TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW:
SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted by:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Institutional Review Team from MGT of America, Inc. conducted its site visit to Tarleton State University on February 10-12, 2009. Prior to and during the course of its visit, the team reviewed numerous documents and conducted interviews with nearly fifty individuals representing students, faculty, administrative leaders and external supporters. Based on its review, the team identified three significant strategic challenges facing the university in the near future:

- **Institutional Direction** – How can the university simultaneously develop its roles as a residential campus that provides a traditional college experience, an upper division program provider for place-bound students in populous areas, and an emerging graduate-research institution?

- **Enrollment Growth Expectations** – How should the university respond to the changing demographics of its market area and state mandates for enrollment growth and retention?

- **Increasing Competition for Students and Donors** – How can the university communicate more effectively with external audiences in support of its enrollment and private giving goals?

The team also observed opportunities for internal operational and organizational improvements:

- **Organizational Alignment** – How should the responsibilities among the university’s senior leaders be aligned to respond to challenges and opportunities most effectively?

- **Internal Governance, Resource Allocation, and Communication** – How can internal resources be focused more effectively on university goals and priorities?

This summary report begins with a discussion of the three strategic challenges facing the university, and then reviews the internal operational and organizational issues. The report concludes with a series of general recommendations to help Tarleton become even more responsive, effective and efficient in pursuing its mission.

The reader should understand this report is based on a high level review of existing reports and documents and brief interviews with a sample of institutional leaders. Although limited review reports of this type may contain minor inaccuracies and omissions, this institutional review of Tarleton State University does serve to identify high priority areas that merit the attention of the university leadership team.
2.0 STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Institutional Direction

Background

- Tarleton has a 100+ year history as a college providing a residential experience for many of its students. Serving as a residential campus still accounts for the majority of resources and activity at Tarleton. For most stakeholders, the residential college experience is the core business of the university. The new president envisions improving student success by enhancing the living and learning experience of residential students and by more effectively blending in-class and out-of-class learning opportunities.

- Over the past decade, Tarleton has operated the Central Texas Center in Killeen, which offers upper division and graduate programs for place-bound adults and now accounts for about 20 percent of Tarleton’s overall headcount enrollment. Tarleton also offers courses and programs in permanent and leased facilities in the Southwest Metroplex (Fort Worth) and Waco areas. Although the Central Texas Center is scheduled to become a separately accredited institution later this year, Tarleton will remain active in providing services to place-bound students at its centers in the Southwest Metroplex and Waco. Opportunities exist to establish other centers in conjunction with community colleges in the region. Significant enrollment growth potential is seen for the off-campus centers.

- Sponsored research activity at Tarleton has grown to provide about $8 million per year in external funding, with the majority being for the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TiAER) and the Center for Agribusiness Excellence (CAE). University leaders believe there is a strong potential for more sponsored research funding.

- Tarleton currently offers the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and is pursuing authorization for two additional doctorates in Environmental Agriculture and Counseling.

Potential Issues

- Academic policies and procedures (e.g., admissions requirements, graduation requirements) will need to accommodate the needs and circumstances of both traditional students on the main campus and non-traditional students at off-campus centers.

- An increased graduate-research focus can have impact on faculty, staff, and facilities requirements.

- Operating in multiple lines of business requires relatively sophisticated information and decision support systems to enable leaders to monitor the performance of each component as well as the overall enterprise.
Observations

- The current administrative organization structure appears to be designed to support the residential college role with a much more fragmented organization for extended education and research.
- Tarleton will need to expand its land holdings, student housing capacity, and student life programs to successfully provide a traditional college experience for its Stephenville students.
- Tarleton is facing increased competition from community colleges for cost-conscious entry level students who comprise the majority of the Stephenville campus student population.
- Tarleton has experienced difficulty in maintaining student persistence and retention rates on par with its peer public institutions.
- Tarleton faces strong competition from nearby universities and online providers in expanding its off-campus programming.
- Changes in recruitment strategies, teaching loads and other assigned duties, tenure and promotion policies, and possibly pay schedules will be needed for faculty involved in sponsored research and supervision of doctoral students.
- New or renovated facilities will be needed to support increased research activity.

Enrollment Growth Expectations

Background

- The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has adopted “Closing the Gap” and is holding institutions accountable for meeting overall enrollment growth goals and subsidiary goals for minority students.
- Tarleton is expected to increase its overall enrollment from 7,545 students in 2000 to 11,516 students in 2015; its minority enrollment is expected to increase from 1,036 to 2,486 students over the same period. (note: this THECB enrollment goal is subject to review after decoupling of the Central Texas Center)
- Texas universities operate under a “grow or die” financial model, where enrollment growth is the major source of additional operating funds.
- The decoupling of the Central Texas Center will lead to a loss of approximately 20 percent of Tarleton’s headcount enrollment and 17.5 percent of its weighted student credit hour (SCH) production.
- The Central Texas Center accounts for approximately 40 percent of the number of minority students enrolled at Tarleton.
- Full-time student equivalent (FTSE) enrollment on the main campus has declined by more than 2 percent in the past two years, but headcount enrollment has been stable.
- Off-campus centers in the Southwest Metroplex and Waco areas are seen as promising opportunities to attract new students.
- The new president has identified enrollment management as an area needing more emphasis.
- Enrollment management programs at other institutions are comprehensive; efforts go beyond just contacting potential new students and include attention on branding, affordability, retention, and graduation.
Potential Issues

- Texas population growth over the coming decade, especially in the college-going age cohort, is expected to be mostly in ethnic groups that have traditionally been underrepresented. In fact, Anglos are expected to account for only 7 percent of the projected population increase in the state between 2010 and 2020.
- Underrepresented minorities have not participated at the same rate as Anglo students and have been more hesitant to leave home to attend college.
- Underrepresented minorities often need targeted student support services to adapt to campus life and to persist to graduation.
- The escalating college cost of attendance is affecting attendance patterns, with students staying closer to home to attend community colleges and expecting/requiring larger financial aid packages for university attendance.
- Enrollment growth at off-campus centers often has a different impact on an institution than growth on campus since many students are not full-time and do not pay the same mix of student fees.

Observations

- The responsibility for enrollment management at Tarleton is fragmented; while certain key units are within the division of enrollment management, others are assigned to the division of student life and the college of general studies.
- Coordination of enrollment management through efforts of two committees is only partially effective in overcoming the organizational barriers.
- University land holdings may not be adequate to accommodate significant enrollment growth and related facility expansion on the Stephenville campus while maintaining the attractive and inviting appearance of the campus.
- Student housing capacity is not adequate to accommodate on-campus enrollment growth and promote an enhanced residential college experience.
- Recruitment of community college transfers needs to be strengthened.
- Oversight of off-campus programming (centers, distance education, on-line courses) is through the assistant vice president for curriculum and assessment; this position also is responsible for a number of other key initiatives.
- The enrollment management office has limited involvement in recruiting for off-campus programs.
- Tarleton provides only limited student and administrative support for those enrolled and working in the off-campus centers.
- Financial aid is not used effectively in recruiting new students due to issues with packaging scholarships and timeliness of award notification.
- The current predominantly white ethnic makeup of students and faculty/staff at Tarleton’s main campus is not representative of the college-aged population of the state or market area.
- Responsibility for diversity initiatives is dispersed across units reporting to three different vice-presidents.
- The staffing pattern of the main campus, with its significant number of Tarleton State graduates, indirectly continues the pattern of underrepresentation of minority groups.
Increasing Competition for Students and Donors

Background

- Competition for recruiting new students is becoming increasingly sophisticated with some colleges and universities mounting flashy media-based marketing campaigns and Internet-based outreach programs.
- The need for private giving is becoming greater, as competition for state appropriations from other public functions increases and universities face growing resistance to higher tuition rates.
- A university’s intercollegiate athletics program is often the most visible component of the institution to the public at large.
- A university’s Web site has become the new front gate to the campus for potential students and external supporters.
- Other colleges and universities have adopted an “integrated marketing” approach for effectively reaching external audiences.
- A key building block in the integrated marketing approach is articulating the institution’s desired identity, establishing its brand image, and incorporating that brand image in all external communications.

Potential Issues

- Constant attention is needed to maintain consistency across all forms of communication both internally and externally, with regard to visual images, key messages, and underlying themes.
- Alumni and friends often do not understand the distinct roles that development foundations, alumni associations, and athletic booster organizations play. When these entities are not properly coordinated, the entities compete for donors and optimal results for a university’s private giving programs are difficult to achieve.
- Universities that operate campuses and centers in multiple locations face special challenges in maintaining visibility and communicating messages appropriate for each community they serve.

Observations

- Marketing efforts are currently fragmented and not effectively integrated.
- The university has not adopted a unified marketing theme, whether it is for attracting students, recruiting faculty and staff, or soliciting donors.
- The public relations office needs to be more effectively utilized.
- The current university Web site does not communicate effectively with external stakeholders and, in many regards, appears to serve more as a resource for internal stakeholders.
- The development and alumni offices maintain separate databases of friends and supporters of the university.
- Most efforts to secure private gifts are locally focused.
Although Tarleton’s initial capital campaign several years ago was successful, the university has not built on or sustained the momentum created by that campaign.

The new vice president for institutional advancement will bring new ideas to the development, alumni, and marketing offices.

There is a need to establish clear responsibility at the cabinet level for maintaining and promoting the Tarleton image among external stakeholders.

The athletics department has strong community support, with 200 corporate sponsors. The Booster Board consists primarily of local community leaders. Tarleton has built one of the top 10 Booster Clubs in the nation (within its division).

The community support and goodwill built over time for Tarleton sports can serve as the basis for broader fundraising initiatives.
3.0 INTERNAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Organizational Alignment

Background

- An appropriate organizational alignment helps a university to operate efficiently and makes the most effective use of the time and talents of the senior leadership team.
- An appropriate organizational alignment enables proper focus and provides for accountability for achieving strategic priorities and operational goals.
- An appropriate organizational alignment is based on the unique circumstances of the setting and the strengths of key members of the leadership team.
- As a public university, Tarleton has specific obligations to respond to information requests under the Texas Public Information Act.

Potential Issues

- Senior members of the executive team need to have complementary sets of skills that collectively span articulating institutional vision and crafting plans; securing needed resources; communicating effectively with internal and external audiences; implementing and monitoring programs; providing encouragement to students, faculty and staff; and providing effective stewardship of resources.
- The chief executive officer needs to be supported by someone who is clearly second-in-command and who can enable the CEO to spend his or her time most effectively. For example, a CEO that is skilled in creating visions for program development and building external support needs to be balanced by a deputy who can focus on internal management issues.
- The ‘provost’ title is often used to denote an academic officer who is also second-in-command. However, some universities designate a different position as the CEO’s principal deputy.

Observations

- The number of positions reporting directly to the president is excessive and serves to limit the effectiveness of the new president in building relationships across the region and state. As previously noted, responsibility for enrollment management is fragmented (e.g., the financial aid and scholarship offices report to different vice presidents, not all enrollment management initiatives within the division of academic affairs report through the dean of enrollment management).
- As previously noted, the responsibility for marketing the institution to external stakeholders is not well developed and is fragmented rather than integrated.
- As previously noted, the structure and reporting relationships for the diversity function do not provide an effective platform for influencing institutional direction.
- The structure and reporting relationships for research administration are fragmented.
Given the expectations for enrollment growth through off-campus instruction, leadership for this function needs undivided attention.

Many of the position titles and reporting relationships with the division of academic affairs, as described below, vary from common practice at other colleges and universities:

- The library is a subunit of the graduate school.
- The university Web master is a member of the library staff.
- The dean of general studies is responsible for student disability services, university testing, and upward bound.
- The ROTC department reports to an associate vice president rather than a dean.
- The registrar is also the dean of enrollment management.
- The center for agribusiness excellence is not within the college of agriculture.
- The honors program and distance education report to the same assistant vice president.
- Faculty development is under center for instructional technology and distributed education.

In other parts of the university, other atypical structures and reporting relationships exist.

- The organizational structures and reporting lines for instructional technology and administrative technology do not appear to be coordinated.
- A common perception across campus is that decision-making and control has been assumed in offices not typical at other universities.
- There is a need to be sensitive to succession planning issues in the finance and administration division.
- Efforts to comply with the public information act divert the attention of staff in the office of the president from more strategic responsibilities.
- More emphasis should be placed on integrating TIAER into the academic environment.

**Internal Governance, Resource Allocation, and Communication**

**Background**

- Colleges and universities across the nation are known for their commitment to collegial governance and collaborative leadership.
- Involvement by front-line managers can lead to better-informed decisions by senior officials.
- The allocation of resources (positions, new facilities, operating funds) is the most telling statement of institutional priorities.

**Potential Issues**

- As institutional roles become more numerous, diverse, and geographically separate, effective internal communication becomes more critical.
Faculty and staff buy-in and effective implementation of new policies and directions will be limited without effective internal communications.

Tarleton is likely to face leaner state appropriations and restrained private giving from donors who are concerned about economic uncertainty; increasingly scarce resources will need to be targeted to issues of the highest priority.

Observations

- Top down decision-making has been part of Tarleton’s history, resulting in some misunderstanding about why certain decisions were made.
- Limited attention appears to be devoted to leadership development of middle managers, and likely patterns of leadership succession are not promoted.
- Unit-level managers feel that the lack of adequate technology support staffing prevents them from improving their services to customers.
- Tarleton has increased its faculty and staff salaries at a rate greater than its peers in recent years, but salary rates still lag those found at peer institutions.
- The intercollegiate athletics program is not self-sustaining.
- Facilities are generally well maintained within budget restraints.
- Signage on campus is limited, making it difficult for visitors to locate offices and services.
- The campus disaster plan is not well understood by front-line managers and staff who will need to take immediate steps whenever the situation merits.
- The budget process should provide greater opportunities for input from unit-level managers.
- The university does not provide a suitable residence for its president that can serve as the living quarters for the first family and as a venue for official functions.
- The primary access corridors to Stephenville do not create an inviting image for a college town.
4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the information collected during the Institutional Review site visits, the analysis of institutional data and information, and discussions among the MGT team. These recommendations relate directly to the topics discussed above. As requested in the RFP, this report identifies areas that need addressing and an insight into how they should be addressed, as opposed to a specific implementation strategy. The recommendations are not listed in any particular priority order. However, the recommendations are grouped by major topic area.

Institutional Direction

Tarleton faces the challenge of re-establishing its base of operations once the planned separation of the Central Texas Center becomes effective and mounting initiatives to expand its reputation as a residential college, a comprehensive regional university and an emerging research institution. MGT recommends the following actions related to overall institutional direction.

- To provide a sound basis for developing plans for future directions, the university’s leadership team should gain a thorough understanding of the impact of the decoupling of the Central Texas Center on the university’s enrollment, student and staffing profiles, funding levels, and public support and communicate this information to all major stakeholders.

- The leadership team should establish new enrollment growth goals for the overall university that support the THECB Closing the Gap initiative and that assign growth targets for the Stephenville campus, the Metroplex and Waco centers, and other instructional delivery modes and locations.

- The leadership team should articulate a vision and develop plans for strengthening the role of the Stephenville campus as a residential college, to include possible new academic program offerings and expanded student life services.
  - As part of the residential college plan, the university should undertake a comprehensive housing master plan to include an assessment of building condition for each current residence hall, consideration of residential living and learning programming requirements, the role of student housing in attainment of university enrollment management goals, and financing strategies to include potential roles for private developers.
  - The university should initiate a joint “town & gown” endeavor to establish a stronger and more attractive and inviting image of Stephenville and Tarleton, including improvement of the “gateways” to campus.

- The leadership team should develop strategies for growing a network of off-campus instructional centers to include delineation of appropriate program offerings and the required roles for distance learning, student life, and other campus based support services.

- The leadership team should articulate a long-term strategy for further developing research programs on a largely undergraduate campus, addressing student participation in research, faculty workload and reward systems, and the need for specialized facilities and resources.
**Enrollment Growth Expectations**

To address the challenges of meeting enrollment growth goals in an increasingly competitive and diverse environment, MGT recommends the following actions:

- The university should consolidate all primary enrollment-management functions under a single organizational entity within the division of academic affairs.
- The expanded enrollment management organization should be headed by an associate vice president for enrollment management and integrated marketing.
- The new associate vice president for enrollment management and integrated marketing should implement the following actions:
  - Adopt a one-stop shop for all front-office functions at a single convenient and visible campus location.
  - Seek support of TAMU System for better coordination of the TAMU applicant pool.
  - Re-engineer the scholarship and financial aid decision processes to assist in student recruitment and retention and enable an earlier and better coordinated notification of awards.
  - Determine factors contributing to the lower than average student persistence rate and develop plans to improve performance. In particular, if significant numbers of students in core courses are not doing well, then Tarleton should contact the National Center for Academic Transformation for information on their program.
  - Develop plans and strategies for recruiting community college transfer students to the Stephenville campus and each off-campus center.
  - Investigate concerns over the number of students transferring out from the institution. If the concerns are legitimate, programs and possibly scholarships should be added to retain these students.
- The chief diversity officer should report to the vice president for academic affairs.
- The role of the reassigned diversity unit should include responsibility for both student and faculty/staff diversity initiatives. In particular, the chief diversity officer should coordinate closely with the enrollment management team to increase the appeal of Tarleton for underrepresented minority students.

**Increasing Competition for Students and Donors**

MGT recommends the university initiate a series of efforts to strengthen Tarleton’s relationship with its external publics.

- As discussed under the enrollment management recommendations, the university should establish the position of associate vice president for enrollment management and integrated marketing.
- The associate vice president for enrollment management and integrated marketing should:
  - Create a strategic marketing and imaging plan to identify audiences, create messages and communication channels to best reach target audiences, cultivate media, etc.
  - Evaluate staff capabilities to ensure the correct mix of talent is in place to exploit a wider variety of media markets.
The recently appointed vice president for institutional advancement, in cooperation with the integrated marketing team, should:

− Create more social networking opportunities to reach younger alumni and current students, in addition to working more proactively on Web site development and maintenance to create stronger links with external stakeholders. Also, create better social networking guidelines for end users.
− With Tarleton’s focus on “tradition,” work on the campus facilities master plan to maintain the look/feel of the older architecture. This creates a more welcoming environment for returning alumni.
− Determine readiness for launching a new capital campaign and provide support for the effort. A CASE statement will be needed to identify an appropriate campaign goal, although a $100 million figure has been mentioned. Foundation support to assist in capital campaign activities will also need to be identified. Larger campaigns generally require larger support budgets. Additional staffing for the next campaign will need to be considered—a major gifts fundraiser and prospect research analyst are critical. The office will also need additional clerical staff.
− Transition to a single, unified database for capturing alumni and donor information. The Raiser’s Edge system being used by the development office contains a component to handle alumni affairs.
− Continue to find ways to generate revenues from the facilities of the Langdon Cultural and Educational Center to break even on operating costs. This could include additional continuing education opportunities

To reduce the confusion regarding where Web services reside, the Web designer should be reorganized under IT, with a strong dotted-line relationship with the associate vice president for enrollment management, the vice president for institutional advancement, and other areas responsible for Web content.

Organizational Alignment

The door is somewhat open for developing a new leadership team. With the hiring of the new vice president for institutional advancement and an open door in recruiting the vice president for academic affairs position, organizational realignment is underway. MGT recommends:

− The number of direct reports to the president needs to be reduced to enable the president to have more time to build external relationships.
− The president should consider establishing a new position of vice president for executive affairs who would be the president’s alter ego. There are a number of areas that now report to the president for which the new vice president could take day-to-day responsibility.
− The role of the provost should be defined as the vice president of academic affairs.
− Preliminary, informal discussions should take place concerning the anticipated retirement in a few years of key executive positions and steps should be taken to groom people for these positions.
With the high importance being placed on student recruitment and retention, the dean of enrollment management position likely should be associate vice president (or even a vice president). The enrollment management function may best be placed directly under the president; however, it is also possible to place this function under the vice president for academic affairs or the proposed vice president for executive affairs depending on the persons selected for those positions and the respective roles of the president’s and vice presidents’ offices.

The upgraded enrollment management leadership position should provide leadership for all “marketing,” with direct responsibility for student recruitment and admissions and facilitating roles in marketing support for faculty and staff recruitment and fundraising.

The position responsible for promoting diversity initiatives should be elevated and report to the vice president for academic affairs (note: one or more separate positions may still be needed to monitor equity compliance issues).

Responsibility for ensuring university compliance with requests made under the public information act, which are typically related to personnel matters, should be delegated to the human resources officer.

Opportunities for streamlining current organizational relationships should be explored, including:

− The university librarian should report to the vice president for academic affairs.
− Access and equity compliance should be under the provost.

The university should review its faculty and staff recruitment process to ensure that a broad cross section of potential applicants with a variety of higher education experience is considered for openings at the university, especially at the administrative/professional level.

**Internal Governance, Resource Allocation, and Communication**

− Decision making should be delegated to front-line managers to a much greater extent. Current decision-making approaches contribute to some who take no responsibility for what happens at the institution. To shift decision making closer to the point of action will be a culture shift, but the rewards will be worth it.

− Unit managers should be given control and responsibility for their budgets and be held accountable. Training should be provided for unit managers and appropriate software should be installed to enable monitoring of their budgets.

− Tarleton State must continue to invest in the employees the university wants to retain and:
  − Provide competitive salary and benefits.
  − Provide professional development opportunities, including the opportunity to obtain certifications, e.g., certified facility manager, master craftsman (electrical, mechanical, etc.), technology and software certifications, etc.
  − Recognize staff for achievements.

− The financial performance of each auxiliary-funded unit should be evaluated and, as necessary, plans developed to mitigate losses (e.g., adjust rates charged to customers, outsource operations to private vendors).

− The campus disaster plan should be more effectively communicated. Our conversations left the impression that although the campus has a disaster plan, there may be holes in the plan or there is a lack of knowledge regarding the plan.