supporting their research endeavors, which can demand a great deal of maintenance and oversight. While grant funding supports cutting-edge research, primarily in our areas of excellence, it may not always support the broader infrastructure needed to support and foster it.



ONGOING ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION

The Assessment of General Education and Integrated Core Learning outcomes continue to evolve. In 2008, a vice provost position was created to emphasize the use of assessment data and strengthen assessment processes. The university places a high priority on its assessment of learning. Training faculty to properly use tools in the classroom to assess the effectiveness of the General Education curriculum will require ongoing and extensive development. By being inclusive across the

university, we are encouraging broad faculty discussion of the baccalaureate competencies within the context of major programs. Rather than relying on a single assessment tool, we take a holistic approach looking at the intersections of capstone assessment, external assessment of student skills (I-LEAP), NSSE data, and program specific course and accreditation data.

SEMESTER CONVERSION AND COLLEGIATE RESTRUCTURING

As we prepare to change to a semester system in 2012, the challenge ahead for grand-scale curricular reform is significant. The university is committed to a foundation of deep reflection that will help refine and enhance academic programs and student learning outcomes. This endeavor will no doubt place a substantial amount of work in some areas where there is a shortfall of human resources and will take a well thought out and executed plan to minimize this effect. The university is committed to the next phase of collegiate restructuring begun earlier in the decade. A well-managed collegiate restructuring, in concert with semester conversion, will result in numerous benefits including: a modernized curriculum, streamlined degree requirements, and a more focused, strategic array of affordable degree programs; all in the context of greater synergies across programs with fewer programmatic redundancies across colleges.



CRITERION 5: Engagement and Service

The University of Cincinnati has a long and varied history of engagement and service to the broader community using the talents of our faculty and the physical and economic resources of the institution. While UC is inevitably tied to the Greater Cincinnati region, its influence is felt throughout Ohio, and increasingly throughout the world. Engagement and service have flourished at the program and unit level at UC, and these efforts have mutually benefited the greater community and the university. Much of this commitment has been driven by the passion of individual faculty for sharing their professional expertise, enlarging students' learning experiences, and translating theory into practice in diverse communities.

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

UNIVERSITY AS ADVISOR AND CAPACITY BUILDER

UC serves its constituencies in a multitude of ways; just a few examples of community-university initiatives that inform the broader agenda include the Community Research Collaborative, the Niehoff Studio, the Economics Center for Education and Research, and the Center for Criminal Justice Research.

COORDINATING UNIVERSITY-WIDE ENGAGEMENT

Programs and centers across the university work to connect students, research, resources and leaders with various community initiatives. These centers include the Center for Community Engagement, the UC Institute for Community Partnerships, and the Center for the City. UC's Center for the City serves as a portal to coordinate, communicate, and celebrate engagement initiatives across the university; at the same time, the center ensures that the university is involved and fully engaged in important community initiatives, playing a critical role in regional efforts, like Agenda 360 and GO Cincinnati.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Engagement is strong within the university through service-learning capstones, cooperative education, and international experiences, providing students with a rich array of opportunities. Additionally, UC has numerous programs in place to support students and families all along the educational pipeline, and these programs are enabling more students to achieve the training and education necessary for success. These programs and partnerships include Strive, GEARUP, and Emerging Ethnic Engineers (E³), as well as improvements in student transfer and program articulation agreements.



DISCOVERIES FROM THE SELF-STUDY

COORDINATION OF RESOURCES

UC's breadth and quality of engagement can create heightened or unrealistic expectations among many of the university's stakeholders and community partners. While UC has the capacity to respond to numerous requests and remains committed to constructive engagement, it also has budgetary and human resource constraints.

CENTRALIZING UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

Despite a long-standing commitment to engagement and service – and significant grassroots efforts at the college, department, and classroom levels – perceptions remain that engagement and outreach continue to be unit-based with little institutional coordination. Strategic planning that includes a focus on engagement is key to sustaining and coordinating long-term efforts.

ENGAGEMENT AS COMMUNITY BUILDER

Community councils of the neighborhoods surrounding the university have approached the Uptown Consortium with the concerns about the focus of its investments and its commitment to a social mission that extends beyond real estate development. The university and the board of the consortium have agreed to work with the community councils to review the mission and vision in setting shared priorities for the Uptown area.



CONCLUSION

RECOGNIZE THE PAST, ACHIEVE IN THE PRESENT, PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

Overall the self-study component of the university's reaccreditation has been a chance to reflect upon the past, assess the present, and steady ourselves for the future. It is a comprehensive and rewarding experience to appreciate and assess our achievements, yet understand the challenges that lie ahead.

The past 10 years may now seem distant, but they truly laid the foundation to create the university we know today; a master plan put into action, the early stages of molding a General Education plan to work university-wide, the Collegiate Structures Initiative (CSI), the assessment to allot resources more effectively and efficiently, and of course, the revitalization that came about through UC|21.

Today, we stand to fare better than most as a university that has already taken steps towards reining in spending, and aligning budgets with priorities campus-wide. A more holistic, integrated approach to planning on many levels will move us away from a campus of many colleges to "one university."

The challenges we hold in our future, the impact and changes of the University System of Ohio, the search for a new president and weathering the economic climate, do not seem so insurmountable. Armed with our self-evaluation, we at the University of Cincinnati are poised and ready for what the next 10 years will bring – **certainly some challenges, but on balance more opportunities for embracing the 21st century learner, success with our communities and partners, and new achievement.**

We invite all members of the university community to please join us in welcoming the consultant evaluators of the HLC/NCA from April 26-29. ***Open forums with the Higher Learning Commission Consultant Evaluators are scheduled for students, faculty and staff on Monday April 27, 2009, at 4-5 p.m. in Rooms 400 B&C and 425 of the Tangeman University Center.***

The University of Cincinnati is a Higher Learning Commission accredited institution. For more information on the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA), go to www.ncahlc.org/.

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