PROJECT SUMMARY

A university-wide business continuity plan has not been implemented for Texas A&M University; however, a process is currently underway to develop and implement a university-wide plan with a target date for completion of August 31, 2011. Without a university-wide plan there is a greater risk that critical University functions that have been significantly interrupted due to a wide-scale disaster or other event may not be able to be restored or recovered in a timely manner. Localized disruptions of business operations on campus (i.e. loss of one or more buildings, etc.) can often be addressed within the University using available capacity and infrastructure. The University has also developed various crises and emergency operation plans over the past several years which take on some of the characteristics of a business continuity plan especially the University’s pandemic influenza response plan.

OBSERVATION, RECOMMENDATION, AND RESPONSE

University-wide Business Continuity Plan

Observation

There is currently no university-wide business continuity plan.

Efforts have been made toward developing business continuity and disaster recovery plans within some departmental areas of the University such as the Division of Finance and the Computing and Information Services Department. However, there is currently no university-wide business continuity plan in place which limits the ability to fully implement the departmental plans due to their reliance on decisions made at the university-level such as assignment of University resources and overall priorities for recovery. In addition, although more localized disruptions of business operations on campus can be addressed by using available capacity and infrastructure, there is a greater risk that the University could not adequately recover business operations interrupted by more wide-scale disasters affecting a large portion of the campus.
The University’s Office of Safety and Security recently began developing a university-wide plan for continuity of operations as part of an overall emergency preparedness plan through a grant funded by the Department of Education in October 2009. The University has contracted with the Texas Engineering Extension Service to assist in developing the plan including providing technical assistance, holding planning workshops, developing departmental planning templates, and training employees. This process is still in its early stages with a target completion date of August 31, 2011. To date, a rough draft of a plan and departmental planning templates have been created. Prior to the recent initiative, the University had focused primarily on the safety aspects of a disaster through development of various university-wide crises and emergency operation plans which took on some of the characteristics of a business continuity plan. During the development of these plans, especially the pandemic influenza response plan, along with disaster-related events experienced by the University such as the evacuation of the University’s campus in Galveston in September 2008, it was determined by certain University and safety management personnel that a plan was needed which focused on business continuity for the University as a whole.

The National Association of College and University Business Officer’s College and University Business Administration indicates that institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly aware of the need for business continuity planning which includes development of a master response plan to document institution-wide priority actions, contact information, and availability of resources. It further states that the master plan should be widely distributed across the institution and that each department should develop its own specific plan of action, based on this master plan. Failure of an institution to recover and restore critical functions resulting from a disaster in a timely manner could result in damage to the University’s reputation as well as significant financial consequences due to interruptions to the academic schedule, failure of current research projects, or other unforeseen delays to the completion of critical activities.

**Recommendation**

Complete the development and implementation of a university-wide plan for continuity of operations. Ensure the plan contains all the necessary elements of the continuity planning model adopted by the University to effectively analyze, address, and test the recovery of critical operations of the University.
Ensure the plan is properly approved by the president or his designated representative and distributed to key personnel. Store a copy of the plan in an accessible offsite location.

Management's Response

*Texas A&M University agrees that a university-wide continuity plan is needed to ensure that recovery of critical infrastructure and essential services are accomplished as efficiently and effectively as possible following a disaster. The institutional continuity plan currently being developed with the assistance of the Texas Engineering Extension Service will contain all necessary elements of continuity planning to effectively analyze, address, and test the recovery of critical operations of the University. Once completed, the plan will be approved by the president or designated representative and implemented including posting the plan on the University’s emergency preparedness website for ease of campus review. These actions will be completed by August 2011.*
BASIS OF REVIEW

Objective and Scope

Review and assess the University's processes for recovering and restoring critical functions that have been either partially or completely interrupted as the result of a disaster or other extended disruption. Also, determine that the University is in compliance with laws, policies, regulations, and rules relevant to business continuity planning. Fieldwork was conducted primarily from October to November 2010.

Criteria

Our audit was based upon standards as set forth in the System Policy and Regulation Manual of the Texas A&M University System; the National Association of College and University Business Officer’s College and University Business Administration; and other sound administrative and industry practices. This audit was conducted in conformance 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

The need for business continuity planning at institutions of higher education has continued to grow as evidenced by natural and other disasters over the past several years such as hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. Texas A&M University currently has a student enrollment of over 49,000 and over $580 million invested in research. The University also has two branch campuses, one in the Middle Eastern country of Qatar, and one in Galveston, Texas, which was evacuated during hurricane Ike in September 2008.

Potential disasters with the greatest likelihood of interrupting business operations at the University include large-scale facility damage and loss of power due to a hurricane, loss of one or more
campus buildings due to a fire or tornado, and widespread unavailability of personnel due to a pandemic influenza outbreak or an evacuation resulting from a hurricane or hazardous material release especially with railroad tracks intersecting the campus.

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