

Arizona Board of Regents (Report Highlights)

September 2001

The Board of Regents governs the State's university system, setting tuition and admission requirements, reviewing and approving academic programs, establishing university policies, and overseeing some university operations.

Our Conclusions:

Since our 1991 report, the Board has shifted its focus from operational details to more significant policy issues affecting the university system. However, the Board should formally address the recommendations of the 2000 Town Hall and the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education. Also, while the Board has rather extensive oversight in most areas, it has virtually no oversight of the universities' information technology (IT) projects. Finally, the Board has made significant progress implementing its distance-learning initiative, the Arizona Regents University (ARU).

Northern Arizona University Campus at night



The Board Has Addressed Many Policy Issues

Over the last decade, with the benefit of additional statutory authority, the Board has changed its focus from operational details to policy issues. A 1991 Auditor General report (Report No. 91-9) found that 60 percent of the items on the Board's agenda involved operational issues such as:

- Building leases;
- Research contracts; and
- In one instance, campus skateboard policies.

The Board is now focused on policy and strategic decisions. For example, the Board has implemented:

- New faculty personnel policies related to tenure and research;
- A goal to emphasize different learning methods at the universities called "learner-centered education";
- Changes in capital asset planning and management; and
- Performance measures to assess the universities' progress in improving the quality of undergraduate education.

The Board also devoted significant staff resources to the 2000 Town Hall and Governor's Task Force on Higher Education. A few of the recommendations from those meetings include:

- Redirecting some students to the community colleges where their educational needs can be better met;
- Expanding teacher certification programs;

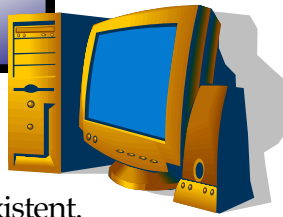
- Developing a master plan for public education;
- Integrating liberal arts education into a technology-based economy; and
- Balancing the costs of education between students and the public.

Although many of these items relate to ongoing Board activities, the Board has not formally reviewed and decided which recommendations to adopt.

The Board should:

- ✓ Decide which recommendations from the Town Hall and Governor's Task Force it should adopt; and
- ✓ Prioritize the recommendations and assign responsibility for implementation.

The Board Needs to Oversee University IT Projects



Board oversight of the universities' technology projects is virtually nonexistent. Although university IT projects can cost several million dollars each, the Board has delegated almost all oversight to the universities. University IT administrators approve projects up to \$1 million dollars. The Council of Presidents, a body composed of the university presidents and the Board's executive director, approves projects over \$1 million dollars.

The lack of IT oversight is in contrast to the Board's extensive oversight of capital projects. The Board requires three reviews of every capital project of \$1 million or more, beginning at the earliest planning stages.

The lack of IT oversight and review is also in sharp contrast to requirements for other state agencies. Most state agencies must submit an extensive proposal to the State's Government Information Technology Agency (GITA) for approval of an IT project. The proposal must include:

- A detailed description of the project;
- The estimated development and operating costs;
- Proposed technology;
- Major deliverables; and
- The benefits to the agency and the State.

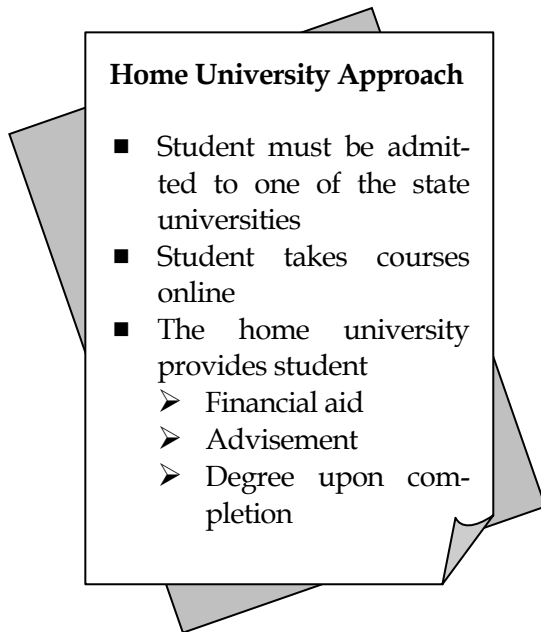
The Board should:

- ✓ Design and implement an oversight process for IT projects that includes a review of the need or justification for each project.

Development of Arizona Regents University Should Continue

In 2001, the Board approved an Internet distance learning initiative, called the Arizona Regents University (ARU), to offer online courses to students who might not be able to attend class in person.

The Board has made a number of key decisions regarding ARU including deciding that it will use a home university approach.



The Board has also determined the degrees to be offered:

- Engineering;
- Teacher education; and
- Nursing

The Board is currently working to resolve a number of logistical issues involving:

- Tuition distribution;
- Student services; and
- Course transfer agreements.

However, the Board needs to continue to obtain information about the demand for distance learning. A 1998 survey conducted for the Board found that:

- Only 28 percent of the persons surveyed were interested in further education; and
- Many of those 28 percent were more interested in classroom learning or instructional TV.

The Board has also received some resistance from university administrators and faculty who have expressed concerns over the expense of distance learning programs, and who believe that it is better for students to take classes in-person on campuses. The Board has forged ahead and received some support from key university officials in its working group.

The Board should:

- ✓ Conduct additional research on demand for and groups likely to enroll in the distance learning program; and
- ✓ Continue to strive for university support.

To Obtain More Information

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

www.auditor.gen.state.az.us

- The contact person for this report is *Shan Hays*.