Chapter Eight:  
Summary and Request for Continued Accreditation

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<th>Patterns of Evidence</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<td>The self-study process for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has provided The University of Akron the opportunity to analyze extensively the many aspects of UA. During the course of this process, the campus community, through self-studies, interviews, surveys, and other means of gathering information, helped identify institutional strengths and challenges and suggestions for institutional improvement. This Self-Study offers recommendations to help meet these challenges by building upon institutional strengths. The Steering Committee also hopes that this Self-Study report will assist the campus community in evaluating the changes in institutional growth and progress since the last Self-Study in 1996 and in clarifying their understanding of UA’s strengths and areas for improvement.</td>
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<td>The University of Akron’s Self-Study report provides patterns of evidence that it meets all the HLC accreditation criteria. UA has a clear and publicly stated mission that all its constituents – students, faculty, staff, alumni and the state community – support. UA has organized its resources (human, physical, financial, support and student services) so that they position the institution strongly for carrying out is mission in the future. UA has a well-qualified and dedicated faculty, staff and administration. It makes available many opportunities for faculty and staff, as well as students, to develop themselves educationally and personally through academics, research, service, and cultural/intellectual activities. The University of Akron is well provided with instructional technology. It has expanded its facilities and is laying the groundwork for future expansion and renovation. UA’s programs are working toward continual evaluation and assessment of their effectiveness through multiple measures; departments have made and are making changes to improve program effectiveness as a result of this assessment. UA has developed a vision, and a strategy by which to achieve that vision, that builds upon its strengths and seeks to improve its performance in areas of challenge, and has begun to implement this vision. The University of Akron clearly practices integrity in all its relationships and responsibilities and complies with federal regulations.</td>
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<td>Through its self-study process, and in response to the Handbook of Accreditation list of indicators for each criterion, The University of Akron identified the following patterns of evidence for the five criteria for accreditation.</td>
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- The University of Akron’s vision, mission and values are clearly and publicly stated and are understood by its internal and external constituencies. Further, the self-study process reinforced the understanding of UA’s mission and goals by instituting the Balanced Scorecard initiative by which each unit links its mission and goals to that of the institution.

**Long and short-range institutional and educational goals**

- *Charting the Course* outlines the long-range institutional and educational goals; the Balance Scorecard Initiative provides short-range objectives, measures, and targets for operationalizing *Charting the Course*.

**Processes, involving its constituencies, through which the institution evaluates its purposes.**

- While *Charting the Course* provides strategic direction, the Balanced Scorecard Initiative defines the six strategic themes – stated purposes – of the institution. The whole of the university community was involved in the development of these themes, and continues to be involved in the processes by which these themes are realized. The University of Akron’s strategic themes inform its decision-making processes.

**Decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission and purposes.**

- The University of Akron values the principle of shared leadership and, since the last NCA visit, has improved its decision-making process by increasing shared leadership through the Planning and Budgeting Committee of Faculty Senate, the Salary Equity Task Force, the Academic Policies Committee of Faculty Senate, the newly formed Decision-making Task Force, the RTP Task Force, the ROI Task Force, and similar bodies.

**Understanding of the stated purposes by institutional constituencies.**

- The University of Akron recognizes the importance of communication within and beyond the university. It is aggressively expanding channels of communication resulting in an extensive, broad-based understanding of the institutional purposes by all constituents.

**Efforts to keep the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through documents such as the catalog and program brochures**

- The University of Akron keeps the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through its catalogs, program brochures, website, publications, public meetings, and outreach.
Support for freedom of inquiry for faculty and students
  o The support of The University of Akron for freedom of inquiry is emphasized in its Strategic Destination Statement and reinforced by statements of academic freedom and faculty and student rights in its rules and regulations.

Institutional commitment to excellence in both the teaching provided by faculty and the learning expected of students.
  o The University of Akron Strategic Destination emphasizes the commitment of UA to excellence in teaching and learning, and is demonstrated by the creation of the Institute for Teaching and Learning and the hiring of an Associate Provost to lead its efforts.

Governance by a board consisting of informed people who understand their responsibilities, function in accordance with stated board policies, and have the resolve necessary to preserve the institution’s integrity.
  o The University of Akron is governed by an informed Board of Trustees that establishes and publishes its rules and regulations, and has demonstrated its resolve to preserve institutional integrity by, for example, the recent Conflict of Commitment/Conflict of Interest Policy, revised initial appointment, reappointment, tenure and promotion processes, and the establishment of links between the annual evaluation and merit awards.

Effective administration through well-defined and understood organizational structures, policies, and procedures.
  o UA’s organizational structure is clearly defined on its organizational chart. The University Rules and Regulations, available on-line to all UA constituencies, describe the role of the various structures and publish UA’s policies.

Qualified and experienced administrative personnel who oversee institutional activities and exercise appropriate responsibility for them.
  o The administrative personnel of The University of Akron are qualified and highly experienced in the areas of administration, higher education in general, and the financial and political cultures of the state.

Systems of governance that provide dependable information to the institution’s constituencies and, as appropriate, involve them in the decision-making processes.
  o The University of Akron has widely implemented the principle of shared leadership, from the institutional level to the departmental level, to provide dependable information to its constituencies. The Faculty Senate,
along with committees of the Faculty Senate, participates actively in institutional governance.

**Faculty with educational credentials that testify to appropriate preparation for the courses they teach.**

- Seventy-two percent of the faculty hold the doctoral degree in their field; all others hold either the terminal degree in their field or can demonstrate expertise and/or credentials beyond that required for the courses they teach.
- In 4-year programs, 79% of the faculty hold the doctoral degree in their field; all others hold the terminal degree in their field.
- In 2-year programs, 31% of the faculty hold doctoral degrees; all others hold either the terminal degree in their field or can demonstrate expertise and/or credentials beyond that required for the courses they teach.

**A sufficient number of students enrolled to meet the institution’s stated educational purposes.**

- UA’s 24,000 students (undergraduate and graduate) are a sufficient number to support its stated educational purposes.

**Provision of services that afford all admitted students the opportunity to succeed.**

- The University of Akron provides to its students academic services such as computer/technology laboratories and a Writing Center; disability services; personal services such as health care and counseling; safety through the campus police department; cultural services; financial aid advising; and academic advising for all students.

**A physical plant that supports effective teaching and learning.**

- Since the last NCA Visitation, the University of Akron has substantially improved its physical plant through expansion and renovation. UA is moving forward with an aggressive plan for the construction of new facilities.

**Conscientious efforts to provide students with a safe and healthy environment.**

- The Office of Capital Planning and Facilities Management, headed by a Vice-President, has responsibility for the removal of hazardous materials, the maintenance of a myriad of licenses and permits, and the daily enforcement of the laws that govern the city and campus; these functions are accomplished through disciplined preventive measures.
- Additional student support services are administered through the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and include the Counseling, Testing and Career
Center, Office of Accessibility, Student Health Services, and Intramural Sports.

Academic resources and equipment (e.g. libraries, electronic services and products, learning resource centers, laboratories and studios, computers) adequate to support the institutions’ purposes.
  o UA is completely “wired for wireless” and is recognized nationally as a leader in deploying a campus-wide wireless network that provides technological access to a myriad of academic and research-related resources.

A pattern of financial expenditures that shows the commitment to provide both the environment and the human resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.
  o The University of Akron demonstrates a pattern of financial expenditures that shows its commitment to provide an environment for effective teaching and learning. Among these expenditures are the establishment of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, and the implementation of an academic enterprise system developed in partnership with WebCT which delivers teaching and learning tools, course content management capabilities, personalization of the learning experience, and learning information management.

Management of financial resources to maximize the institution’s capability to meet its purposes.
  o In completing the New Landscape for Learning and the improvements of the physical plant, providing for a wireless campus, emphasizing traditional research, implementing enrollment management strategies, and the establishment of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, UA is investing in the future so as to yield a return on investment that will allow the University to do much more.

Educational programs appropriate to an institution of higher education.
  Courses of study in the academic programs that are clearly defined, coherent and intellectually rigorous.
   o The undergraduate and graduate majors are appropriately titled, defined, and comprehensive. Further, UA’s professional programs are evaluated by external professional accrediting agencies and have had their professional accreditation extended.
   o The intellectual rigor of the courses of study is demonstrated by students’ performance on proficiency examinations, on professional or licensure examinations, and through departmental program review and assessment.
Programs that include courses and/or activities whose purpose is to stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values.
  o The General Education Program, service learning activities within courses, the Bridge to Success program, and the Passage program all serve to stimulate students to examine and understand personal, social, and civic values.

Programs that require of the faculty and students (as appropriate to the level of the educational program) the use of scholarship and/or the participation in research as part of the programs.
  o Many of the programs, including the University Honors program, particularly require students to use scholarship and/or to participate in research through a capstone course or experience. Graduate courses require students to design and complete a research component or project.

Programs that require intellectual interaction between student and faculty and encourage such interactions among students.
  o In the past five years, the student:faculty ratio has averaged 15.7:1 which enables close intellectual interaction between student and faculty and between student and student. Many UA programs emphasize the instructional formats of seminar, small group work, and applied learning approaches.

Assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting:

Proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated students.
  o Assessment and documentation of appropriate levels of undergraduate academic achievement are taking place currently in those programs with external, specialized accreditation, including but not limited to the College of Nursing, the College of Engineering, the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and the College of Education. Deans, department chairs, and faculty of the remaining programs have committed to this goal and are in various stages of planning and implementation. By Fall 2006, all UA undergraduate degree programs will have clearly defined levels of skills and competencies and processes for assessing and documenting student achievement.

Completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component;
  o The University of Akron has a clear and coherent, course-based General Education program, lauded by the 1997 NCA Visiting Team, which all undergraduate degree-seeking students must complete. Quality and coherence
of the GE curriculum are safeguarded by the GE Advisory Committee, made up of faculty from all undergraduate units. Academic advising and monitoring assist students in understanding and meeting this requirement. To ensure the continuing relevance and quality of the GE program, the General Education Advisory Committee has proposed and begun planning a complete assessment of general education, to begin in Fall 2003.

**Mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained.**
- Discipline specific accreditation requires assessment and documentation of mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained. Appendix B details The University of Akron programs that hold specialized accreditation. Further, as part of the Balanced Scorecard initiative, all UA undergraduate degree programs will have clearly defined levels of skills and competencies and processes for assessing and documenting student achievement by fall 2006.

**Control by the institution’s faculty of evaluation of student learning and granting of academic credit.**
- All policies and procedures regarding the evaluation of student learning and granting of academic credit – including defining standards for, indicators of, and measures of learning – are controlled by the University of Akron’s faculty through program, departmental, and college level committees and, at the University level, through committees of the Faculty Senate.

**Graduate programs that:**
- **Distinguish clearly graduate from undergraduate offerings.**
  - The University of Akron’s graduate programs clearly define their curricula in the Graduate Catalog.
- **Expect students and faculty to value and engage in research, scholarship, and creative activity.**
  - The University of Akron graduate programs require a research component that includes faculty engagement. Further, both the RTP and annual evaluation processes emphasize research, scholarship and/or creative activity as a condition of satisfactory service to the university.
  - Research and scholarship, including creative activity, is one of the six strategic themes identified by the university as essential to achieving its mission and vision.
- **Restrict graduate academic credit for prior learning to credit validated by examination, credit based on documented faculty evaluation of a portfolio or original work products, or credit awarded by an institution of higher education either affiliated with a recognized U.S.
accrediting association or approved by an appropriate national ministry of education.
  o University of Akron rule 3359-60-03.1 restricts both graduate and undergraduate accepted transfer credit to credit obtained at institutions of higher education either affiliated with a recognized U.S. accrediting association or approved by an appropriate national ministry of education, and restricts credit by examination to those approved by the dean of the student’s college and the dean of the college that offers a particular course.

Are approved, taught, and evaluated by a graduate faculty that possesses appropriate credentials and experience.
  o The University of Akron Graduate Council must approve the graduate curriculum. Membership on the University of Akron Graduate faculty is awarded for a five year period. Minimum requirements for membership established by the Graduate School, including but not limited to possession of the terminal degree appropriate to the field and active engagement in scholarly or creative activities; departments and colleges may establish more stringent requirements as related to specific program dictates.

Use results of regular internal and external peer review processes to ensure quality.
  o In the past, doctoral programs have been periodically reviewed by a state-wide process; currently, there will be another review planned as part of the Governor’s plan to strengthen graduate education in Ohio. The Graduate Faculty is presently establishing a procedure to review extended studies courses as related to traditional class-based courses, since many of the inter-university programs have a web-based component.

Faculty have and exercise responsibility for determining the institution’s award of academic credit.
  o The University of Akron curriculum process determines the academic credit to be awarded for each individual course offering. Every proposal is initiated by faculty at the departmental level and is approved by faculty at both the college and university levels.
  o University of Akron faculty are solely responsible for the awarding of grades, and thereby academic credit for any given course.

Effective teaching that characterizes its courses and academic programs.
  o The University of Akron regularly evaluates teaching effectiveness through semester evaluations by students, and annual evaluations by program administrators.
Ongoing support for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.

- The University of Akron provides faculty and staff with development programs, personal improvement leaves, release time, and internal funding for research and personal improvement projects.
- The Institute for Teaching and Learning and the Center for Collaboration and Inquiry organize and offer workshops, seminars, and other professional development activities for full and part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants.

Student services that effectively support the institution’s purposes.

- The various offices of the Office of Student Affairs provide accurate and helpful information to prospective students, registration and transcript services, financial aid services, career services, tutoring services, counseling and personal growth through sponsored activities and other programs. These services support UA’s purposes of enabling students’ personal and intellectual growth.

Staff and faculty service that contributes to the institution’s effectiveness.

- The University of Akron’s faculty and staff provide many services that contribute to UA’s effectiveness, including clinical services, musical and theatrical performances, consulting services to state agencies and businesses, and educational outreach.

Evidence of support for the stated commitment to basic and applied research through the provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce effective research.

- The University of Akron has improved its support for basic and applied research through the reorganization of the Office of Research and Graduate Education, and internal programs that support grant applications.
- The Institute for Teaching and Learning also provides grants for faculty to carry out applied scholarship aimed at improving teaching and learning.

Evidence of support for the stated commitment to the fine and creative arts through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce creative endeavor and activities.

- The University of Akron maintains an extensive outreach program through numerous musical and theatrical performances and visual arts events both on campus and in conjunction with UA’s E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall and the Akron Civic Theatre.
Evidence of effective delivery of educational and other services to its community.

- The University of Akron has increased its educational services through technology, e.g. Medina Fiber Network, web-based professional development workshops, distance education partnerships within Ohio and beyond.

Evidence of development and offering of effective courses and programs to meet the needs of its sponsoring organization and other special constituencies.

- The University of Akron has increased its educational services through partnerships with two year institutions and career centers within Ohio and beyond for degree completion programs.
- The University of Akron offers courses and programs that meet the needs of special constituencies, and programs that address continuing professional education of teachers and other groups.

A current resource base - financial, physical, and human – that positions the institution for the future.

- The University of Akron demonstrates a resource base that positions the university for the future. Stability has been achieved in the ranks of senior administration, and the University's high priority of improving the quality, breadth, and timeliness of management information has yielded significant improvements since 1997.

Decision-making processes with tested capability of responding effectively to anticipated and unanticipated challenges to the institution.

- Decision-making processes that are capable of responding to both anticipated and unanticipated challenges to the University are exhibited by its comprehensive and active set of governance and advisory groups providing a sound structure for shared leadership. There is significant commitment to these endeavors, as evidenced by the participants' willingness to invest their time and energies in meetings and other activities.

Structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty and administration.

- The University has put into place a three-pronged structured assessment process: (1) implementation of a new enterprise system (PeopleSoft) linking business processes, student records, registration system, accounts payable/receivable, and faculty grade submittal in a real-time environment; (2) introduction of interactive
management tools such as Brio and Balanced Scorecard in concert with institutional data warehousing that gives academic departments direct access to real-time data; and (3) enhanced collection and use of benchmark data for the purposes of analyses and decision making.

- The faculty, staff and administration are cognizant of both the University's strengths and challenges and there is deep commitment to its advancement, as indicated by survey results and anecdotal evidence.
- Both the administration and faculty have supported the evaluation of operating policies, procedures, and organization in terms of shared leadership. All sides see the importance of assessing effectiveness of current modes and operations and to change those as necessary to meet current and future needs.

**Plans as well as ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institution’s continuance.**

- Plans and ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institution’s continuance are evidenced in *Charting the Course* that identifies the vision for the future of The University of Akron, and the Balanced Scorecard Initiative that provides the process by forming the structure and guidelines for a focused and “reality-based” academic plan.

**Resources organized and allocated to support its plans for strengthening both the institution and its programs**

- The Balanced Scorecard methodology balances growth and innovation with cost and efficiency and requires that budget allocations be aligned with institutional priorities.
- The Return-on-Investment model allocates monies based on productivity, and allows for reallocation of funds to strengthen both the institution and its programs.

**Student, faculty and staff handbooks that describe various institutional relationships with those constituencies, including appropriate grievance procedures.**

- The University of Akron has published online all of the university rules and regulations, including appropriate grievance procedures.

**Policies and practices for the resolution of internal disputes within the institution’s constituency.**

- The University of Akron has established policies and procedures for the resolution of internal disputes. These policies and procedures are included in the university rules and regulations.

**Policies and practices consistent with its mission related to equity of treatment, nondiscrimination, affirmative action, and other means of enhancing access to education and the**
building of a diverse educational community.
  o The University of Akron has policies and procedures that
govern equity of treatment and affirmative action. UA’s
official state of nondiscrimination is published widely in its
catalogs, handbooks, and other public documents.
Services that enhance access to education are publicized
in appropriate UA publications.

Transcripts that follow commonly accepted practices and
accurately reflect student learning.
  o The Office of the Registrar follows standard transcript
practices and adheres to the practices of the American
Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission
Officers.

Institutional publications, statements and advertising that
describe accurately and fairly the institution its operations,
and its programs,
  o The University of Akron fully discloses pertinent
information through its various publications. Program
descriptions in the Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins
and admission materials are reviewed regularly.

Relationships with other institutions of higher education
conducted ethically and responsibly.
  o The University of Akron conducts ethically and responsibly
its relationships with its sister institutions and other
institutions of higher education within Ohio and in other
areas.

Appropriate support for resources shared with other
institutions.
  o The University of Akron works with its sister institutions to
institute and support cooperative programs such as the
Doctor of Audiology (with Kent State University) and the
Master of Social Work program (with Cleveland State
University).

Policies and procedures regarding institutional relationships
with and responsibility for intercollegiate athletics, student
associates, and subsidiary or related business enterprises.
  o The Director of Athletics answers directly to the President.
UA monitors its compliance with NCAA and MAC policies
on athletics. The Compliance Unit in the Athletics
Departments is specifically responsible for monitoring
rules compliance. The NCAA has never identified any
major rules violations at The University of Akron.

Oversight processes for monitoring contractual
arrangements with government, industry, and other
organizations.
  o The University of Akron takes seriously its responsibilities
for monitoring contractual arrangements with government,
industry, and other organizations. The Office of Research
Services and Sponsored Programs under the vice president for Research has responsibility for the administration of grants and contracts awarded to The University of Akron. All contracts and agreements are executed in the name of The University of Akron, and processed through the Office of General Counsel. Signature authority is granted by the Board of Trustees with the President having the ability to delegate signature authority where appropriate.

The University of Akron is confident that it has presented strong patterns of evidence that demonstrate that it meets all of the criteria for accreditation set forth by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the President, through this Self-Study Report, The University of Akron respectfully requests that the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools grant it continued accreditation at the doctor’s (research curricula and professional curricula) degree-granting level.