5.D - Core Component 5.D

The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

Argument

The evidence that CWRU systematically and continuously works to improve its performance generally applies to both subcomponents 1 and 2, so this argument will address both of these subcomponents in parallel.

1. & 2. CWRU regularly monitors its operations on an ongoing basis with reference to established goals and metrics. This occurs at multiple levels ranging from the overall institution down to the performance of individuals. Analyses of the results of these evaluation processes are routinely used by the university to improve its effectiveness and efficiency.

The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) supports and facilitates the university's strategic planning process, decision-making, and policy analysis. The OPIR oversees the Institutional Research office which is a university-wide resource for conducting studies, and providing data and reports to inform those planning and decision-making processes.

Several examples of ways in which the university has and continues to evaluate and improve its operations are provided below.

Strategic Planning: The 2008 Strategic Plan (Forward Thinking) addresses the need to strengthen institutional resources in order to assess and improve academic programs, manage and improve tracking of finances, and improve services to the campus community of faculty, staff, students and alumni. The 2013 Strategic Plan addresses the need to review existing curricular efforts (such as the SAGES program) in order to determine whether these efforts are providing students with excellence in their education. In addition, the plan provides that the university will engage with industry leaders on a regular basis to determine whether the programs at CWRU are meeting the needs of the future and if not, what new programs or program modifications are needed.

The academic units also created their own strategic plans incorporating the mission and strategic priorities of the university’s plan. (See the strategic plans for the College of Arts and Sciences, the Case School of Engineering, the School of Dental Medicine, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, and the Weatherhead School of Management.) All these strategic planning processes start from an understanding of basic institutional data, such as that provided in the School Data Profiles document. Metrics associated with research awards and proposals, as well as the outcome of technology transfer activities, are used to inform the university and school strategic plans.

The Division of Student Affairs began work on a comprehensive strategic plan in August of 2013. The Division consists of 13 departments; each department developed an outcome model and a SWOC analysis for its programs. Values and priorities were identified. The resulting plan includes goals and
steps for accomplishing these goals. (See the mission, vision and strategic goals statements for the Division of Student Affairs.)

**Educational Outcome Assessment:** In 1996, the university faculty endorsed a framework for assessment of learning which guides outcome assessment across the university. Periodically, the Senate reviews and updates the university's *Philosophy Statement on Educational Assessment*. The most recent statement is prominent on the home page of the General Bulletin. In order to improve and coordinate assessment practices across the institution, the university created and hired a full-time University Director of Outcome Assessment to assist the academic units in creating or refining assessment plans. Because of the call for more assistance, one of the first tasks accomplished by this office was to develop a guide to assist the various academic programs to improve their assessment activities. In addition, the school-based assessment committees are coordinated through this office.

CWRU's SAGES program receives routine attention, especially with respect to its success in developing writing skills in undergraduates. A number of reports focusing on writing abilities have been prepared and are available to the campus community. Evaluations of writing portfolios (submission of which is an undergraduate degree requirement) assess the efficacy of the SAGES program and point toward directions for improvements. See the most recent *Writing Portfolio report* (from Summer 2014) as an example.

**Academic Advising:** Another example of CWRU improving its performance is associated with academic advising. CWRU enrolls a large number of undergraduates who intend to matriculate in medical school. In the early 2000's, statistics showed that CWRU students gained entry to a medical school at a rate that exceeded national averages, but the university wanted to improve upon that result. Consequently, CWRU established a Director of Health Career Advising (within the Office of Undergraduate Studies) to focus on better advising CWRU's pre-health students. Statistics on more recent years show significant improvements (e.g., approximately 90 students per year enter medical school compared to 70 per year in the past; more than 60% of the overall number of applicants gain admission, compared to about 55% in the past; and CWRU has an all-time high of 84% of the students with GPAs > 3.5 and MCAT scores > 30 gaining entry to medical school).

**Evaluation of Internal Services:** CWRU makes a regular practice of evaluating internal units that provide services to the university community. External consulting firms are often invited to conduct these reviews and make recommendations for improvements. The university implements such recommendations as appropriate. Recent examples include the evaluation of the Office of Procurement and Distribution Services and Information Technology Services (ITS).

ITS maintains detailed service reports on outages and disruptions in services throughout the year. Each critical service has an ownership team that is responsible for the ongoing operation of the service as well as continuous improvement initiatives. In addition, ITS maintains detailed metrics on the progress of new technology projects in an effort to improve its efficiency.

**Financial Planning and Budgeting:** A Budget System Review Committee (the precursor to the University Budget Committee) was charged in 2009 with assessing how well the CWRU budget system supports the university’s operations and strategic plan and making recommendations for improvement. The university has adopted a number of the Committee’s recommendations including regular review of the methodologies utilized in the “responsibility center management model,” three-year financial plans for all academic units, and improved methods for budgetary coordination at all levels (department, school, and central administration).

CWRU utilizes a PeopleSoft Financial system that provides a variety of detailed financial reports in
real time. For example, detailed information on operations budgets is available to all units, and faculty members can directly monitor expenditures on research grants. The availability of such reports supports fiscal management across the institution.

Recently, based on user experience with its previous grants management system, CWRU implemented a new upgraded tool to improve the pre-award process for researchers. The SPARTA (Sponsored Programs Application for Research Tracking and Administration) system became fully active in early 2014.

**Campus Climate:** CWRU regularly conducts surveys of the faculty, staff, and students to ascertain areas for attention and improvement. Results of surveys on campus climate and reports on gender and salary equity are publicly posted on the Institutional Research website. Likewise, a variety of student satisfaction and engagement surveys are conducted and analyzed on a routine basis.

One example of an action taken to improve campus climate is the process that led to the development of a Diversity Strategic Action Plan (DSAP). Consultants were retained to engage the campus community in discussion and analysis of the state of diversity at the university. Through surveys and open forums, the DSAP was developed and endorsed by the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees. The plan includes goals and metrics for success, and academic units were encouraged to develop their own diversity action plans. The plan includes a timeline and identifies milestones for success. It also called for a follow-up Faculty Climate Survey which was completed in 2014. Various reports and summaries of survey results are used to ascertain changes in campus climate and progress toward DSAP goals.

**Campus Infrastructure:** A comprehensive master planning process is underway for the university campus. Consultants hired to evaluate the sufficiency and effectiveness of our physical space will identify the best ways to enhance or repurpose existing buildings. Feedback from students, staff, faculty members and alumni is being considered along with many other factors. It is expected that a plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees in the spring of 2015.

**Sources**

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