Drake University
Assessment of Centralized and Decentralized
Administrative Operations
August 31, 2014

Introduction

Campus Strategies, LLC was engaged to conduct an assessment of Drake University’s administrative operations—both centralized and decentralized—to identify opportunities for efficiencies, including consolidation to achieve cost savings. The assessment, conducted by Campus Strategies president Larry Goldstein, focused on organizational structure, service effectiveness, staffing, and interactions among and between units as well as process comparisons with best practices throughout higher education. The scope of the project was expanded to incorporate selected features of the program prioritization process developed by Robert C. Dickeson.

Although the scope of the project was expansive, it involved only limited time spent on campus. Four days were spent conducting interviews and meetings with approximately 130 members of the Drake community. Individuals interviewed include Drake’s senior executives, staff and managers working within the central administrative units and in various other departments, as well as selected individuals throughout Drake who rely on the services provided through administrative operations.

In addition to the information obtained during the interviews and meetings, each identified administrative operation was asked to complete a questionnaire detailing its contributions and value to Drake. The questionnaire contained 22 questions in six categories: impact, justification, and overall essentiality; internal demand; mandates and external demand; quality; cost effectiveness; and opportunity analysis. Forty-four separate questionnaires were completed and reviewed in detail. This resulted in each operation being assessed using a standard scoring rubric.

The recommendations provided in this report result from the analysis of the questionnaires along with the information obtained during interviews and meetings. In some instances, specific feedback about decentralized operations is not being provided because of the inability to gather sufficient information due to the limited time available for the on-campus portion of the engagement. Hence, there is very little to say about some units. For instance, very little information about academic units was obtained during interviews and their questionnaires tended to focus less on the administrative
activities that are the subject of this engagement and more on programmatic issues. This was also true for Athletics. As a result, there is a need for more in-depth examination in selected areas as noted below.

The recommendations below are organized by specific division/unit or as cross-divisional issues.

**Recommendations**

*Executive Office (including President’s Office, Athletics, Marketing & Communications, and Strategic Partnerships)*

1. Establishing and filling a chief of staff position in the President’s Office would achieve a better operational structure and enhance the office’s overall effectiveness.

2. No recommendations are offered for Athletics, although this appears to be a successful operation for the university. Admittedly, little evidence of their success was provided but the absence of criticism from others areas is significant. This usually is a point of concern to other areas and that was not the case at Drake. Athletics identified a number of opportunities for enhanced performance, but these would require significant resource investment without a corresponding likelihood of increased revenues—either directly for Athletics or indirectly for the university.

3. A more thorough examination of Marketing and Communications should be undertaken to determine the specific factors that cause it to be viewed as an underperforming unit. Independent of how it's viewed on campus, it is noteworthy that this area reports directly to the president rather than through advancement. Both reporting models are prevalent in higher education and Drake should consider whether the additional direct report to the president enhances results or simply increases his managerial burden. Engaging a consultant with expertise in marketing will be necessary to identify the underlying issues that result in negative perceptions about this operation by a wide range of stakeholders.

4. Assuming resource availability, Strategic Partnerships should pursue establishment of an executive education/professional development center coupled with the creation of a corporate partners program. The combined efforts have the potential to create significant new revenue streams for the university by attracting professionals seeking continuing professional education opportunities and corporate donors to the campus.
5. It is noteworthy that representatives of the various academic units (i.e., deans’ offices) express strong support for the current organizational structure within their units and satisfaction with the level and quality of service being provided by staff working therein. The one occasional note of concern expressed is in the area of staffing. Some units indicated that their administrative support personnel are operating at full (or excess) capacity, however, no specifics were offered.

6. The student activities operation should be established as a separate organizational unit with a chief student affairs officer reporting directly to the president as a cabinet-level position. This is necessary to ensure that student-related issues are given appropriate attention within the cabinet.

7. Assuming resource availability, Residence Life should pursue an online housing system for roommate pairing and record retention, consolidation of facilities usage for camps and conferences, and conversion of two 10-month positions to 12-month appointments. Implementing these recommendations has the potential to provide significant benefit to students through enhanced services—particularly automation of the room assign process. Additionally, the consolidation of facilities utilization during summer has the potential to generate enhanced revenues while also decreasing expenses.

8. A comprehensive examination of the programmatic operations within the Provost’s Office should be undertaken to identify opportunities for combining responsibilities within a single position. The functions currently being addressed are essential, but an institution Drake’s size should be able to operate with fewer staff in this area. In other words, instead of the one-to-one relationship between an individual and his or her functional responsibilities, most staff members should have responsibility for multiple functional areas, thereby reducing the number of staff.

9. The director of student records and academic information should assume responsibility for all registrarial functions related to undergraduate students. Staff focused on registrarial functions related to undergraduate students should be reassigned to report to this position. Additionally, this office should be assigned responsibility for maintaining the academic program information published in the general catalog. This information is used in the degree audit software employed by the university and, improving its overall accuracy, will provide significant benefits across the university.

10. No changes should be made as it relates to graduate program registrarial functions unless a decision is made to consolidate all graduate program administration in a single office.
11. Assuming resource availability, Institutional Research and Assessment should pursue the development of new data management systems to enhance the services this unit provides to the university. This would result in enhanced outcomes with significant financial benefits through improved analysis of data being collected, allowing the university to pursue new revenue-generating opportunities.

12. Assuming resource availability, Sponsored Programs Administration should be authorized to hire a new grants specialist to assist with the preparation and successful procurement of large multidisciplinary awards. Beyond grant writing assistance, this would enable the office to better support faculty interested in pursuing extramural funding, thereby increasing revenues.

13. Disability Services’ space is inadequate to carry out its functions. Compliance is not a concern but service effectiveness is impaired due to the current space arrangement. Alternative or enhanced space should be pursued as soon as possible.

Vice President for Admission and Student Financial Planning

Insufficient feedback was received about this division to form substantive recommendations or draw conclusions about its performance.

14. The only recommendation relevant to this division relates to retention. The vice president for admission and student financial planning essentially serves as the university’s chief enrollment management officer, but without even indirect responsibility for retention. This should be a shared responsibility with the provost to ensure that the university is focusing on the full range of issues that affect students’ decisions to enroll and persist at Drake. Including retention as part of the portfolio would lay the foundation for development of a comprehensive enrollment management model because he would have responsibility (with some shared responsibility) for the entire continuum of a student’s experience at Drake. Everything from recruitment to application, matriculation, and graduation would be under the purview of a single campus official.

Vice President for Alumni and Development

As with the vice president for admission and student financial planning, only limited feedback was received regarding this division. It was insufficient to draw any significant conclusions or make substantive recommendations beyond the space issue noted below.

15. The situation in the Kinne Center should be examined to determine whether alternative space options are available.
There are more recommendations in this section of the report because it was the area (1) that drew the most interest during the interviews and (2) it was the primary focus at the beginning of the engagement.

16. The university’s procurement function either must be empowered to oversee and regulate all facets of procurement or all attempts to control procurement centrally should be abandoned in favor of a completely decentralized approach. If the former approach is pursued, the P-card operation should be transferred from the Controller’s Office to Purchasing & Business Services. Additionally, assuming resource availability, an e-procurement software solution should be implemented.

17. The current approach to managing resources and their allocation should change to one that leverages the existence of budget manager positions within the academic units. These positions should continue to exist and report directly to their respective deans, but they should have an equivalent reporting relationship to the vice president for finance and administration (or her designee). In addition to the budget managers, the deputy provost (or successor position responsible for the Academic Division’s budget administration) should have a dual reporting relationship to the provost and the vice president for finance and administration (or her designee). Along with the reporting relationship changes, a regular meeting schedule—preferably biweekly—should be established so that the budget managers, deputy provost (or successor position), and central financial office representatives work together to address the Academic Division’s financial issues.

18. Drake does not utilize an automated facilities management information system, relying instead on hardcopy records at a time when most similarly complex institutions have converted to automated systems to manage their massive investments in physical assets. Research has demonstrated that facilities are a significant factor in the recruitment and retention of students. Investments in this arena can pay huge dividends. Assuming resource availability, a facilities management solution should be considered for implementation.

19. Assuming resource availability, the Postal Operation would benefit significantly from automated tracking software to manage package routing. This would free up resources enabling them to provide better service throughout the operation.

20. Drake has recently embarked on a new approach for meeting the IT needs across campus. Numerous opportunities for enhanced operations and services exist but resource availability will influence how much progress can be made. Given the essential nature of technology to the university’s overall success, this should be a priority for enhanced investment to achieve both administrative and pedagogical improvements.
21. The assistant vice president position in the finance and administration division should be re-established and filled to relieve some of the pressure on the vice president. Depending on the skill-set of the person recruited, several of the units currently reporting to the vice president should be reassigned to the assistant vice president. Once this position is filled a determination should be made whether additional changes are necessary to reduce the number of direct reports to the vice president.

22. Internal procedures should be established within the central units to ensure that any transaction revisions that occur with manual documents must be communicated to the person originating and/or approving the transaction. Additionally, to the extent possible, the university should shift as many financial and related transactions as possible to electronic processing to replace manual forms and procedures.

Cross-divisional Issues

23. Information technology staff working in the decentralized units should have a dual reporting relationship to their local manager and to the chief information officer (or his designee). To the extent these positions are not addressing specific academic needs unique to the unit in which they are employed, the positions should be reassigned to the Office of Information Technology.

24. A campus-wide effort should be undertaken to reinforce the importance of establishing and then maintaining an appropriate customer service culture. It is possible that outside assistance will be needed to establish a program through which all administrative staff can be trained.

25. The university has done an excellent job of establishing and communicating policies and procedures via its website. It should become an annual practice to review policies and procedures to assess their currency and utility. A good time for such a review is immediately following the annual financial statement audit. Additionally, a routine practice should be established to ensure that any proposed policy or procedure changes are discussed with a representative group of decentralized staff to ensure that they are implemented in the most effective manner possible.

26. Quarterly information exchange meetings should be organized by the vice president for finance and administration or her designee, open to all staff carrying out administrative responsibilities—particularly those working in decentralized units. The agenda for these meetings should focus on important operational information from all administrative units within the university. The meetings also should include the opportunity for attendees to raise issues about which they
would like more information. This forum can be used to seek input from
decentralized staff when policies and procedures are being considered (see 25
above) as well as to highlight processing problems that surface from time to time.
Finally, the meeting can be used to conduct training when new policies and
procedures are being implemented.

27. The university should undertake an assessment to determine what university
activities are routinely occurring during evenings and weekends. Once the
activities have been identified, the individuals responsible for conducting those
activities should be polled to determine the ongoing support they require to ensure
effective operation of their programs. Once the needs have been identified,
Drake’s central service units should ensure that appropriate support is made
available for these activities.

28. Several individuals expressed concern about their inability to access Banner
records through “read only” permission. Those responsible for controlling access
to Banner should reconsider the current policies and procedures to determine
whether greater flexibility would enhance operational effectiveness. When
considering this recommendation, Drake should devote special attention to
internal controls to ensure that any added functionality does not impair the
security of data or other resources.

Conclusion

It would not have been possible to complete this engagement without the
cooperation and candor of numerous individuals throughout Drake University. Campus
Strategies wishes to thank the many individuals who took time to participate in meetings
and/or respond to emails.

Prepared and submitted on August 31, 2014 by:

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Campus Strategies, LLC