PROJECT SUMMARY

Overview

Overall, the recruiting, admissions and enrollment management processes established by Texas A&M University are effective in meeting the University’s enrollment goals and in providing reasonable assurance that students are admitted in compliance with applicable state laws and University requirements. Some opportunities for improvement exist in the regional prospective student centers’ administrative operations for increased efficiency and effectiveness.

Texas A&M University’s freshman enrollment for fall 2008 was over 8,000 students of which approximately 7,700 were Texas residents. Approximately one in four freshmen were first-generation college students. The University’s strategic plan addresses diversification and globalization of faculty, staff and student body; therefore, it is important to increase admission numbers with an emphasis on attracting and enrolling underrepresented groups. The University has established seven regional prospective student centers (PSC) jointly managed by the Office of Admissions and Records (OAR) and the office of Scholarships and Financial Aid (SFA) that promote attending college and how to pay for it. In the past six years, the overall freshman student enrollment has grown 25% from 2003 to 2008 with the African American growth at 100% and the Hispanic growth at 106%, both of which are proportionally higher than the overall growth. Management credits much of this enrollment growth to the efforts of the PSCs. Annual operating budgets for the PSCs were approximately $3.7 million for fiscal year 2009.

Summary of Management’s Response

Overall, Texas A&M University has demonstrated significant gains in recruiting of underrepresented students and increasing quality, particularly through the use of the regional prospective student centers (PSC). This success has been noted through this audit process while identifying areas of improvement. The University is committed to addressing all of the recommendations in this report and implementing changes over the course of the next year.
Scope

The review of student recruitment, admissions and enrollment management at Texas A&M University focused on recruiting, admissions, regional prospective student center operations, recruitment grant compliance, and goals, objectives and performance measure attainment for the period primarily from September 1, 2008 to May 31, 2009. Enrollment data was reviewed from fiscal years 1999 to 2008. Fieldwork was conducted during June and July, 2009.
OBSERVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESPONSES

1. Administrative and Resource Improvements for Prospective Student Centers (PSC)

Observation

Administrative management of PSC resources needs improvement to ensure the most efficient and effective PSC operations. Programmatically, the PSCs have been successful in increasing enrollment and attracting targeted groups of students to Texas A&M University. However, there are opportunities for improvement of administrative processes that could, in turn, enhance customer service and provide for more efficient and effective achievement of programmatic goals. The following issues were noted:

- PSC websites have not been developed to market the PSC services, locations, personnel, etc. PSC information is not prominently displayed on OAR and SFA websites. In addition to recruiting, PSCs provide admissions and financial aid counseling services and help facilitate other University recruiting office efforts within their regions.

- Management has not taken a proactive role in the development of social networking pages for recruitment. Social networking pages were not yet developed and implemented for either office or the individual PSCs. In the absence of PSC pages, some of the staff had developed their own personal networking pages to use for recruitment efforts.

- Offsite internet connectivity is not available to all PSC staff for accessing the OAR and SFA networks while working outside of the PSC office. Access to the Internet is not always available at the schools that are visited. Access to OAR and SFA network systems would increase timely response to customers (students, parents, high school counselors).

- A common calendar system is not accessible by PSC staff members for better communication, organization, and scheduling. A basic goal of the PSCs is to provide admissions and financial aid information to potential students. Therefore, coordination and communication between the OAR and SFA staff members is essential.
1. Administrative and Resource Improvements for Prospective Student Centers (cont.)

- Comprehensive/combined accounting records and financial reports are not prepared for each PSC. Currently, PSC operational costs are combined in the Financial Accounting Management Information System accounts with other OAR and SFA departmental operating costs. OAR and SFA do not prepare combined monthly financial reports for the PSCs that include all costs for each individual PSC. Financial reporting is a tool for management to assess resource use, performance results, and other activities at the centers.

- The PSCs do not have comprehensive recruitment management software, nor is there a single system for use by recruiters throughout the University. OAR staff at the PSCs use six computer systems related to recruitment and admissions status. SFA staff use three systems. OAR and SFA staff members do not enter and track the same level of contact information in their respective recruitment tracking systems. Reducing the number of systems for more integrated and consistent information would improve efficiencies and increase effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

- Ready access to current procedure manuals, including procedures for PSC operations, is not easily available to all PSC staff. SFA provides a procedure manual in a central location on the department network for all employees to access and use. OAR has various manuals for each division within the department. These are not centrally maintained or updated for access by all employees.

The PSCs are jointly managed by OAR and SFA, each of which provides staff members to the PSCs. The individual PSC directors are OAR staff. There is also a SFA team lead in each PSC. The PSC staff members report administratively to their respective departments.

**Recommendation**

Consider improvements to PSC administrative operations to ensure PSCs have the resources needed to efficiently and effectively achieve University recruiting goals and objectives such as the following:

- Enhancing marketing of PSCs with websites and other means.
- Developing social networking pages for recruitment at the PSCs.
1. Administrative and Resource Improvements for Prospective Student Centers (cont.)

- Ensuring that PSC staff members have Internet access availability while working outside of the PSC office.

- Establishing a common calendar system for PSC staff members.

- Establishing monthly combined financial reports for the PSCs.

- Developing central recruiting software for use by all PSC members and other University recruiters.

- Ensuring that procedure manuals are maintained in a manner that allows all employees access to current procedures.

- Establishing a central administrative and reporting function for PSC administration.

Management’s Response

Each of the recommendations above is addressed separately as follows:

- Improvements to the PSC websites have been implemented, including information on location, staffing, regional scholarships, and services provided. A single set of PSC websites is now in use, eliminating duplication between offices. Implementation target is September 28, 2009.

- The use of social networking in recruitment is being pursued. A pilot Facebook page has already been launched for the Houston PSC. Additional sites for each PSC will be added after assessing the pilot site. Additionally, the University will develop guidelines in order to provide a framework for using this type of technology for recruiting purposes. Implementation target is February 28, 2010.

- Additional aircards will be purchased so that any PSC staff member who needs one can check it out on a first-come, first-serve basis. Implementation target is November 30, 2009.

- Solutions to shared calendars are being explored by Admissions and Financial Aid IT staff in conjunction with Computing Information Services staff. Implementation target is February 28, 2010.

- Since the budget year has already begun, current accounting processes and practices will be evaluated during the 2009-10 year by both accounting departments and will work on a
1. Administrative and Resource Improvements for Prospective Student Centers (cont.)

- Independent surveys of customer and peer groups are not performed.

Independent surveys of all PSC customer and peer groups are not performed. Currently, PSC directors send surveys to high school counselors served by their region. These surveys are returned to the PSC directors. A more independent administration of surveys to high school counselors, students, parents and other recruiters at the University (Honors, Corps of Cadets, and University college recruiters) would provide a more objective assessment of customer satisfaction of PSC services provided. In addition, surveying a variety of customer and peer groups would alert management to new opportunities or potential problem areas.

Recommendation

Conduct independent surveys of all PSC customer and peer groups.

combined PSC financial report by region and implement any accounting changes for 2010-11. However, a combined summary financial report will be created for the 2009-2010 academic year. Implementation target is August 31, 2010.

- The University has just signed a contract for SunGard’s Enrollment Management suite which will be implemented as a university-wide solution for recruitment activities. The project is staffed and underway. This will allow the elimination of some of the other systems utilized on campus. Implementation target is August 31, 2010.

- Procedure manuals for the PSC staff are maintained by each respective office and will be updated annually and accessible on a shared secure network drive to all staff. Implementation target is November 30, 2009.

- The University recognizes the challenges created by having two separate offices operating side-by-side in each center and the inherent differences in administrative and reporting functions. However, the University also recognizes the value created by having these two separate offices represented in each center. That being said, we will establish a team to review differences in operating and reporting procedures in each center and further align functions that do not bring value to the operations of the PSCs. Implementation target is February 28, 2010.

2. Surveys

Observation

Conduct independent surveys of all PSC customer and peer groups.
Management’s Response

2. Surveys (cont.)

Independent surveys will be developed by the University Measurement and Research Services office. Surveys will be given bi-annually to a variety of customers and peer groups including counselors, parents and prospective students and other University stakeholders. Surveys will be developed during the 2009-10 recruitment year so they can be administered in the summer of 2010. Implementation target is August 31, 2010.

3. Student Trip Approvals

Observation

No central oversight for student trips from PSCs.

Three of thirty-eight (8%) student trips reviewed did not go through Student Activities to seek approval for the camp and/or enrichment program. Responsibility and monitoring of student trips is decentralized between the program coordinators within OAR and SFA as well as the individual PSC directors. University rules require that all camps and enrichment programs, which include potential student trips to campus, be approved prior to the event. This approval process is designed to ensure that potential risks have been reviewed, liability insurance coverage is obtained, background screens are conducted on employees and volunteers, and information is obtained for emergency situations. A more central monitoring or oversight function for student trips from the PSCs would decrease the risks that trips and programs with prospective students, which include minors, occur without going through the proper risk management processes.

Recommendation

Establish central monitoring for student trips from PSCs to ensure that all applicable student trips are approved in compliance with University rules and procedures.

Management’s Response

The program coordinators on the main campus in the offices of Admissions and Scholarships and Financial Aid will be responsible for coordinating all campus trip-related programming and paperwork. We will establish a single process, irrespective of the office originating the trip, and a checklist to ensure that all campus trips comply with University rules, including collection and maintenance of all proper paperwork, coordination with other campus organizations, and communicating with the PSC staff who are part of the trip and/or program. Implementation November 30, 2009.
4. Approval to Work from Personal Residence

Observation

An appropriate level of approval was not obtained for employees working from home. The Central Texas PSC employees do not have a physical center location and, therefore, they work from their homes. Texas Government Code 658.010 states, “The employee's personal residence may not be considered the employee's regular or assigned temporary place of employment without prior written authorization from the administrative head of the employing state agency.” A&M System Regulation 33.06.01 states, "The component Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or designee must approve, in writing, each request for an employee to work from home or another location other than the place of business.” OAR and SFA management was not aware of the requirements of CEO approval for employees working from home.

Recommendation

Obtain CEO or CEO designee approval for employees working from their personal residence.

Management’s Response

The Admissions and Financial Aid staff operating in the Austin/Central Texas area work out of their residence since there is not an Austin PSC. Appropriate approvals for the employee to work from their residence have been received and a copy is in the personnel file of each employee. Completed on August 10, 2009.
BASIS OF REVIEW

Objective

The objective was to review the University’s recruitment, admissions and enrollment management processes to determine if resources are used efficiently and effectively and in compliance with laws, policies, regulations, rules and Higher Education Coordinating Board requirements.

Criteria

Our audit was based upon standards as set forth in the System Policy and Regulation Manual of the Texas A&M University System, Texas A&M University Rules, and other sound administrative practices. This audit was performed in compliance with the Institute of Internal Auditors’ “International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.”

Additionally, we conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Texas A&M University, the state’s first public institution of higher learning, is one of the nation’s largest universities, with more than 48,000 students. Freshman enrollment in fall 2008 was over 8,000 of which approximately one in four were first-generation college students. To enhance this focus, the University has established seven regional prospective student centers in an effort to proactively recruit and produce a more broadly represented student body. The regional centers are jointly managed by the Office of Admissions and Records and Scholarships and Financial Aid to create a one-stop shopping effect promoting college and how to pay for it. In the past six years, the overall freshman student enrollment has increased 25%. Minority freshman student enrollment for African American and Hispanic students together has increased 100% and 106%, respectively, for this period. Management credits much of this enrollment growth to the efforts of the PSCs. Annual operating
budgets for the PSCs were approximately $3.7 million for fiscal year 2009.
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