



# THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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## **Regional Campus External Review December 17, 2021**

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

Consistent with The Ohio State University (OSU) Office of Academic Affairs Academic Review Process, our external review team conducted its visit of the Ohio State University (OSU) Regional Campuses via Zoom from October 26-28, 2021. In addition to an orientation meeting with senior OSU academic leadership held on October 5, 2021, the team was provided with thorough self-studies provided by the Lima, Mansfield, Marion, and Newark campuses and background material on the University's expectations for external review. During the review the team met with:

- The dean of each campus
- The leadership team from each campus
- Student Life Staff
- Tenure Track, Clinical, Teaching Practice Faculty
- Lecturers and Associated Faculty
- Undergraduate Students
- Campus Advisory Boards
- Department Chairs from OSU Columbus

We see this report as a high level strategic overview of the *OSU regional campuses as a whole* that should be read in addition to the campus self-studies, which provide excellent detail on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities present for each of the campuses. Two exit sessions were held on October 28, one for the campus deans and the other for senior OSU academic leadership. In those sessions, the team summarized its conclusions in three broad categories, detailed in this report.

Clarity of Regional Campus Mission: The committee finds that the OSU Regional Campuses are integral to Ohio State's land grant mission. Consequently, most recommendations in this report are a consequence of our assessment of mission clarity. The review committee highly recommends that as Columbus and regional campus leadership look to the future, they refine and operationalize the importance of these campuses to OSU's commitment to educational access.

Funding Model and Enrollment Management: The committee finds, not surprisingly, that funding on the regional campuses is highly enrollment dependent. This is indicative of on-going national trends and will not change. Consequently, we find that OSU must position the regional campuses as an opportunity to extend OSU's land grant mission to serve the unique populations and regional needs of each campus location. The OSU regional campuses could improve their financial standing with changes in program delivery and expansion.

Faculty Roles and Rewards: The committee was impressed by the quality of the faculty on the OSU regional campuses, and applauds their dedication to their disciplines and their students. Much like the rest of our observations, however, we find that when it comes to faculty roles and rewards, there exist ambiguities and mixed messages, largely owing to the fact that academic departments housed on the Columbus campus don't all embrace and engage their regional campus programs and faculty equally

Overall, our team found that:

- The OSU regional campuses provide higher education opportunities for place bound students.
- As the overall student population becomes more post-traditional, the OSU regional campuses can be positioned as leaders in educating a new generation of college students.
- The OSU regional campuses are developing innovative approaches to student support financially and academically.
- As state legislatures are turning to regional campus models to educate students at multiple levels and demographics in inexpensive and efficient ways, the OSU regional campuses should serve as an exemplar for truly fulfilling the land grant promise.
- OSU should leverage its regional campuses to demonstrate alignment with legislative tendencies of stressing higher education and workforce development and invest in the regional campuses accordingly.

## 2.0 Clarity of Mission and Campus Identity

The Ohio State University Regional Campuses are an essential resource with the potential to allow Ohio State to most fully realize its land grant mission. There is no question that OSU in general, and the regional campuses in particular, are committed to this mission. We would be hard-pressed to recall a meeting where this commitment was not at least mentioned, and it is explicit in the university's vision statement:

*The Ohio State University is the model 21st-century public, land grant, research, urban, community-engaged institution.*

Yet, there is a problem of ambiguity for the regional campuses.

- Where do primarily teaching campuses fit in a vision statement that emphasizes being an urban research institution?
- How is this vision operationalized on the regional campuses?

While the committee found widespread commitment to access, affordability, and inclusion throughout its visit, we also found that how the full potential of the regional campuses is leveraged in fulfilling this vision is an open-ended question that must be answered.

Moreover, we studied carefully the December 2017 Regional Campus Advisory Council [report](#) on “Regional Campus Vision and Goals” and recommend that its conclusions and

recommendations be revisited as the conversation continues on the best way to optimize the potential of the regional campuses. These included:

- Broadening Access
- Reframing the Image of the Regional Campuses
- Striving for Inclusive Excellence
- Fostering a Vibrant Student Experience
- Deepening Community Partnerships

We especially recommend that attention be paid to page 8 of that report, where an explicit vision for the regional campuses by 2030 is articulated.

As the university moves forward in this dialogue, we recommend the following:

- Clarify organizational structure and reporting lines to strengthen connections between the Columbus and regional campuses;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of regional campus leaders;
- Formalize collaborations between academic units, functional areas of student affairs, and campus operations;
- Adjust the organizational structure to better facilitate shared interest in and accountability for the success of regional campuses;
- Incentivize and recognize departmental innovation and success on the regional campuses;
- Involve the regional campus at the conceptual level of planning and decision making;
- Utilize and give equal weight to regional campus leadership expertise and perspectives in decision making;
- Integrate regional campus strategies and action into the OSU Strategic Plan;
- Identify opportunities for strategic differentiation of regional campuses from Columbus, and from each other; and
- Address program duplication across regional campus locations and shift organization to align with this change.

### 3.0 Funding Model and Enrollment Management

The committee finds that funding on the regional campuses is highly enrollment dependent. This is indicative of on-going national trends and will not change. Consequently, we find that OSU must position the regional campuses as an opportunity to extend OSU's land grant mission to serve the unique populations and regional needs of each campus location functioning, as it were, as "One Ohio State University."

Unfortunately, we find in too many instances that the regional campuses function more like islands "off the coast" of the Columbus "mainland." Regional campus faculty and staff express a sense of isolation, especially financially. OSU budget modeling is perceived as entrenched, inflexible, and non-adaptive. While regional campus staff are devoted to students and campus

success, they are stretched extremely thin as a consequence of performing duties more typically done by larger numbers. As a result, some campuses are suffering from poor staff retention.

Furthermore, delivery of curriculum on the regional campuses is extremely inefficient because each campus must provide its own set of programs and the faculty to serve them. Small numbers of regional campus faculty are struggling to provide the number of classes to complete degree programs. This is preventing the addition of new programs, and has the potential to delay student progress to graduation. The campus by campus redundancy is unnecessary and financially unsustainable. Some networking of classes during COVID demonstrated a curriculum sharing approach was feasible.

There must, however, be a balance. Differentiation of programming and finding areas of distinction would allow each campus to thrive, since duplication can take away from market share. If each campus established unique areas of emphasis and the university invested their marketing, it could increase the success of the regional campuses. The uniqueness could be determined by regional business and industry, regional economic development goals, and student interest. This does not preclude the regional campuses from collaborating or sharing degrees if they will communicate clearly the role of each campus and delineate offerings. It is possible that some regionals would be able to expand their four year offerings while others could be designated as having pathways to the Columbus campus or focusing on credentials and upskilling.

Finally, a word about understanding the regional campus student body is essential in fully realizing the land grant mission. Regional campus students need types of support that often differs from that needed in Columbus, and the regional campuses struggle financially to provide help. This has an immediate negative impact on retention and progress to graduation. One example is the all too prevalent challenge of food insecurity and dependence on food banks for meals. Regional campus students are unable to use Columbus student resources such as the “Buckeye” website to help locate such vital resources.

We recommend the following:

- Seriously consider a new institutional budget and financial structure for support of the regional campuses;
- Enhance the opportunities for course access and program availability for students whose destination is the regional campus;
- Expand class and program offerings at times and in modalities to better serve adult and post-traditional learners;
- Balance efficiency of remote course sharing with on-campus learning;
- Extend the OSU brand through marketing, promotion, and recruitment of regional campuses;
- Extend retention and student success services to regional campuses that strategically align with open admission policy;
- Develop a robust technological network to share course delivery with synchronous methods between all OSU campuses to better optimize his faculty resources;
- Develop better coordination between the Columbus and regional campuses so that the regional campuses can take full advantage of Columbus's considerable resources, i.e., investigate a broad shared services model.

#### 4.0 Faculty Roles and Rewards

The committee was impressed by the quality of the faculty on the OSU regional campuses, and applauds their dedication to their disciplines and their students. Much like the rest of our observations, however, we find that when it comes to faculty roles and rewards, there exist ambiguities and mixed messages, largely owing to the fact that all academic departments are housed on the Columbus campus.

A whole spectrum of attitudes and practices related to inclusion of regional campus faculty in Columbus-based academic departments was observed. Depending on the department, some regional campus faculty expressed they are fully integrated in academic departments and feel respected and valued. Others feel disenfranchised by their home academic department. Some department chairs express annoyance and resentment that they have to support regional campus faculty financially and in other ways such as mentorship because "it takes away from Columbus faculty." This reflects shocking lack of ownership of regional campus faculty who should be equally valued members of the department. The regional campus faculty – Columbus department issue is symptomatic of a much large OSU cultural challenge.

As OSU administration operationalizes its commitment to the land grant mission of providing educational access throughout the state, it must serve as an example to the rest of the institution and undertake a culture change so every unit, academic or non-academic, understands the value regional campuses bring. Eventual culture change of this type will address multiple challenges. Of significance is the variance in the treatment of regional faculty with respect to tenure and promotion. These faculty, by virtue of their location and responsibility, have disproportionately higher teaching loads compared to their Columbus counterparts. Yet, the intense focus of the regional campus faculty, their departments, and other administration is on research productivity

and the importance of that in tenure and promotion. The impression is that the teaching and learning effort by regional campus faculty was secondary to their research when in terms of load, it is primary. Furthermore, research was narrowly defined as research in the academic discipline. Not once in any meeting with faculty or Columbus department chairs was a mention made of reward for or encouragement of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

This raises the question: Does OSU truly value the obligation to educate inherent in its land grant mission to the extent that the academic enterprise would award tenure and promotion based on teaching alone or as a large majority of a regional campus faculty member's role? Teaching-based tenure and promotion occurs throughout the academy, even at research institutions. Departments and colleges would benefit by visibly embracing and supporting excellence in teaching and learning.

The departments must be responsible for the evaluation of teaching in faculty tenure review; it means that Columbus faculty and administrations will better understand and value teaching and learning as a pillar of the university's mission. A separate, or regional campus only, based teaching faculty tenure process would only serve to create a larger gap and class differentiation between the regional campuses and Columbus, and fuel the perception in some places that regional campus faculty are not as valued as Columbus faculty.

Finally, clarity about faculty loads and roles must apply to tenure track as well as associated faculty. Associated faculty are not respected uniformly throughout university. In an interview during the review, associated faculty rated their connection to the departments as a "4" on a "1-10" scale. There appears to be a lack of professional development opportunities for associated faculty; this is something OSU as a whole should take more seriously.

We recommend that OSU:

- Develop a robust tenure and promotion pathway based on teaching as the primary faculty role;
- Build a more intentional means of orienting and mentoring regional campus faculty that takes seriously the land grant access mission; and
- Take the scholarship of teaching and learning as seriously as it takes scholarship in the discipline.

## 5.0 Summary and Conclusions

Regional comprehensive institutions and regional campuses like yours are a part of the largest and most important sector in all of higher education. They open doors of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of students, provide a pathway to the middle class, serve as important if not anchor employers in their regions, and are often their region's cultural hub. Yet, even before the current pandemic, they were a sector under tremendous stress.

In their 2019 report “Squeezed from All Sides,” *Inside Higher Ed* notes that such institutions produce nearly 40 percent of all baccalaureate degrees in the United States, by far the most of any sector. Yet, these campuses are also the most vulnerable to increasing budgetary and demographic challenges in the increasingly competitive higher education landscape. As Moody’s notes in their 2020 Outlook for Higher Education, “Regional public universities, particularly moderately sized and smaller ones, will be among the most constrained for revenue growth because of flat to declining enrollment and limited revenue diversity beyond state funding and in-state tuition.”

The Ohio State University Regional Campuses fill this niche in Ohio, and they do it well. They are, however, like most of their national peers, stressed by competition, demography, and declining state support. Unlike some of their national peers, however, they have a decided advantage: The Ohio State University. There is great potential for growing and strengthening these campuses, should university leadership wish to do so. First and foremost, there must be a clear sense of the regional campus mission and most importantly, the central role these campuses play in OSU’s mission as a land grant institution. The current ambiguity is detrimental to both current operations and the long-term sustainability of these campuses. Clarity of mission will allow OSU to more effectively address a long-term funding model and enrollment strategy that recognizes the challenges endemic to all such campuses nationwide and uses OSU’s considerable resources. Finally, your faculty are the reason why students come to any of your campuses, whether they be in Columbus, Lima, Mansfield, Marion, or Newark. It is time for the class distinctions that persist between the regional campuses and Columbus to end. Embrace the scholarship of teaching and learning as a legitimate path to tenure and promotion, encourage and reward innovative approaches to teaching and learning (including, especially, online approaches that serve post-traditional students), and fully embrace a “students first” mentality that recognizes that everything that we do, even faculty research, must serve the goal of improving a students’ chances of persisting to graduation. Possessed of student-focused leadership and the considerable resources of The Ohio State University, your regional campuses can, and we maintain should, be a national model for serving its students and fulfilling the promise of the land grant mission.