Chapter Three
Criterion One: Mission

The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.

—Handbook of Accreditation, second edition; a publication of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

The University of Akron Mission Statement clearly expresses its commitment to the fundamental role of higher education in society: teaching and learning, research, and service. Further, it recognizes the centrality of the pursuit of excellence and the benefit of focused distinction.

The University of Akron, a publicly assisted metropolitan institution, strives to develop enlightened members of society. It offers comprehensive programs of instruction from associate through doctoral levels, pursues a vigorous agenda of research in the arts, sciences and professions, and provides service to the community. The University pursues excellence in undergraduate and graduate education and distinction in selected areas of graduate instruction, inquiry and creative activity.

The University of Akron goals and stated purposes, as established in University rule 3359-20-01, elaborate on this tripartite commitment. The University of Akron has a commitment to:

- Provide learning opportunities for the full spectrum of students
- Create and discover knowledge through basic and applied research and creative activity
- Create a learning environment with emphasis on a full collegiate experience for each student, leading to opportunities for cognitive, social and personal development
- Provide a forum for the examination of ideas and concepts and the generation of scholarly dialogue within the established principles of academic freedom
- Encourage opportunities for interdisciplinary study and research
- Strive for continued improvement of the teaching and learning environment
Prepare career oriented people for professional leadership roles in regional, national, and international organizations and institutions

Offer appropriate educational and professional services to its various constituencies within available resources and established continuing education and outreach philosophies

In preparation for the writing of the Self-Study, each college, department, and unit was asked to report on its long-range and short-range educational goals. These reports show without exception that each unit has clearly thought-out goals that focus on student success and educational excellence. See http://www3.uakron.edu/provost/nca/docs/index.html

While the reports demonstrate a very wide variety of responses and approaches to insuring that the University’s goals and purposes are communicated, understood and implemented by the various constituencies, they demonstrate no one particular formalized mechanism. For the most part, the reports indicate that the various constituencies have an understanding of the University’s stated goals and purposes, although the evidence offered to support that understanding is as wide and varying as might be expected in a large, diverse University. There is more consistency among the reports when they address what mechanisms are in place to insure the understanding, although there is still a wide variety of evidence offered here as well. However, these mechanisms, as consistent as may be reported, tend to not be formalized “mechanisms” or processes.

The single most-often cited mechanism for insuring understanding is involvement. Whether the involvement is by faculty members being involved in the Faculty Senate, or by Department Chairs/Directors being involved in various strategic planning committees/events, or even attending the President’s Fall Convocation, all of the reports speak to a very high level of involvement in all aspects of the University’s operations. Most of the reports also indicate that the stated goals and mission of the University are reflected in criteria for initial appointments, merit pay raises, and retention, tenure and promotion (RTP) decisions. Many reports indicate substantial discussions of the specifics of the University’s goals and mission at faculty meetings, committee meetings, and indicate that periodic reviews are conducted to compare and contrast Department/School goals with the University’s stated goals and mission. In fact, several reports note that the University President’s annual visitations to the individual Colleges go a long way toward insuring that all faculty members understand what the University is trying to accomplish.
The University’s decision in 1999 to apply for certification as a member of the Carnegie Teaching Academy leaves no doubt about our dedication to excellence in undergraduate and graduate education. Many of our faculty have played active roles in summer academies conducted by the American Association of Higher Education. The newly established Institute for Teaching and Learning began its work with a colloquium series centered on instructional technologies, and with a year-long symposium on assessment and learning. Our growing concentration on excellence in teaching and learning is underscored by the recent dedication of an Associate Provost position to these concerns. In this capacity Associate Provost Dr. Thomas Angelo, a nationally recognized expert on assessment, has also begun to lead the task force developing a comprehensive student outcomes assessment strategy and practice. Efforts have been made to insure universal and sound assessment of the quality of instruction. These initiatives have benefited from a variety of well-attended seminars for faculty planned by Associate Provost Angelo. Administratively, each college has a course evaluation program in place, assuring almost, if not fully, universal coverage. Currently, there is no one standardized method used across the university and most colleges have worked effectively to upgrade their procedures.

For example, the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences requires the use of the nationally recognized IDEA forms, as a stand-alone or with supplementation, and even bears the costs of its administration and scoring for departments. The Community and Technical College has instituted an ongoing Evaluation of Teaching Committee to regularly work toward improving its college-wide assessment program. The College of Nursing uses an in-house assessment instrument across all its courses and encourages peer appraisal. The Law School relies universally on a faculty-created form developed in the 1980s from which longitudinal data exist and which includes quantitative, as well as narrative, feedback. The College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering evaluates all its lecture and lab courses using a departmentally developed protocol.

Of particular interest in the service of excellence in learning is the University’s General Education program, whose unique format was described approvingly in the 1997 Self-Study report. The program is now approaching maturity and seems on track. The feared proliferation of acceptable courses has not occurred to any significant extent. Since one-third of all baccalaureate credits are earned though General Education courses, all of our undergraduate students are assured of a degree of consistency and order in their educational experience.
The procedures and criteria for the hiring, retention, promotion, and granting of indefinite tenure for faculty have been the subject of a major upgrade and standardization, which became fully effective in early 2002. Substantive changes from the previous practices include the recognition of the scholarship of teaching as a scholarly activity on a par with teaching, traditional research and creative activity. This initiative is clearly in the service of excellence by demanding consistency and detailed accountability in its judgments of faculty performance, and by reinforcing the importance of the formal study of teaching and learning.

Course instructors whose native language is not English, particularly graduate assistants with classroom or laboratory teaching duties, have for some time been required by Ohio’s Board of Regents to be certified to have adequate competency in spoken English. In addition to imposing the requirement of passing TOEFL to qualify for admission (and the units’ GRE requirements), the University has chosen to administer the TSE with a passing score of 50. The test is administered locally under the supervision of the English Language Institute; the latter also offers remedial instruction, whose high expense can become prohibitive for international students unable to pass the test initially. One effect has been to discourage foreign students with uncertain English competency from applying for teaching assistantships, with applicants from the Orient – with the notable exception of the Indian subcontinent – being most affected. The more beneficial effect of the TSE requirement has been to reduce student (and parent) complaints about incomprehensible instructors, or at least to force a distinction among different causes of incomprehensibility, such as that due to an instructor’s lagging language skills, his or her strong accent, and the difficulty of the subject matter given the student’s inadequate preparation.

Many faculty members in science and engineering departments feel that the TSE requirement, with its insistence on cultural and colloquial American components of speech, greatly exceeds the reasonable expectation of a laboratory teaching assistant and unnecessarily deprives us of talented students. Contrary to the recommendation by the TSE’s designers, The University of Akron has made no adaptation of the passing score based on discipline and duties. For more imaginative alternatives some faculty have looked to other Ohio campuses, particularly Ohio State University, some of whose units avoid the TSE by installing their own language competency development and “mock-teaching” testing, closely related to the discipline and to specific instructional duties, and – crucially – at no cost to the graduate student. Such an initiative has some local administrative support.
Recent substantial changes and turnover in the teaching faculty population have had several divergent effects on instructional excellence. The largest change has been the succession of five early retirement incentive programs (ERIP), now concluded. These programs have caused the University to lose many skilled and experienced instructors, without the ability to replace them rapidly. The immediate result for the University has been an initially haphazard, but partly welcomed, reallocation of resources, the need to hire more part-time instructors, and the creation of several full-time non-tenure-track teaching positions. Within Board of Trustees’ limits on the rehiring of superannuates, many new part-time hires were recruited from the ranks of the recent ERIP retirees, whose expertise is proving indispensable in the short run.

Since the mid 1990s, General Education funds have been earmarked to support hires dedicated to excellence in undergraduate education; the search plans for these and other regular faculty positions stipulate previous pedagogical experience with up-to-date methods as highly desirable. In particular, in the last several years the University Honors Program has greatly benefited from the enthusiasm and commitment of some newly hired faculty preceptors. Several departments have established honors sections of some of their introductory survey courses reserved for students in the Honors Program and others selected for their high achievement or promise. The University had earlier begun to cultivate interest in entering first-year students of academic promise by offering Scholarships for Excellence.

Scholarships and awards based on demonstrated excellence in learning abound at the undergraduate and graduate level. In addition to industry-sponsored awards, many departments benefit from scholarships provided by alumni. These latter scholarships are typically competitively awarded and renewed on the basis of performance in addition to financial need. The Chemistry Department recently received a bequest of $200,000, with the proceeds destined for scholarship support of undergraduate women studying chemistry. Indeed, essentially all forms of student support depend on continued satisfactory academic progress toward a degree, forming a broad baseline of incentives on which the development of excellence relies.
Since research constitutes instruction whenever and wherever it involves students, striving for excellence in research directly informs and drives student learning at the hands of dedicated faculty researchers. The University’s scholarly research is a source of pride and a showcase of much certifiable excellence. Many faculty are assisted in their research by both undergraduate and graduate students. Excellence in this respect depends on our ability to attract and interest talented and committed students. Beyond the obvious attractions of our faculty and institutes of high reputation, graduate student interest, at least in the scientific and technical fields, depends to a large extent on financial support available to them in the form of graduate stipends. Many faculty in the technical disciplines depend on grants for the support of some of their graduate students, but during the initial, pre-research, phases of graduate study the University’s allotment of graduate stipends usually bears the brunt of providing that support. Judging from long-standing informed faculty complaints, the University continues to suffer from its inability to offer graduate assistant (GA) stipends either in sufficient numbers or at adequate levels for the University to remain competitive vis-à-vis comparable institutions with whom we are vying for a decreasing number of graduate students. This shortfall is ameliorated only slightly by Akron’s relatively low cost of living, but this fact seems of little comfort to our graduate applicants. The Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School has addressed this problem, within the limits of an essentially constant funding level, by eliminating GA positions previously dedicated to administrative support and reallocating the funds to departments with substantial research efforts and high levels of external funding. Some departments are using the new allocations to augment existing stipends, others to increase the number of GA positions.

The largely successful effort in 2000-2001 to hire faculty with research specializations in materials, computation and nanotechnology is evidence of the degree of commitment to research excellence and an indication of its direction. By 1998 the University leadership had declared its intention to reach Carnegie Research II classification status. That classification scheme has recently been revised and now includes credit for other than Federal research funding, but since our Federal funding levels have increased more rapidly than anticipated, that goal in terms of its original threshold should now be attainable well ahead of the plan. Students will be the principal beneficiaries of increased research productivity and of its national and international recognition.
The Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs more ably than ever assists faculty researchers with the identification of research funding and provides the administrative interface between University faculty and granting agencies, foundations, and industrial sponsors. The recent liberalization of State policies concerning intellectual property and entrepreneurial involvement by research faculty has greatly increased the possibilities and attractiveness of University service in support of local and national industrial needs. Revision of the university summer schedule has provided research faculty with a full 15-week session. An updated University policy concerning patents and intellectual property is in the late stages of development. The University-affiliated University Research Foundation, recently developed under the guidance of the new Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School, deals with the business and management aspects of patents, and an Office of Technology Transfer as well as the William and Rita Fitzgerald Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies assist in the development of business contacts between University researchers and industry and in economic development, including start-up firms in which faculty may hold equity interest. These efforts are guided by a long overdue and highly detailed conflict-of-interest/conflict-of-commitment policy recently approved, and aided by access to substantial intellectual property expertise residing in the School of Law. The University of Akron has the second largest intellectual property portfolio among public universities in Ohio, and relative to its inputs, the most productive by far. The latest Association of University Technology Managers surveys report that the University had both the most issued patents and the second largest number of invention disclosures, per million dollars of research expenditures, in the country.

Unlike many metropolitan universities, The University of Akron embraces the Akron community. The typical town-and-gown syndrome is virtually nonexistent. In fact, the community affectionately refers to “their university” as “Akron U”. Service activities, both individual professional service and institutional service to the community, nurture, encourage and characterize this phenomenon. Community service is viewed as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the University that forms the basis of a long-term competitive advantage.

- Dr. Chrys Wesdemiotis, a chemistry faculty member, heads the mass spectrometry laboratory. In 2001, he and his students ran more than 400 mass spectra samples for university internal groups in Chemistry, Engineering, and Polymer Science, as well as external industries such as Noveon Inc., Cougene Corp., and the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company.
The Department of Economics and Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences sponsors the Emile Grunberg Lecture Series, an annual event that attracts a substantial number of individuals from outside the University community. Since it was inaugurated in 1988, the series has been privileged to have 14 distinguished economists, nearly all Nobel Laureates in economics.

The Department of Political Science and the Bliss Institute have developed a large internship program serving a broad community and national constituency. Placement agencies, including the White House Press Office, have said they would be unable to complete their work objectives without the assistance of interns. Local placement agencies include the YWCA, American Friends Service Committee, Better Business Bureau, and Ohio Citizen Action; interns also have the option of working in the non-profit sector.

The Psychology faculty’s commitment to service at the national level is best represented by the recent elections of two faculty members to the presidency of their respective American Psychological Association (APA) divisions. Additionally, 14 of the 20 faculty serve on the editorial boards of major journals with 2 of these 14 functioning as Associate Editors. Further the faculty and students associated with the department’s Counseling Psychology Training Clinic provide free mental health services to members of the greater Akron community.

Community engagement and service is part of the mission of the Department of Public Administration and Urban Studies. Currently, three faculty are members of national boards or executive committees and five faculty serve on regional and community boards, including one who is chair of the board of a non-profit service organization. In the past, faculty have served on boards and committees as diverse as the National Council of the American Society for Public Administration, including one President, to the program committees for national conferences, to service on the Transition Team for President George W. Bush.

The Decker Family Development Center is an outstanding example of community outreach. A collaborative effort of the University, Children’s Hospital, and Barberton City Schools, Decker opened in September 1990, and delivers social, educational, medical/health, and pre-employment services to 225 low-income families and their 325 preschool children. Decker employs 80 people, including 21 at the university, and UA graduate students have used Decker to complete four dissertations and six master’s theses. Decker has received national and international
attention and awards for the impact of its service delivery on children and their families. Thirty-two percent of the faculty hold national leadership positions and 45 percent of the faculty hold state/local leadership positions.

- The Clinic for Child and Family Study provides low-cost counseling services to campus and community clients (over 700 in the past year) while also providing an internship/practicum site for candidates in counseling programs. Individual and group counseling sessions are offered each semester. Group session topics typically include anger management for adolescents, anger management for adults, and kids coping with ADHD.

- The Center for Literacy engages faculty with colleagues in schools and in community agencies such as Project LEARN to develop a number of instructional programs for both professional education and P-12 schools. The center supports literacy development of children and adults through courses and workshops, teacher professional development, research and scholarship, and service projects. During summer 2002, the center launched a summer youth program called Leap into Literacy that offered children in grades 1 to 4 wide-ranging opportunities to enrich their literacy development. Plans are underway to continue the Leap into Literacy effort during the school year as a Saturday morning academy at the University campus.

- The Center for Economic Education aims to improve the economic literacy of individuals so they can function competently as citizens, producers and consumers. The center conducts workshops, seminars, and economic programs for teachers, candidates and interested groups. It provides consulting services in the area of economic education and acts as a clearinghouse for the gathering and dissemination of economic education materials and programs.

- The Center for Urban and Higher Education has the broad purpose of improving student achievement Pre-K through higher education. It serves both the University and the community by fostering collaboration among faculty, candidates, practitioners and community leaders in educational conferences and seminars, research, evaluation and training. Current projects include collaborations with the Summit County Education Service Center to provide Leadership for Learning: A Forum for Educators for area administrative leadership and school boards, and grant-supported activity to complete case studies of four Ohio districts to assess the relationship of school governance and student achievement.
Because of a nearly $1.2 million grant received in 2001 from the National Science Foundation, Graduate Teaching Fellows in K-12 Education programs and UA graduate fellows are working with public school teachers to do biological research and develop curricular materials based on their findings. The program, representing one of the largest NSF grants ever awarded to the University and the largest received by the Department of Biology, also links faculty from biology and education. External partners include the Akron Public Schools, Bath Township Elementary School, and the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center.

In August 2002, the Ohio Commission on Minority Health awarded $200,000 to the Department of Sport Science and Wellness Education for a year-long project, Healthy Lifestyles: Inside and Outside. The program will target 120 African-American girls in the Akron-Canton area. The project links UA faculty, Kent State University, Caring Communities of Summit County, and Children’s Hospital Medical Center of Akron.

The College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering Applied Research Laboratory in partnership with EPIC, the Edison Polymer Innovation Corporation, has been solving problems and accelerating innovation for more than a quarter-century. The Laboratory focuses on solving real-world industry problems by providing independent and objective analysis and testing of material properties.

The Akron Global Polymer Academy offers facilities for online collaborative research in polymer science and polymer engineering along with education opportunities from kindergarten through college to the workplace. The AGPA links corporate and academic researchers and students at all levels with remotely operated laboratories, classroom teaching resources, degree programs, certification and training, and short courses for a uniquely rich spectrum.

Each year more than 1,000 clients visit The University of Akron’s School of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and its Audiology and Speech Center for assessment and treatment of speech, language, and hearing disorders. These clients include children with speech, language and hearing disorders; adults who have acquired head traumas; persons who cannot speak and require technology to express themselves; and elderly persons with hearing losses. In addition, the Center is one of only two University training centers in the country providing auditory-verbal clinics for children with severe hearing impairments.
- "Arts LIFT" is a new initiative of The University of Akron's Arts Education Program that is serving underprivileged and artistically gifted high-school students in the Akron Public Schools.
- The University of Akron's social work students intern at more than 65 social service agencies throughout Northeast Ohio, while UA's family and child development majors log 7,000 to 8,000 internship hours per year at programs and agencies serving families and children. Internships like these benefit the community while giving students valuable professional experiences that often lead to employment after graduation.
- The University of Akron's E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall is the flagship performance venue for our region and an economic boon for downtown Akron. Each year E.J. Thomas Hall presents Broadway musicals, world-renowned entertainers, ballet, opera, jazz, comedy, and a prominent speakers series. Plus, E.J. Thomas Hall serves as home to the Akron Symphony Orchestra, Ohio Ballet, Tuesday Musical, Children's Concert Society, Akron Youth Symphony, and the Summit Choral Society. The professional staff of E.J. Thomas Hall also manages the historic Civic Theatre in downtown Akron. Together, E.J. Thomas Hall and the Akron Civic Theatre bring nearly 600,000 visitors to downtown Akron annually, with a yearly economic impact of more than $15 million.
- Since 1996, the Akron Civic Theatre has been managed under an agreement with the University of Akron’s E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall. This agreement allows the two facilities to work in cooperation, instead of competition, maximizing their ability to bring more entertainment and cultural activities to the citizens of Summit County. The synergy of the partnership with E.J. Thomas Hall allows the Civic to tap into the fifth largest market in the country creating the potential to bring one million-plus people to downtown Akron annually.
- In cooperation with the Akron Bar Association and several public schools, the University sponsors a "Street Law Program" in which law students and attorneys help teachers of government present law-related programs in various high schools in the county. Last year this program won an award for excellence from the American Bar Association.
- The School of Law's Joseph G. Miller Institute for Professional Responsibility, now in its tenth year, sponsors, in conjunction with the Ohio State Bar Association and the Board of Commissioners on Grievances and Discipline of the Ohio Supreme Court, a
yearly seminar on the Lawyer Grievance Process. This free seminar provides attorney members of Grievance Committees the only formal training they receive.

- The Center for Nursing is an academic nurse-managed center where students from all levels in the College of Nursing participate in the provision of multidisciplinary care to underserved and vulnerable populations.

- Student support services are provided through the Office of Student Affairs from the funded project entitled Skills Enrichment and Retention Program in Nursing (SERPN), a three-year project funded through the Department of Health and Human Services Division of Nursing, provides sensitive academic and non-academic support services to homeless men (The Haven of Rest), abused women and their children (ACCESS), and groups of disadvantaged students.

- Nursing students provide needed preventative health care services to patients and families in the following population groups: incarcerated men and women (Oriana House); rural health care intervention (Wayne public health department); and parenting and breastfeeding with pregnant teens (Barberton) through service-learning initiatives, several of which are funded through external resources.

- The College of Nursing continues the development and on-going implementation of Pre-Nursing Clubs to introduce health care professions to youth at local elementary schools and high schools. In addition to providing important information about health care professions, there are numerous opportunities to teach students about illness prevention and wellness maintenance.

- Coleen Curry, Assistant Dean of University College, co-directs the Youth Excellence Performing Arts Workshop. This weeklong, intensive, residential experience is held each summer on our campus for youth 12-24 years of age.

- Michael Morsches, Director of Developmental Programs, has worked with over ten local organizations and industries on workplace literacy issues. Michael, who also serves as Coordinator of the Reading courses offered in the department, has provided training and support to literacy agencies in Akron and Cleveland. Additionally he serves on the Board of Trustees of Project LEARN of Medina County (an adult literacy program).

- Brenda Marina, Academic Adviser/Transfer Specialist, and Dr. Bonnie Williams, Assistant Dean of University College, worked extensively with the Medina County School District and the Barberton City School District this past year to introduce the Ohio Course Applicability System
(CAS) to middle- and high-school guidance counselors as well as to parents of high-school students who were potential enrollees in the Post Secondary Enrollment Option Program.

- Dean Karla Mugler, University College, currently serves as Co-Chair of the Impact Committee of the Ohio Board of Regents’ Articulation and Transfer Council.

The pursuit of excellence must be firmly and broadly based on instructional support. The University is in the midst of a comprehensive overhaul of its campus physical facilities and landscape. It is also expanding and enhancing its information systems.

The largest single improvement in library services has come as a result of the maturation of OhioLINK, a statewide cooperative that allows our students and faculties to share resources easily with 78 other campuses throughout Ohio and gives the University community access to an unprecedented array of databases, electronic books and full text journal files. This resource now includes most of the standard electronic indexes our student users need, the full text of every article in every issue of almost 6,500 journals, and a variety of other databases that provide selective coverage of articles from thousands of other magazines and journals. When combined with other electronic files that the libraries have purchased outside of the statewide system for use at Akron and the paper collections that the library continues to build, it is clear that library users have access to more scholarly information than they have had before. At the same time, students have access to a very large collective monograph collection, even if access requires them to browse only online and limits the amount of time for which materials can be checked out. The popularity of this service is evidenced by the fact that almost 20 percent of our circulation either involves materials from our collections lent to patrons of our partner libraries or materials held by those libraries lent to our clients.

But, at the same time, the Libraries face a challenge. Different publishers have chosen to provide electronic resources to libraries differently and at different speeds, and the result has been that coverage across disciplines provided in electronic formats has been uneven. At the same time, the move from paper to electronic formats has added expense and exacerbated the problems that libraries have had for more than two decades relating to the inflation of the costs of books and journals. While central funding through OhioLINK has softened the blow, the long term commitment that came with those funds has limited the libraries’ flexibility in trimming serials lists. At present, more than
half of the libraries’ material budget is committed to maintaining its membership in OhioLINK.

This has led the libraries, in times of flat budgets, to weight collections purchases in favor of serials purchases and led to a subsequent decline in the number of books and monographs purchased. In the fall of 2001, budget cuts required that the University Libraries suspend the purchase of books through its approval plan for a short time until additional money could be identified. The suspension of the approval plan and a moratorium on the purchase of books and monographs was again enacted in the summer of 2002 when it was determined that the financial commitment to our serials collection would take virtually all of the materials budget. Again, relief was provided in the form of $100,000 in one-time money for the purchase of monographs until a more permanent solution can be found. University Libraries is presently involved in a paring of the serials list to reintroduce a balance between books and serials and a balance of the materials budget across disciplines.

Instructional support is also provided through information technology systems. Under the direction of the Vice President for Information and Instructional Technologies, Libraries and Institutional Planning (VP/CIO), a campus-wide wireless network is making e-mail and web-based applications available to its students, faculty and staff anywhere on and near campus without the need for physical connections. Several University-sponsored laptop lease/purchase programs are available to students as well as faculty. Instructional faculty are benefiting from a program to lease laptops for work-related use, at no direct cost to them. These computers are equipped to use physical as well as wireless network connections, for convenient use at home, traveling and at work. The effects on the teaching/learning enterprise will be highly beneficial. Access to web-based course material and to the resources on the web will no longer be restricted to fixed building locations, and student-instructor contact and feedback is certain to broaden and intensify.

Substantial software support has become available for Computer-Based Assessment and Evaluation. Multi-Media Learning Technologies and Design and Development Services provide assistance with the design of web-based instructional materials and offerings. The University’s software training opportunities for students and faculty have become quite extensive and are well received. The multi-media conversion of numerous local campus classrooms was largely completed by 2000, but distance-learning facilities are still being augmented and new instructional projects are under development.
The University of Akron makes a clear and conscious effort to inform the public of our institutional and educational goals. The front page of The University of Akron web site (www.uakron.edu) prominently features Charting the Course, our statement of strategic intent and comprehensive vision for the future of the University. The Balanced Scorecard initiative is detailed on the university home page at: http://www.uakron.edu/facstaff/scorecard.php

Documents such as the Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins, highlight the University’s Mission Statement, including Charting the Course and “A Civil Climate for Learning: Statement of Expectations.” Literally hundreds of brochures are published by the University every year to articulate our institutional and educational goals to a variety of different readers, including prospective students, current students, prospective employees, current employees, legislators, donors, community members and sister institutions. The University’s marketing plan, through a series of promotional pieces on television and radio and in numerous publications including newspapers and magazines, highlight the University’s goals.

The University of Akron’s Mission Statement accurately and clearly expresses its commitment to the fundamental role of higher education in society: teaching and learning, research, and service. But it was not until the arrival of President Proenza that a process of strategic thinking was instituted to define the course we would take to attain the goals contained in our mission statement. Presented in 2000, Charting the Course provides a common framework for institution-wide and unit-based planning and resource allocation. (See detailed information in Chapter 6.)

Begun in 1999, the process leading to the development of Charting the Course started with the appointment of the Strategic Thinking Steering Committee, a broad-based group reflecting a cross-section of the campus: central administrators, faculty, staff and students. To ensure wide campus participation, the Strategic Thinking Steering Committee employed a number of strategies including retreats, workgroups, and planning its web page with periodic updates. Two retreats—each involving more than 175 faculty, staff and students—were held in 2000. A two-day retreat in September 1999, featured strategic planning expert Michael Dolence exploring the myriad of challenges, opportunities and new competitors for higher education in the new century. A second retreat led by Dr. Cindy Wheatley, Vice President for Marketing at the Disney Institute, was held in February 2000.

Part II: Informing the Public of Institutional/Educational Goals

Part III: Relationship between the Mission, Vision and Strategic Destination

NCA Self-Study Report: Chapter Three: Criterion One: Mission
The steering committee also launched an enthusiastic campaign entitled WOW (Wild on Wednesdays). Under this initiative, six work groups were formed and met weekly to tackle key topics: competitive and market changes in education; The University of Akron’s distinctive competencies; opportunities; continuous quality improvement; development and assessment of personnel; and innovative budgeting. Nearly 100 faculty, staff and students participated in the weekly Wednesday meetings from 3-5 p.m. in the Gardner Student Center. At the end of Spring semester 2001, workgroups provided final reports and recommendations that supported steering committee goals.

The best thinking from all of these efforts resulted in Charting the Course that presents the focused vision for The University of Akron.

"The University of Akron intends to be recognized as the public research university for northern Ohio. It intends to achieve a prominence in northern Ohio comparable to that which Ohio State has long enjoyed in central Ohio and which the University of Cincinnati has begun to achieve in the southern part of the state."

Charting the Course is the strategic vision of The University of Akron. It is an ongoing and dynamic process of strategic thinking that begins from where we are and builds to where we want to go. Charting the Course represents our strategy for attaining greater excellence – requiring collaboration, continuing reliance on factual information, sharing information openly and candidly, and demonstrating the utmost professionalism in all that we do – all disciplined by high standards and aspirations. It establishes the foundation for shared leadership.

Strategic thinking must be continued and enabled by strategic planning. The strategic planning process chosen to realize the vision of Charting the Course is based in a Balanced Scorecard (BSC) methodology. (See details in Chapter 6.) This methodology helps to translate strategic vision into operational objectives that, in turn, set priorities and measure performance. Our strategic vision tells us where we are going; the strategic plan shows us how to get there.

Originally developed for the corporate world, and designed as a top-down process, the implementation of BSC in the academic setting required an adaptation that opened the process to input from all of the institution’s constituents. In a continuation of strategic thinking, the first step in the determination of the
institutional strategic destination involved an extensive interview process. Broad-based constituent groups identified by the NCA Self Study Steering Committee provided the concepts, ideas and priorities that resulted in the formulation of the strategic destination.

Within three years, The University of Akron will be recognized as the public research university for northern Ohio, the university devoted to the education and success of its students and to the production, integration and dissemination of knowledge for the public good.

Like Charting the Course, our institutional and college Balanced Scorecards are dynamic documents that will evolve as our institution evolves.

STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, FUTURE PLANS

STRENGTHS:

- The University has comprehensive programs of instruction, a vigorous agenda of research
- The University of Akron has a rich tradition of service to the community.
- Each unit has a clearly defined mission and articulated goals that focus on student success and educational excellence.
- Charting the Course and the Balanced Scorecard Initiative are helping to align strategies, goals, and priorities across the University.
- The establishment of the Institute for Teaching and Learning stimulated renewed excitement about teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- The recent review and enhancement of University rules and regulations, including those procedures and criteria that guide the hiring, retention, promotion, and granting of indefinite tenure for faculty, have provided processes that are both fair and well-understood.
- The University of Akron enjoys an exemplary relationship with its surrounding community and region, including playing an increasingly important role in the economic vitality of the region.
- The University has a strong intellectual property portfolio.
- The University has expanded its academic calendar to include a 15-week summer session.
- The General Education program, lauded by the 1997 NCA Visiting Team, continues to thrive.
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<td>programs, including becoming recognized as a Carnegie Teaching</td>
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<td>Academy, and its emphasis on building strong, externally-funded</td>
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<td>research programs requires clearly focused strategic initiatives</td>
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<td>and the unfailing alignment of resources and goals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o  It is imperative that the University maintain momentum</td>
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<td>related to continuing development of the Institute for</td>
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<td>Teaching and Learning.</td>
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<td>o  Downturns in state revenues are likely to place us under</td>
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<td>severe budget constraints for at least the next several</td>
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<td>years.</td>
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<td>FUTURE PLANS</td>
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<td>o  Continued enhancement of scientific research in strategic areas-of-</td>
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<td>opportunity.</td>
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<td>o  Continued enhancement of our instructional activities through the</td>
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<td>further development of the Institute for Teaching and Learning and an</td>
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<td>emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>o  Continuing efforts to clearly define and disseminate broadly the</td>
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<td>University’s goals and the strategies in place to accomplish those</td>
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<td>goals.</td>
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<td>o  Continued commitment to clear and reciprocal communication and</td>
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<td>involvement in the promotion of the university’s mission.</td>
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<td>o  All planning processes will take into consideration both present and</td>
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<td>future fiscal restraints and be prioritized accordingly.</td>
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