ADMINISTRATIVE APPLICATIONS REPORT  January 12, 1996

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Academic/Administrative Vision:

Institutional administrative computing systems will meet the operational, managerial, and strategic information needs of both the institution and responsibility centered organizational units. Information will be clearly defined, easily accessible, appropriately timed, consistent and integrated across areas of the university. Administrative systems will have a common user interface, a single point of entry and quality control, eliminate information redundancy, reduce dependence on paper and provide appropriate support services to meet departmental needs.

Summary of Opportunities and Status of Each:

A. Information Warehouse

Need: There is a need for an administrative/management information warehouse to relate current and historical information across departmental and central administration unit boundaries.

Status: A working prototype of a warehouse of Financial Accounting and Human Resources System information has been approved by the Information Warehouse Committee. It uses Windows-based Microsoft Access to access data in a manner similar to the Grants Information system. The full warehouse will include student information and contain 5 years of historical data.

Recommendations: Provide the $200,000 funding necessary to proceed with the prototype. The warehouse is independent of the operational environment and can provide complementary analytical capabilities for several years as new administrative systems are acquired and phased into operation. To ensure the success of the project, provide ongoing funding for technical support and dedicated warehouse administrators, knowledgeable in the data, who train, provide support and market the warehouse to departmental users.

B. Departmental Management System

Need: UAB administrative systems do not permit departments, units and individuals to effectively administer all of their UAB business activities.

Status: 1) A recent Campus-wide Information Services Committee survey of 253 UAB business units determined that 70 percent of the 92 units responding use some type of system or software to supplement financial and personnel management and student tracking. Most are developed in-house with general purpose PC software such as Microsoft Access, Excel and Lotus. Several use a PC based package developed by Priority Software, a Birmingham company. 2) UAB has included a $1,000,000 request in its FY 1996-97 state appropriations requests to develop a prototype departmental
management information system. Given the current political climate, it is unlikely that this request will be approved. 3) UAB is evaluating participation in a 13 university partnership that is developing a new student system based on best institutional practices. The student system incorporates the characteristics of the academic/administrative management vision. It includes a Windows-based user interface, intuitive navigation, convenient access to information with easy-to-use reporting tools, tracking and advising capabilities, and electronic information interchange among faculty, students and other institutions. It automates departmental student record keeping, reduces duplicate records and promotes a student oriented institutional image. 4) The student partnership vendor is also establishing financial system partnerships that emphasize a common user interface, single point of entry, electronic data interchange, enhanced reporting and analysis capabilities, reduced paper processing and focus on departmental management and operational needs to eliminate shadow systems. These or similar systems that emphasize departmental as well as institutional needs and take advantage of newer technology can further the university's vision. 5) An interim expenditure management system is planned to address departmental needs to record pre-encumbrance transactions and other commitments against account balances prior to their being recorded in the Financial Accounting System. It will eliminate much of the double-keying and reconciliation effort that now exists between stand-alone systems and the institutional systems by performing reconciliations automatically and directly accessing data in central repositories. Appropriate data integrity controls and security will be included. Estimated cost is $50,000 and 10 man-months.

Recommendations: 1) Proceed with the evaluation of new institutional administrative systems that make routine electronic administrative processes more intuitive and departmentally focused. Evolve or replace existing transaction processing systems to take full advantage of technology. Because it will take four or five years to fully phase in replacement systems, implement interim solutions where it is economically feasible to do so. Include departmental and unit representation in system decision making. 2) New systems will impact the existing desktop resources of university departments. Graphical interfaces and process re-engineering will yield products that require up-to-date Windows or Macintosh system software and high-powered desktop workstations. Half of UAB's existing PC and Macintosh base is incapable of taking advantage of improved processes. The university must help departments provide desktop computers and software that can take advantage of improving information resources.

C. Paper Limited Records

Need: There is general consensus that the university should reduce paper-based transactions. There are unmet requirements for real time data management, off-site transactions, storage space for paper documents, records retention/retrieval personnel, and interfacing with external constituencies.

Status: 1) A pilot imaging project to share documents between Financial Aid and Student Accounting is currently being bid. The pilot will demonstrate that paper storage needs can be curtailed and that images may be quickly and easily accessed from any authorized campus location. The estimated cost for the pilot is $100,000. 2) Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) of Accounts Payable information is in place for a major vendor.
It is being expanded to include more vendors and to process purchase orders. 3) A working prototype of World Wide Web (WWW) Internet access to UAB student information has been developed from University of Delaware software. UAB employee and benefit information can also be made available to employees through this WWW interface. 4) Existing electronic forms have been expanded to include Human Resources Turnaround Documents as well as Purchasing Requisitions thus addressing UAB's two highest volume forms. Online airline ticket requisitions are already in development. Other electronic forms are scheduled to follow.

**Recommendations:** Expand the imaging system to other areas of campus. Broaden EDI, electronic forms and WWW access to include heavily used administrative and student forms. Pursue use of these strategies in new administrative systems, enhancements and processes.

**D. Additional Considerations**

**Training:** Hands-on training must be provided centrally for all institutional administrative systems through a permanent training facility that has professional assistance with curriculum development, professional trainers experienced in both the use and content of the systems, and up-to-date equipment that accesses actual system models. Training will become essential as we move to a more paper-limited electronic environment.

**Standardization:** New systems must include all university units to overcome reporting problems with institutional data contained in inaccessible departmental systems. Examples are the student records in Medicine, Dentistry, and Optometry. Some standardization of hardware and software in the units will be necessary to accommodate the cost effective development, maintenance and training requirements of more sophisticated administrative applications. UAB must take advantage of volume purchase discounts and internal funding options that become feasible with increased standardization.

**Access:** The university must resolve the major policy issue of open vs limited inquiry access to UAB administrative data. "Open" access means users at all levels of the organization have access to all data (other than that data which must be legally treated as confidential). For example, a professor in the Department of English can run ad hoc reports concerning the operating budget of the School of Medicine or the President's Office. The new grants and contracts administration system uses this approach.

**Cost:** Meaningful cost estimates are difficult to develop until the options are better defined. A wide variety of end users must be included on the project teams for new and evolving administrative systems. The vision will require a significant investment by the institution. Given the increasing complexities of managing in today's environment, shrinking departmental budgets, and UAB's commitment to quality, this is an investment the university must pursue.