

# Twelfth Quadrennial Evaluation of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education

**Alabama Commission  
on Higher Education**

**November 2022**



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## Preface

By statute, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) evaluates its strategic planning goals and service to the state every four years (the last year of each gubernatorial term). ACHE staff members conducted the review for the twelfth quadrennial evaluation during October 2022.

ACHE's evaluation method for this review consisted of an electronic survey sent to over 350 public four-year and two-year college or university officials, private college or university officials, members of campus or system board of trustees, K-12 officials, members of the state legislature, executive branch officials, civic and business leaders, and members of the news media or press. The following report presents ACHE's analysis of the survey responses.

We wish to thank those individuals who participated in the electronic survey for this twelfth quadrennial evaluation of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

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# Twelfth Quadrennial Evaluation of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education

## Executive Summary

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) conducts its quadrennial evaluation every four years in accordance with the Code of Alabama, 1975, Section 16-5-12, which states:

*During the last year of each gubernatorial term, the commission shall conduct a survey of members of the education community, the Legislature, the Executive Branch of the state and business and industry to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of the commission. A report detailing the results of the survey and any recommended changes, shall be submitted to the Governor, the Legislature, the presidents and governing boards of the public institutions of higher education of this state, and the public.*

The Twelfth Quadrennial Evaluation was conducted in October 2022 using an online survey distributed to a diverse group of more than 350 constituents, including postsecondary education officials, members of the business community, state legislature, and news media, among others. The vast majority of respondents, over 81 percent, were officials from public and private two- and four-year institutions. This participation is consistent with prior participation rates for colleges and universities that have exceeded 80 percent.

The Commission considers this survey to be an invaluable opportunity to get feedback from a variety of stakeholders on its service to the state, including the degree to which it achieves its statutory requirements as the coordinating board for Alabama's higher education system. The findings from this 2022 survey suggest that ACHE is performing its primary functions well, with 86 percent of the respondents indicating the agency is effectively performing its statutory responsibilities to the state.

The respondents see the following responsibilities as the Commission's most important functions (on a scale of 10):

- *servicing as an advocate for higher public education (8.72),*
- *developing and recommending legislation to ensure high quality education (8.10),*
- *administering the Statewide Student Database (8.05),*

- *advising the Governor on postsecondary/ higher education matters (7.97), and*
- *reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction for public institutions (7.87).*

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of those same core functions, respondents rated the following responsibilities as the Commission's most effective (on a scale of 4):

- *reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction for public institutions (3.21),*
- *administering the Statewide Student Database (3.15),*
- *reviewing extensions and alternations to existing programs and units of instruction, research, and service (3.06),*
- *serving as an advocate for higher public education (3.03), and*
- *operating student aid programs for the state (3.03).*

A majority of respondents (72%) believe the Commission has sufficient authority to perform its multiple statewide responsibilities effectively, and a majority (86%) believe the Commission is effective in the performance of those duties. The Commission staff is rated most effective in *responding timely to inquiries (3.50), displaying positive and cooperative attitudes (3.47), and being knowledgeable on higher education issues (3.43).*

A majority of respondents (65%) believe the Commission balances its advocacy for higher education equally with fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. A similar percentage of respondents (66%) rate the Commission's efforts to consistently advance higher education's strategic plan for 2018-2030 entitled, *Building Human Capital: The Educational Path to Alabama's Economic Success*, as adequately or highly effective.

Respondents were asked to rate several significant issues facing Alabama in providing higher education support. According to their responses (on a scale of 5), *teacher education and training (4.28), increasing student financial aid/ decreasing student debt (4.20), and educating people for the workforce (4.20)* are the most critical issues facing Alabama higher education.

A majority of respondents also believe that statewide higher education's political environment (65%) and higher education structure (55%) are major impediments to the Commission in providing leadership in higher education.

Alabama's system of higher education continues to face complex challenges as colleges and universities operate in rapidly-changing and highly competitive environments. The Commission has a responsibility to help these institutions overcome their challenges by being an advocate of higher education throughout Alabama and beyond.

The continuing focus of the Governor and other stakeholders on workforce development is positive for higher education, but the higher-paying and sustainable jobs of the future will require a more educated workforce with baccalaureate and graduate degrees.

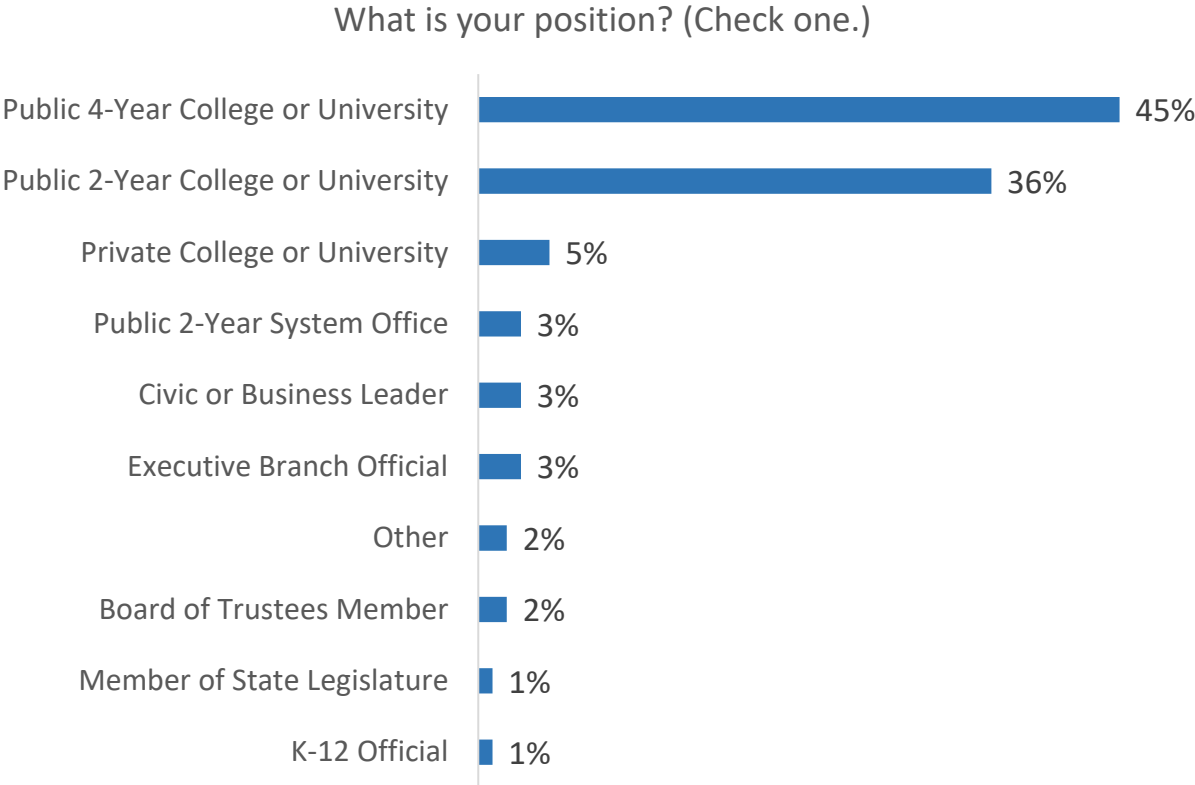
Policymakers of the past once touted the importance of being prepared for the future. The future is here as business and industry increasingly rely on new technologies that didn't exist ten, or even four years ago during the last quadrennial review. The state's system of higher education is critical to developing educated and trained workers who can respond to the demands of today's technology-driven workforce.

As stated in the 2018 evaluation, it is still vitally important that the ACHE Commission and staff continue to engage the Governor's office, Legislature, leaders in the business community, institutional leaders, and even representatives of the general public so that all are involved in developing constructive suggestions and plans for the future. Having a stake in the process may provide a greater sense of ownership of the priorities and goals of the Commission and the state.

# Survey Overview and Findings

A ten-question online survey was emailed to a diverse group of over 350 constituents with 115 respondents. Most respondents, 86 percent, were officials of public two- and four-year and private institutions, which is consistent with the response rate from the same group in 2018.

The 2022 survey uses the same questions from the 2018 survey to provide some historical context. A few comment options were added to some questions to give respondents an opportunity to elaborate on their responses. This year’s respondent group is summarized below:

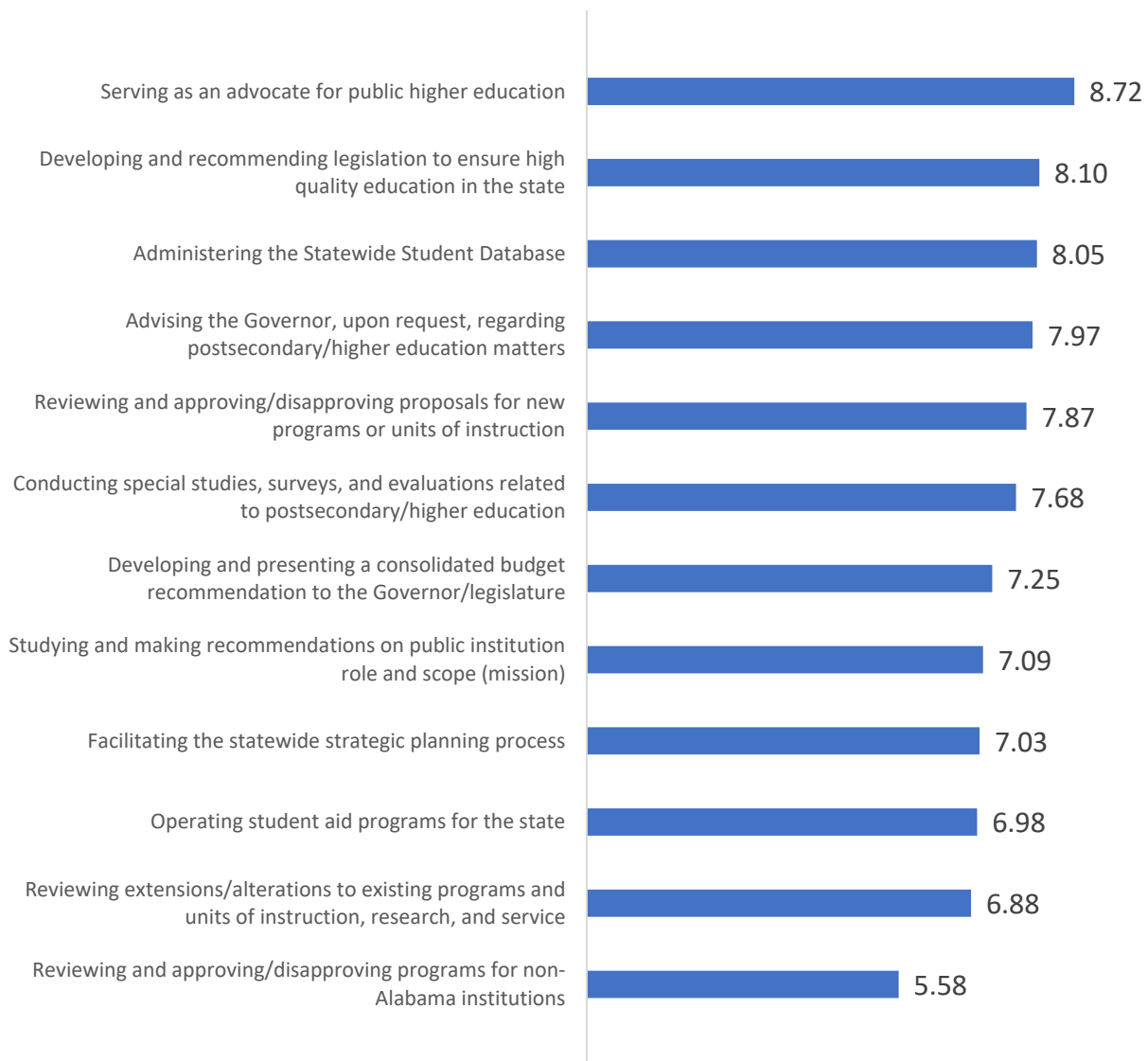




Respondents were asked to rate the *importance* of the twelve ACHE core functions. *Serving as an advocate for public higher education* was seen as the most important. *Reviewing and approving/ disapproving programs for non-Alabama institutions* was seen as the least important.

The chart below compares the ACHE responsibilities and the level of importance of each based upon those surveyed:

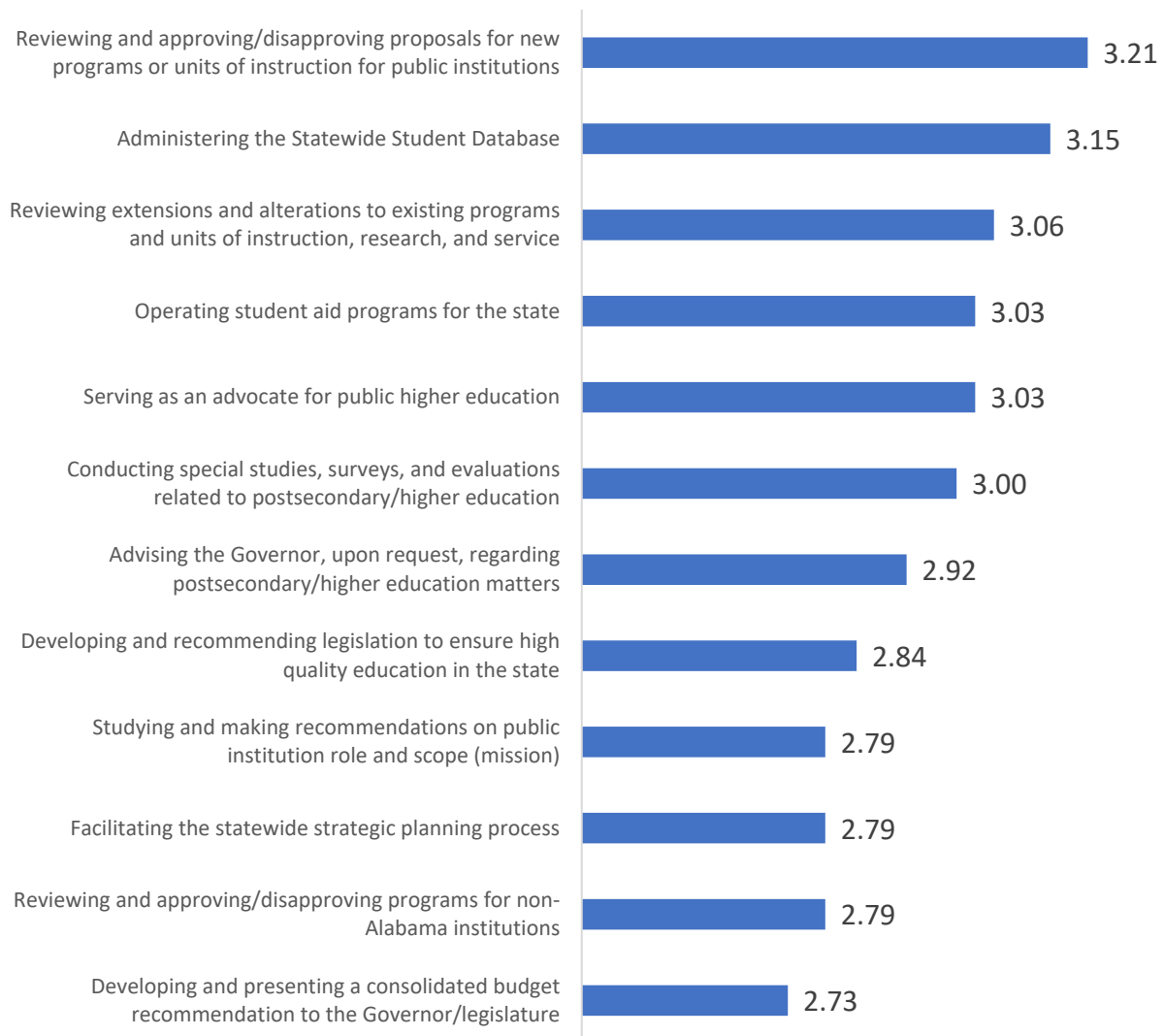
In your view, rate the importance of the following Commission responsibilities (with 10 being the most important and 1 being the least important).



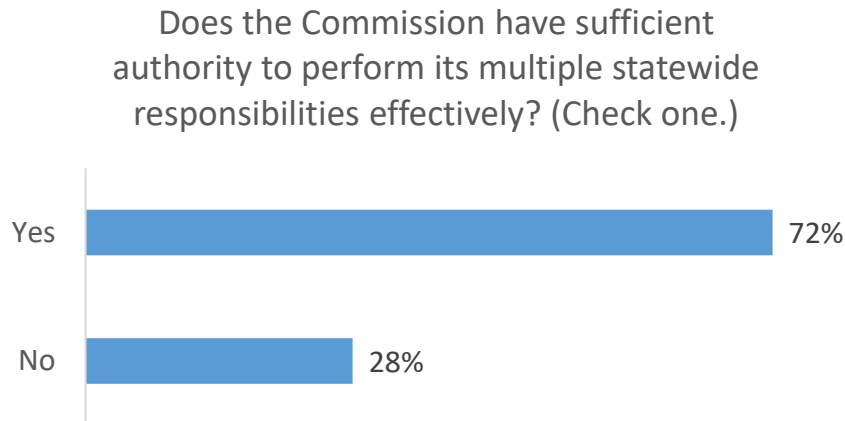
Respondents were then asked to rate the effectiveness of the same ACHE core functions from *Highly Effective* to *Not Effective* on a scale of 1-4. *Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction for public institutions* was seen as the function performed most effectively by the Commission. *Developing and presenting a consolidated budget recommendation to the Governor/legislature* was seen as the function performed least effectively.

The chart below shows the average score for each function based upon those surveyed:

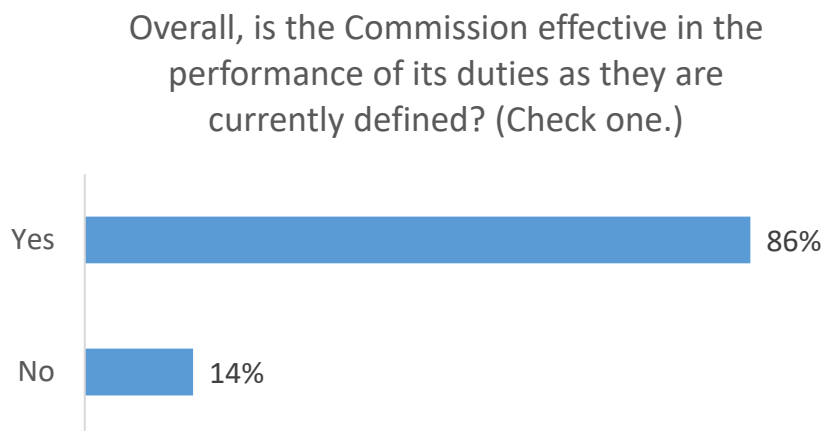
Use the list of responsibilities and scale below to indicate your assessment of the Commission's effectiveness for each function (Scale of 1 to 4).



Respondents were asked to respond *Yes*, *No*, or *No Opinion* to the question: *Does the Commission have sufficient authority to perform its multiple statewide responsibilities effectively?* A majority, 72 percent, replied *Yes*. This is a slightly higher percentage than the 71 percent reported in 2018. The chart below shows the percent of *Yes* and *No* responses:



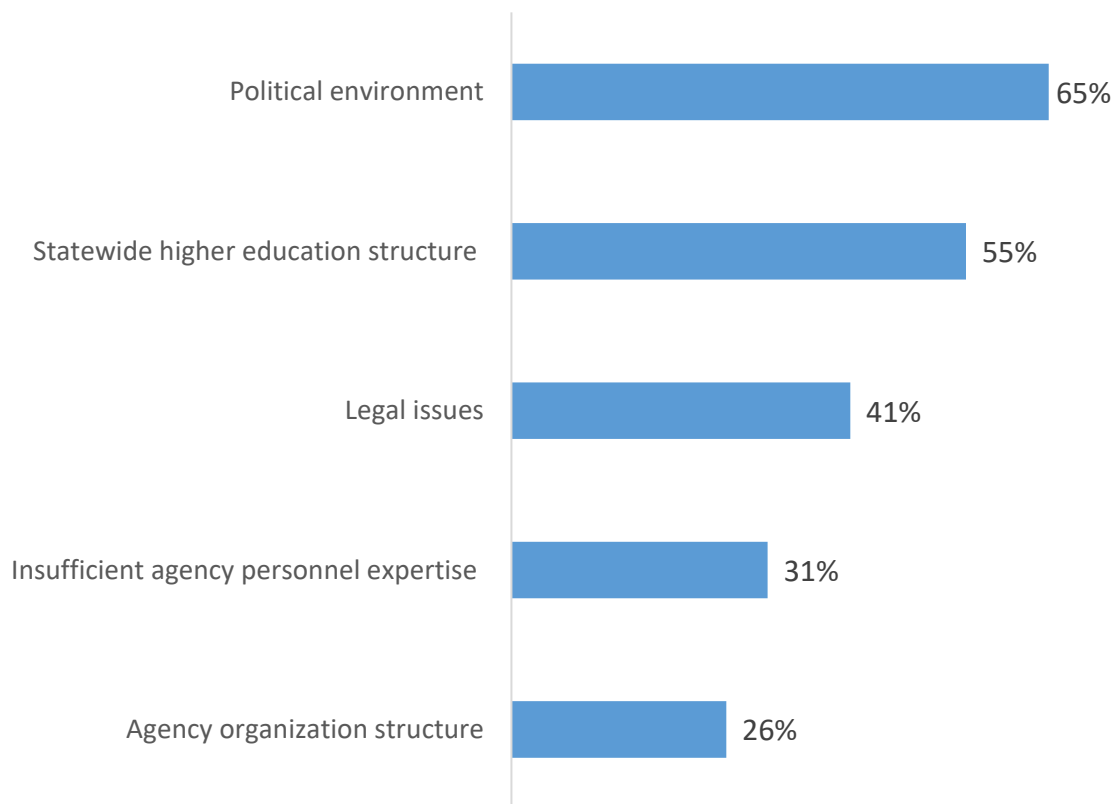
Respondents were then asked to respond *Yes*, *No*, or *No Opinion* to the question: *Overall, is the Commission effective in the performance of its duties as they are currently defined?* A majority, 86 percent, replied *Yes*. This is a higher percentage than the 81 percent reported in 2018. The chart below shows the percent of *Yes* and *No* responses:



Respondents were asked to respond *Yes*, *No* or *No Opinion* to a list of potential impediments to the ability of the Commission to provide leadership in postsecondary/higher education. *Political environment* was seen as the most significant impediment at 65 percent. *Agency organization structure* was seen as the least significant impediment at 26%. These responses closely parallel the responses from the 2018 survey.

The chart below displays the *Yes* responses to each potential impediment based upon those surveyed:

Are there impediments to the ability of the Commission to provide leadership in postsecondary/higher education?



Respondents were then asked to rate the *effectiveness* of Commission *staff* responsibilities from *Highly Effective* to *Not Effective* on a scale of 1-4. *Timely response to inquiries* and *displaying positive and cooperative attitudes* were seen as the responsibilities performed most effectively by the staff.

The chart below shows the average score for each responsibility based upon those surveyed:

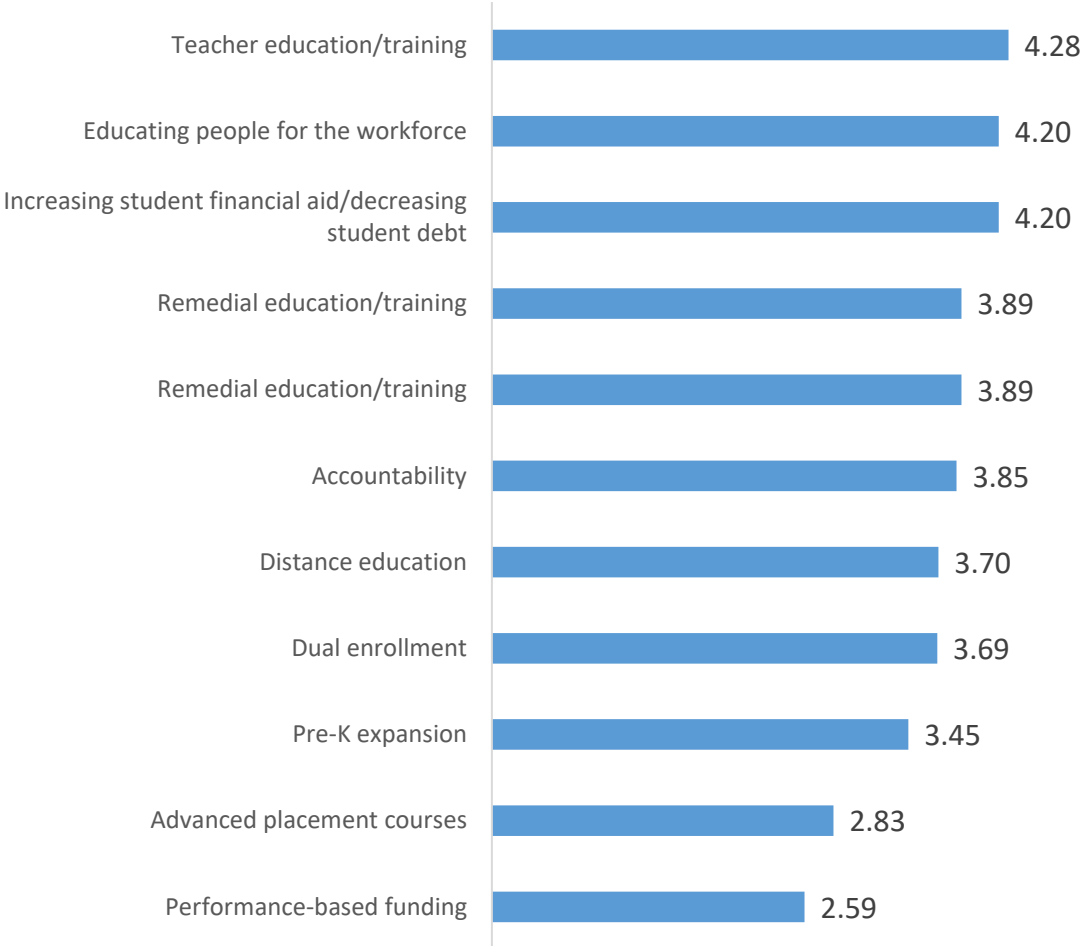
Using the scale provided, please indicate your assessment of the Commission staff's effectiveness for each of the responsibilities specified below:



Respondents were asked to rate the importance of ten significant issues facing Alabama in providing higher education support from *Critical* to *Not Very Important* on a scale of 1-5. *Teacher education/training* was seen as the most critical issue. *Performance-based funding* was seen as the least critical.

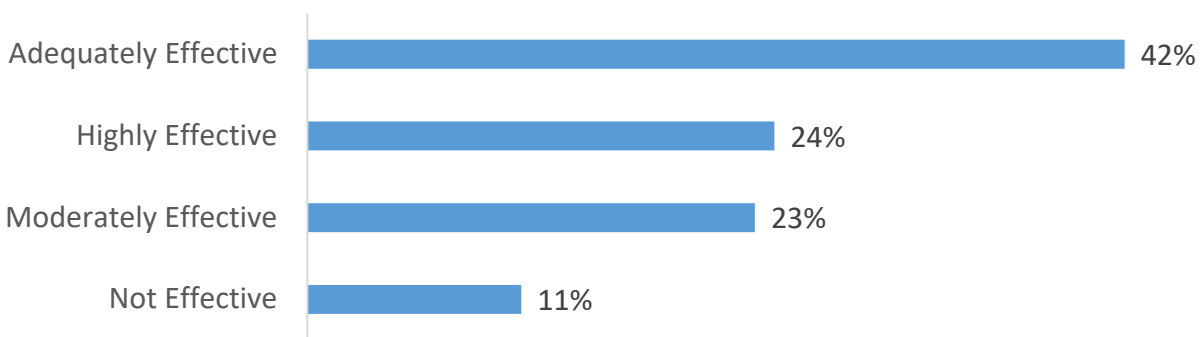
The chart below shows the average score for each issue based upon those surveyed:

There are a number of significant issues facing Alabama in providing higher education support. In your view, rate the following according to importance.



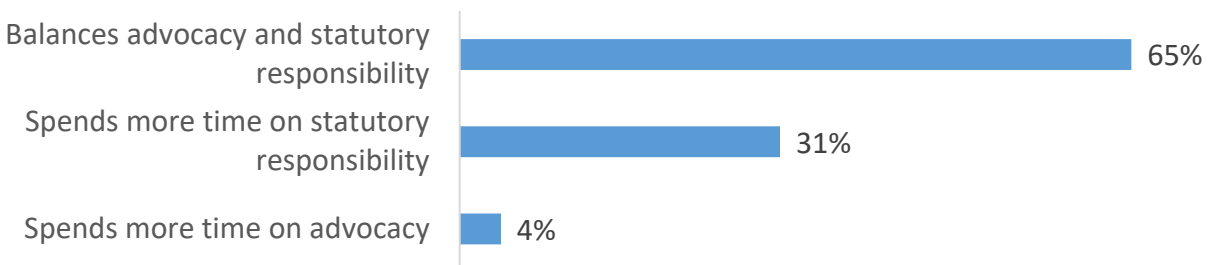
Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the Commission’s efforts to consistently advance or champion higher education’s strategic plan for 2018-2030 by selecting one response from *Highly Effective* to *Not Effective*. The majority, 42 percent, believe the Commission’s efforts are adequately effective while only 11% percent believe their efforts are not effective. The chart below shows the percentage for each level of effectiveness based on those surveyed:

How would you rate the Commissions efforts to consistently advance or champion higher education's strategic plan for 2018-2030 entitled, *Building Human Capital: The Educational Path to Alabama's Economic Success*, with all stakeholders: educational leaders



Respondents were asked if they believe the Commission spends more time on advocacy for higher education or fulfilling statutory responsibilities, or balances both equally. The majority of respondents, 65 percent, believe the Commission balances the two responsibilities. The chart below shows the percentage for each option selected based upon those surveyed.

In the performance of its duties, how well does the Commission balance its role between being an advocate for higher education and fulfilling its statutory responsibilities as the state's higher education coordinating board? (Check one.)



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the survey results mirror prior quadrennial reviews. Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) respondents feel the Commission is meeting its statutory obligations as the state's coordinating board for higher education. There was greater satisfaction with agency efforts on *Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction for public institutions* and *Administering the Statewide Student Database*. Some of this improvement could be related to the ability of the agency to develop and present a consolidated budget recommendation to the Governor/legislature.

In addition, recent emphasis by the ACHE staff to streamline ACHE's procedures, and a reduction and clarification of ACHE policy may have contributed to improved satisfaction. Advocacy by ACHE for budget increases for the colleges and universities and need-based aid and scholarships targeting the shortage of math and science teachers could also be a contributing factor.

Based on the survey results, the following measures are recommended:

- Continue focus on advocacy and coordination of higher education, including affordability and expanded student aid programs.
- Expand services to campuses including professional development.
- Continue to provide valuable data through the Statewide Student Database and work to provide even more objective analyses and reports on important measures such as enrollment, retention and graduation rates, and accountability metrics.
- Continue to coordinate with state education and non-education agencies on the development and implementation of the State Longitudinal Data System.
- Continue to investigate cost-saving measures for students, i.e., the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions and Open-Educational Resources (OER).



## Appendix A: Statistical Survey Results

Q1. What is your position? (Respondents were asked to select one response.)

	Frequency	Percent
Public 4-Year College or University	52	45.21
Public 2-Year College or University	41	35.65
Public 2-Year System Office	3	2.61
Private College or University	6	5.22
Member of Campus or System Board of Trustees	2	1.74
K-12 Official	1	0.87
Executive Branch Official	4	3.48
Civic or Business Leader	3	2.61
Member of State Legislature	1	0.87
Other	2	1.74
Total	115	100.0

Q2. In your view, rate the **importance** of the following Commission responsibilities. (Respondents were asked to rate each responsibility from 'Most important' to 'Least important' on a scale of 1-10, with 'Most important' equal to 10.)

	Frequency	Mean
1. Administering the Statewide Student Database	112	8.0536
2. Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction for public institutions	113	7.8673
3. Reviewing and approving/disapproving programs for non-Alabama institutions	112	5.5804
4. Reviewing extensions and alterations to existing programs and units of instruction, research, and service	112	6.875
5. Developing and presenting a consolidated budget recommendation to Governor/legislature	114	7.2544
6. Facilitating statewide strategic planning processes	112	7.0268
7. Serving as an advocate for public higher education	112	8.7232
8. Conducting special studies, surveys, and evaluations related to postsecondary/higher education	112	7.6786
9. Developing and recommending legislation to ensure high quality education in the state	114	8.0965
10. Advising the Governor, at her request, regarding postsecondary/higher education matters	114	7.9737
11. Studying and making recommendations on public institution role and scope (mission)	113	7.0885
12. Operating student aid programs for the state	114	6.9825

## Q2. Frequency Tables

1. Administering the Statewide Student Database (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	3	2.7
2	0	0.0
3	4	3.6
4	2	1.8
5	6	5.4
6	9	8.0
7	10	8.9
8	15	13.4
9	25	22.3
10	38	33.9
Total	112	100.0

2. Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of Instruction (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	1	0.9
2	4	3.5
3	1	0.9
4	3	2.7
5	10	8.8
6	7	6.2
7	13	11.5
8	18	15.9
9	22	19.5
10	34	30.1
Total	113	100.0

3. Reviewing and approving/disapproving programs for non-Alabama institutions (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	15	13.4
2	14	12.5
3	3	2.7
4	8	7.1
5	10	8.9
6	12	10.7
7	17	15.2
8	12	10.7
9	6	5.4
10	15	13.4
Total	112	100.0

4. Reviewing extensions and alterations to existing programs and units of instruction, research, and service (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	4	3.6
2	5	4.5
3	4	3.6
4	3	2.7
5	12	10.7
6	15	13.4
7	15	13.4
8	24	21.3
9	15	13.4
10	15	13.4
Total	112	100.0

5. Developing and presenting a consolidated budget recommendation to Governor/legislature (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	5	4.4
2	6	5.3
3	3	2.6
4	4	3.5
5	9	7.9
6	15	13.2
7	7	6.1
8	15	13.2
9	19	16.6
10	31	27.2
Total	114	100.0

6. Facilitating statewide strategic planning processes (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	6	5.4
2	3	2.7
3	7	6.3
4	2	1.8
5	7	6.3
6	14	12.5
7	14	12.5
8	22	19.5
9	17	15.1
10	20	17.9
Total	112	100.0

7. Serving as an advocate for public higher education (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1.8
2	3	2.7
3	1	0.9
4	2	1.8
5	2	1.8
6	2	1.8
7	9	8.0
8	10	8.9
9	17	15.2
10	64	57.1
Total	112	100.0

8. Conducting special studies, surveys, and evaluations related to postsecondary/higher education (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	5	4.5
2	1	0.9
3	2	1.8
4	6	5.4
5	3	2.7
6	8	7.1
7	11	9.8
8	29	25.9
9	19	16.9
10	28	25.0
Total	112	100.0

9. Developing and recommending legislation to ensure high quality education in the state (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	4	3.5
2	0	0.0
3	4	3.5
4	3	2.6
5	6	5.4
6	2	1.8
7	11	9.6
8	21	18.4
9	22	19.3
10	41	35.9
Total	114	100.0

10. Advising the Governor, at her request, regarding postsecondary/higher education matters (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	4	3.5
2	2	1.8
3	2	1.8
4	4	3.5
5	6	5.3
6	6	5.3
7	7	6.1
8	21	18.4
9	24	21.1
10	38	33.2
Total	114	100.0

11. Studying and making recommendations on public institution role and scope (mission) (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	3	2.7
2	2	1.8
3	4	3.5
4	5	4.4
5	12	10.6
6	12	10.6
7	17	15.0
8	24	21.2
9	13	11.5
10	20	18.7
Total	113	100.0

12. Operating student aid programs for the state (10 is most important and 1 is least important)

	Frequency	Percent
1	8	7.0
2	2	1.8
3	7	6.1
4	7	6.1
5	8	7.0
6	9	7.9
7	16	14.0
8	12	10.5
9	17	14.9
10	28	24.7
Total	114	100.0

Q3. Use the list of responsibilities and scale below to indicate your assessment of the Commission's **effectiveness** for each function. (Respondents were asked to rate each responsibility from 'Highly Effective' to 'Not Effective' on a scale of 1-4, with 'Highly Effective' equal to 4.)

	Frequency	Missing (No Opinion)	Mean
1. Administering the Statewide Student Database	91	25	3.15
2. Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction	97	19	3.21
3. Reviewing and approving/disapproving programs for non-Alabama institutions	61	55	2.79
4. Reviewing extensions and alterations to existing programs and units of instruction, research, and service	94	22	3.06
5. Developing and presenting a consolidated budget recommendation to Governor/legislature	92	24	2.73
6. Facilitating statewide strategic planning processes	84	32	2.79
7. Serving as an advocate for public higher education	106	10	3.03
8. Conducting special studies, surveys, and evaluations related to postsecondary/higher education	97	19	3.00
9. Developing and recommending legislation to ensure high quality education in the state	92	24	2.84
10. Advising the Governor, at her request, regarding postsecondary/higher education matters	79	37	2.92
11. Studying and making recommendations on public institution role and scope (mission)	82	34	2.79
12. Operating student aid programs for the state	73	43	3.03

### Q3. Frequency Tables

#### 1. Administering the Statewide Student Database

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	6	5.2
Moderately Effective	15	12.9
Adequately Effective	29	25.0
Highly Effective	41	35.3
Total	91	78.4
No Opinion	25	21.6
Total		100.0



2. Reviewing and approving/disapproving proposals for new programs or units of instruction

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	2	1.7
Moderately Effective	17	14.7
Adequately Effective	37	31.9
Highly Effective	41	35.3
Total	97	83.6
No Opinion	19	16.4
Total	116	100.0

3. Reviewing and approving/disapproving programs for non-Alabama institutions

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	7	6.1
Moderately Effective	14	12.1
Adequately Effective	25	21.6
Highly Effective	15	12.9
Total	61	52.6
No Opinion	55	47.4
Total	116	100.0

4. Reviewing extensions and alterations to existing programs and units of instruction, research, and service

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	3	2.6
Moderately Effective	20	17.2
Adequately Effective	39	33.6
Highly Effective	32	27.6
Total	94	81.0
No Opinion	22	19.0
Total	116	100.0

5. Developing and presenting a consolidated budget recommendation to Governor/legislature

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	13	11.2
Moderately Effective	22	19.0
Adequately Effective	34	29.3
Highly Effective	23	19.8
Total	92	79.3
No Opinion	24	20.7
Total	116	100.0

6. Facilitating statewide strategic planning processes

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	8	6.9
Moderately Effective	22	19.0
Adequately Effective	34	29.3
Highly Effective	20	17.2
Total	84	72.4
No Opinion	32	27.6
Total	116	100.0

7. Serving as an advocate for public higher education

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	8	6.9
Moderately Effective	19	16.4
Adequately Effective	41	35.3
Highly Effective	38	32.8
Total	106	91.4
No Opinion	10	8.6
Total	116	100.0

8. Conducting special studies, surveys, and evaluations related to postsecondary/higher education

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	8	6.9
Moderately Effective	18	15.5
Adequately Effective	37	31.9
Highly Effective	34	29.3
Total	97	83.6
No Opinion	19	16.4
Total	116	100.0

9. Developing and recommending legislation to ensure high quality education in the state

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	9	7.8
Moderately Effective	24	20.6
Adequately Effective	32	27.6
Highly Effective	27	23.3
Total	92	79.3
No Opinion	24	20.7
Total	116	100.0

10. Advising the Governor, at her request, regarding postsecondary/higher education matters

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	6	5.2
Moderately Effective	19	16.4
Adequately Effective	29	25.0
Highly Effective	25	21.5
Total	79	68.1
No Opinion	37	31.9
Total	116	100.0

11. Studying and making recommendations on public institution role and scope (mission)

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	11	9.5
Moderately Effective	20	17.2
Adequately Effective	26	22.4
Highly Effective	25	21.6
Total	82	70.7
No Opinion	34	29.3
Total	116	100.0

12. Operating student aid programs for the state

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	7	6.0
Moderately Effective	12	10.3
Adequately Effective	26	22.4
Highly Effective	28	24.1
Total	73	62.8
No Opinion	43	37.1
Total	116	100.0

Q4. Does the Commission have sufficient authority to perform its multiple statewide responsibilities effectively? (Respondents were asked to select one response from 'Yes,' 'No' or 'No Opinion'.)

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	55	47.4
No	21	18.1
Total	76	65.5
No Opinion	40	34.5
Total	116	100.0

Q5. Overall, is the Commission effective in the performance of its duties as they are currently defined? (Respondents were asked to select one response from 'Yes,' 'No' or 'No Opinion'.)

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	76	65.5
No	12	10.3
Total	88	75.8
No Opinion	28	24.2
Total	116	100.0

Q6. Are there impediments to the ability of the Commission to provide leadership in postsecondary/higher education? (Respondents were asked to select one response from 'Yes,' 'No' or 'No Opinion' to each impediment.)

1. Statewide higher education structure

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	43	37.1
No	35	30.2
Total	78	67.3
No opinion	38	32.7
Total	116	100.0

2. Legal issues

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	22.4
No	38	32.8
Total	64	55.2
No opinion	52	44.8
Total	116	100.0

3. Political environment

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	50	43.1
No	27	23.3
Total	77	66.4
No opinion	39	33.6
Total	116	100.0

4. Insufficient agency personnel expertise

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	17.2
No	45	38.8
Total	65	56.0
No opinion	51	44.0
Total	116	100.0

5. Agency organization structure

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	17	14.7
No	49	42.2
Total	66	56.9
No opinion	50	43.1
Total	116	100.0

Q7. Using the scale provided, please indicate your assessment of the Commission staff's effectiveness for each of the responsibilities specified below. (Respondents were asked to rate each function from 'Highly Effective' to 'Not Effective' on a scale of 1-4, with 'Highly Effective' equal to 4.)

	Frequency	Missing (No Opinion)	Mean
1. Do you find the staff to be knowledgeable on higher education issues?	98	18	3.4286
2. Does the work produced meet quality standards: accuracy, neatness, thoroughness, etc.?	100	16	3.3900
3. Is the staff responsive to inquiries in a timely manner?	94	22	3.5000
4. Do employees express ideas clearly, both orally and in writing, listen well and respond appropriately?	95	21	3.3789
5. Do you find that the staff displays positive and cooperative attitudes?	97	19	3.4742

## Q7. Frequency Tables

1. Do you find the staff to be knowledgeable on higher education issues?

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	1	0.9
Moderately Effective	11	9.5
Adequately Effective	31	26.7
Highly Effective	55	47.4
Total	98	84.5
No Opinion	18	15.5
Total	116	100.0

2. Does the work produced meet quality standards: accuracy, neatness, thoroughness, etc.?

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	3	2.6
Moderately Effective	8	6.9
Adequately Effective	36	31.0
Highly Effective	53	45.7
Total	100	86.2
No Opinion	16	13.8
Total	116	100.0

3. Is the staff responsive to inquiries in a timely manner?

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	1	0.9
Moderately Effective	10	8.6
Adequately Effective	24	20.7
Highly Effective	59	50.9
Total	94	81.1
No Opinion	22	18.9
Total	116	100.0

4. Do employees express ideas clearly, both orally and in writing, listen well and respond appropriately?

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	1	0.9
Moderately Effective	13	11.2
Adequately Effective	30	25.9
Highly Effective	51	43.9
Total	95	81.9
No Opinion	21	18.1
Total	116	100.0

5. Do you find that the staff displays positive and cooperative attitudes?

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	3	2.6
Moderately Effective	8	6.9
Adequately Effective	26	22.4
Highly Effective	60	51.7
Total	97	83.6
No Opinion	19	16.4
Total	116	100.0

- Q8. There are a number of significant issues facing Alabama in providing higher education support. In your view, rate the following according to importance. (Respondents were asked to rate each issue from 'Critical' to 'Not Very Important' on a scale of 1-5, with 'Critical' equal to 5.)

	Frequency	Missing (No Opinion)	Mean
1. Remedial education/training	108	8	3.8889
2. Pre-K expansion	103	13	3.4466
3. Distance education	109	7	3.6972
4. Advanced placement courses	102	14	2.8333
5. Dual enrollment	110	6	3.6909
6. Teacher education/training	111	5	4.2793
7. Performance-based funding	104	12	2.5865
8. Increasing student financial aid / decreasing student debt	111	5	4.1982
9. Accountability	111	5	3.8468
10. Educating people for the work force	112	4	4.1964



## Q8. Frequency Tables

### 1. Remedial education/training

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	3	2.6
Somewhat Important	8	6.9
Important	25	21.6
Very Important	34	29.3
Critical	38	32.7
Total	108	93.1
No Opinion	8	6.9
Total	116	100.0

### 2. Pre-K expansion

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	10	8.6
Somewhat Important	16	13.8
Important	23	19.8
Very Important	26	22.4
Critical	28	24.2
Total	103	88.8
No Opinion	13	11.2
Total	116	100.0

### 3. Distance education

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	1	0.9
Somewhat Important	13	11.2
Important	32	27.6
Very Important	35	30.2
Critical	28	24.1
Total	109	94.0
No Opinion	7	6.0
Total	116	100.0

#### 4. Advanced placement courses

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	13	11.2
Somewhat Important	23	19.8
Important	41	35.3
Very Important	18	15.5
Critical	7	6.1
Total	102	87.9
No Opinion	14	12.1
Total	116	100.0

#### 5. Dual enrollment

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	0	0.0
Somewhat Important	20	17.2
Important	29	25.0
Very Important	26	22.4
Critical	35	30.2
Total	110	94.8
No Opinion	6	5.2
Total	116	100.0

#### 6. Teacher education/training

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	1	0.9
Somewhat Important	2	1.7
Important	17	14.7
Very Important	36	31.0
Critical	55	47.4
Total	111	95.7
No Opinion	5	4.3
Total	116	100.0

## 7. Performance-based funding

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	27	23.3
Somewhat Important	27	23.3
Important	20	17.2
Very Important	22	19.0
Critical	8	6.9
Total	104	89.7
No Opinion	12	10.3
Total	116	100.0

## 8. Increasing student financial aid / decreasing student debt

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	1	0.9
Somewhat Important	5	4.3
Important	18	15.5
Very Important	34	29.3
Critical	53	45.7
Total	111	95.7
No Opinion	5	4.3
Total	116	100.0

## 9. Accountability

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	0	0.0
Somewhat Important	16	13.8
Important	22	19.0
Very Important	36	31.0
Critical	37	31.9
Total	111	95.7
No Opinion	5	4.3
Total	116	100.0

10. Educating people for the workforce

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Important	0	0.0
Somewhat Important	6	5.2
Important	19	16.4
Very Important	34	29.3
Critical	53	45.7
Total	112	96.6
No Opinion	4	3.4
Total	116	100.0

Q9. How would you rate the Commission’s efforts to consistently advance or champion higher education’s strategic plan for 2018-2030 entitled, *Building Human Capital: The Educational Path to Alabama’s Economic Success*, with all stakeholders: educational leaders, policymakers, the press, and the general public? (Respondents were asked to select one response from ‘Highly Effective’ to ‘Not Effective’.)

	Frequency	Percent
Not Effective	8	6.9
Moderately Effective	19	16.4
Adequately Effective	35	30.2
Highly Effective	20	17.2
Total	82	70.7
No Opinion	34	29.3
Total	116	100.0

Q10. In the performance of its duties, how well does the Commission balance its role between being an advocate for higher education and fulfilling its statutory responsibilities as the state’s higher education coordinating board? (Respondents were asked to check one response.)

	Frequency	Percent
Spends more time on advocacy	3	2.6
Balances advocacy and statutory responsibilities	54	46.6
Spends more time on statutory responsibilities	26	22.4
Total	83	71.6
No Opinion	33	28.4
Total	116	100.0

## Appendix B: Summary of Recommendations from Past Quadrennial Reviews

### ACHE Recommendations, 2022

Based on the survey results, the following measures are recommended:

- Continue focus on advocacy and coordination of higher education, including affordability and expanded student aid programs.
- Expand services to campuses including professional development.
- Continue to provide valuable data through the Statewide Student Database and work to provide even more objective analyses and reports on important measures such as enrollment, retention and graduation rates, and accountability metrics.
- Continue to coordinate with state education and non-education agencies on the development and implementation of the State Longitudinal Data System.
- Continue to investigate cost-saving measures for students, i.e., the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions and Open-Educational Resources (OER).

### ACHE Recommendations, 2018

1. If ACHE and the state choose Model 1, the ACHE Commission and staff should carefully review past recommendations and those offered here to select only those that they believe add value and do not face significant barriers to implementation. Those few goals should be memorialized in a formal document with specific outcome expectations, and the Commission should review progress on those commitments at every meeting.
2. The issues that cause us to propose statutory revisions in Model 2 are systemic. They are not the fault of any individual or organization. If ACHE and the state choose to pursue Model 2, the appropriate process would rely heavily on discussions that include representatives of all the key stakeholders and on the expertise and best judgment of the ACHE staff.
3. If the statute is revised, we suggest that it not be done piecemeal, and that adequate time for deliberation and consultation be set aside to prepare the revisions.

4. We strongly recommend that any revisions in ACHE duties confirm the fundamental premise that there will be no reductions in staff size and that existing staff will have opportunities to re-tool if/as needed. Alabama higher education needs what this staff can provide, and their experience and relationships in the system are invaluable.

## **ACHE Recommendations, 2014**

The evaluation committee was fortunate to benefit from a total of 55 interviews both in person and by telephone. The following recommendations are based on many diverse views and incorporate the results of the survey and written materials, and the evaluation committee's experience in both Alabama and a number of other states.

The evaluation committee offers two sets of recommendations from which the ACHE Commission and staff might pursue either one or elements of both. The first, Model 1, is a continuation of the ongoing quadrennial evaluation series, offering suggestions for improvement. The second set of recommendations, Model 2, proposes reconsidering the statutory expectations of ACHE to enable ACHE to contribute more to the state's key priorities today and in the future. We suggest that the ACHE Commission and staff consider this report as input to a thoughtful, consultative process to determine which of these several recommendations, whether from Model 1, Model 2, or both, make most sense.

### **Model 1: Improve Current Functioning**

Many of the conclusions and recommendations that arise from this year's evaluation have already been made in the 1999, 2006, and 2010 evaluations. These prior recommendations are summarized in Appendix E. Discussion among ACHE staff and Commissioners could identify those on which the time, need, and resources are right for further progress. The evaluation committee identifies 18 recommendations below from 2006 and 2010 that still resonate with the committee and with the interview and survey participants, some on which progress recently has been achieved, as noted above.

In addition, we offer the following recommendations for improvement based on our observations and gathered in interviews for this, the 2014 evaluation.

## Regarding the Commissioners:

1. All Commissioners would benefit from an orientation to the Alabama statute, responsibilities of coordinating boards, state and national policy in higher education, strategic higher education issues, and the like. ACHE's orientation is directed at new members, but there is so much to learn that all Commissioners would benefit from ongoing orientation and education.
2. The Commission's meeting frequency and duration is currently light enough to expand the time that is occasionally devoted to "discussion items," making strategic policy discussions an occurrence at every meeting. At the beginning of each Commission meeting, a president, elected leader, or ACHE senior staff member could be asked to make a brief presentation on a critical education policy issue facing Alabama, while ensuring that a majority of the time is left for a strategic conversation among Commissioners around the issue presented. Individual Commissioners could volunteer to lead a discussion on a topic of interest.
3. Issues worthy of strategic discussion include, but are no means limited to: reciprocity in distance education, college completion, minority achievement gaps, college affordability, adult education, and employability of graduates. This would likely entail longer Commission meetings, but it would be time well spent and demonstrate a visible commitment to fulfill responsibilities to the citizens of Alabama. Overall, more compelling quarterly agendas that engage Commissioners on issues of policy will help inform those policies and advance the stature and effectiveness of ACHE.
4. Having an annual or biennial retreat would enable the Commission to discuss and evaluate major priorities both for the Commission and for higher education.
5. Many boards find it helpful to put their own best practices in writing in the form of a short handbook for members that includes key documents such as the statute, but also describes expectations for communication, processes for decisions, and the like. It is particularly important, for example, and as prescribed in the ACHE statute, that Commissioners represent the interests of the entire state and refrain from representing single institutional interests, or falling prey to institutional lobbying or interests before the Commission. A sample "Statement of Expectations" is included in Appendix B.
6. Commissioners with appropriate connections should assist the executive director in relations with the legislature and the business community.

Regarding the responsibilities of ACHE:

1. There is great concern regarding the quality of out-of-state providers in Alabama (both those that wish to establish a presence in the state and those that wish to provide distance education) and some expectation that ACHE do more to prevent problems. ACHE only reviews proposed programs for non-resident institutions and is not the licensing agency (that is the responsibility of the Department of Postsecondary Education) so ACHE may already be doing as much as it can. If concern is great, however, ACHE could consider taking a very proactive consumer protection role – for example, by providing information to the public regarding sources of comparative information about institutional variables such as job placement, net cost, graduates' debt, and retention/graduation rates.
2. The Statewide Data Base is a gold mine with much greater value than is currently extracted. ACHE provides a good deal of data on its web site, and has done several longitudinal studies on various topics. The database is used to create annual Institutional Student Profiles that show important measures such as enrollment, retention, graduation rates and numbers. Along with using the data to support regional and statewide economic development efforts, the Profiles are another good example of the kinds of information that can be of value to policy makers and decision makers. Still more could be done in the way of statistics, trend lines, comparative, or interpretive information that would be very helpful to policy makers and decision makers. Furthermore, others are unable to access the data to prepare their own reports. Interinstitutional politics and fear of misunderstanding and misuse may account for some of this serious loss of value from one of the few student unit record data bases in the country. Credible, objective analyses and reports on issues of state higher education policy regarding institutions, citizens, and the economy would be invaluable input to important decisions by institution leaders and state policy makers. To provide this critical service, ACHE requires additional staff expertise and capacity, as well as a compelling mandate.
3. ACHE's strategic planning process for the new state plan (2015-2020) should build on the 2009-2014 State Plan for Higher Education by again focusing on major educational policy issues that colleges, universities, and ACHE collectively can and should address. In concurrence with earlier quadrennial reviews that encouraged ACHE to focus less on institutional needs and more on the future of Alabama, the 2009-2014 plan was a good start on forming alliances to address educational needs and deficits in the state, and the goals within its five priorities should be a starting point to discuss the inclusion of possible additional goals. As noted earlier, respondents to the electronic survey were largely supportive of the number of priorities and their focus.



As ACHE's executive director has stated, the 2009-2014 plan is a benchmark for future action. In that regard, several of the priorities and goals of the 2009-2014 plan and succeeding plans ought to be consistent from one planning cycle to the next, so that in essence, a longer-term "public agenda" for collective action is created. The new plan should have explicit performance measures to assess progress; measures on which institution leaders might be asked to report progress at Commission meetings, and ones that can be used again in future planning cycles. The new plan should also selectively build on and attempt to inform institutional and system strategic plans, including the Alabama Community College System.

It is also vitally important that ACHE continue to engage the Governor's office, Legislature, business leaders, chancellors, presidents, and representatives of the general citizenry (perhaps through focus groups or town meetings) so that they are involved directly in the planning process and thereby demonstrate a far greater commitment to the priorities and goals of the plan once they are determined. Involving these stakeholders directly, was strongly communicated in the survey results.

## Model 2: Restructure and Reinvigorate ACHE's Foundation

Despite changing conditions and personnel, ACHE has not been able to make significant progress on important recommendations of past quadrennial evaluations such as engaging in policy leadership, increasing its focus on improving Alabama's educational access and attainment rates, and de-emphasizing its regulatory role (see Appendix E).

Lack of progress is not, we believe, attributable to lack of expertise, agreement, or effort on the part of ACHE staff. Indeed, we agree with one survey respondent who said that the staff is the best part of ACHE. As implied in previous evaluations and substantiated by the barriers noted in survey responses, we see the issues as systemic, not personal. An array of structural, political, historic, and economic factors exists that, in effect, hold the future of Alabama higher education in limbo, unable to leverage its considerable capacity toward maximum benefit for the people and businesses of Alabama.

At the same time, the world of higher education has changed dramatically since ACHE's establishment in 1969 and even since the statutory revisions of the 1990s. ACHE is attending to one dimension of such change in its work on out-of-state institutions offering courses and programs in Alabama (and Alabama institutions extending their instructional services outside the state). Another change is the extent to which the economic future of the country and each state depends upon major increases in the education level of the population. That in turn requires educators at all levels to rethink many of their core assumptions and practices and to find new ways to increase the likelihood of each student's

success even as poverty, language, and other barriers make it more difficult for them.

Another change with significant, pervasive impact on ACHE as it currently operates is the nature of competition in higher education. Whereas geographic service areas once helped contain competition, the advent and growth of distance delivery have all but eliminated geography as a relevant consideration. While institutions may well be charged with addressing their region's mission-related educational needs, to hinder their efforts to reach out is to put them at a disadvantage relative to all other institutions that are not subject to Alabama state-level restrictions. One way to deal with excess impact by out-of-state providers is for Alabama institutions to proactively corner those markets without state-level regulation.

Relatedly, we subscribe to the view that market dynamics and institutional business models address program duplication better than a priori regulation. If duplicating another institution's program does not yield the expected return, the institution should close it. Participants attest that ACHE's new program review process often results in a better offering, but ACHE's approval is not required for an institution to launch a new program if the Legislature disagrees. Therefore, we recommend that ACHE significantly relax or eliminate its role in approving new programs but strengthen its focus on reviewing the effectiveness and productivity of existing programs.

We recognize that this perspective is much different from that of many people we interviewed, some saying that without ACHE all would be chaos. It also differs from the survey finding that new program review is ACHE's most important function. We suggested our different stance in the 2010 recommendations. Now we are persuaded that the ongoing scarcity of resources and the growing need to leverage higher education for all Alabamians make a compelling case for major changes to enable directing resources and attention to activities and initiatives where ACHE can make a significant difference.

Finally, we are concerned that Alabama's extraordinarily high levels of institutional isolation and competition harm both the state and the institutions. A wise management philosopher suggested long ago that when leaders are in a tough spot their best course of action is to expand their definition of who's on their team. The primary competitor of a public Alabama university is no longer (if it ever was) another public or private Alabama university. In fact, leading strategists today recommend focusing intently on the people you serve and how you serve them without regard to other service providers.

Whatever its benefits, competition inhibits institutions from collaborating to pursue academic and administrative cost savings. Collaboration allows everyone to tamp down their tuition increases while often times delivering higher quality programs. We asked many of our interviewees if there are any unifying themes or issues that transcend individual institutions and would help bring the leadership together, such as a focus on student success. Most were stumped. This is very unfortunate for the institutions, the students, and the state. The significant state issues reviewed earlier in this report require collaborative attention. ACHE can help convene and support such efforts if its charter limits or removes its regulatory duties.

We suggest that it is time for state leaders to consider a very different approach, one that can be more effective and efficient. We recommend that the Commission and relevant policy makers consider designing a process through which these key leaders can evaluate and revise the current statute, which has not had a comprehensive review in over 40 years.

It is not our intent to increase ACHE's authority. Rather, the outcome of such a process would be an updating of ACHE's responsibilities, an increase in ACHE's flexibility to address new priorities, and thereby, an increase in ACHE's effectiveness.

The statutory review and revision process should:

1. Ensure that any legislatively mandated functions for ACHE continue to add significant value to higher education and the state.
2. Enable ACHE to provide meaningful data and information to inform decisions by policy makers and educational leaders.
3. Recognize and support ACHE's state planning efforts to identify and clarify the major policy issues relative to higher education and the future of the state.
4. Leverage the shared priorities and capabilities of postsecondary institutions toward results and addressing state priority issues that will benefit all.
5. Minimize unproductive inter-institutional competition, seeking strategies that will grow the state and therefore potential funding together rather than compete for each slice of the pie.
6. Clarify ACHE's mandate to educate the general public, institutions, and the policymaker community at large on the value of postsecondary education and how Alabama is doing on key performance indicators and outcomes.

We believe that the above suggested goals will help ensure that the respect and stature that accrue to ACHE are based not only on the quality of the advice and policy analysis it provides, but also on its state policy leadership. As input to this process, we offer specific suggestions below to those statutory

provisions contained in the authorizing statute for ACHE that we feel need to be re-examined. Some suggestions are repeated from Model 1. Many pertinent or critically important statutory provisions are still necessary, but may need to be updated to reflect changed conditions or recent activity, and are so noted. Some provisions should be fully retained as originally passed into law—hearing applications for changes in classification of role and scope, managing the statewide articulation agreement and administering student aid programs, are three examples—and we offer no comments on them. ACHE staff and Commissioners may see additional provisions that require review or updating. We are confident that a number of thoughtful individuals will have valuable ideas for examining and evaluating ACHE’s responsibilities.

### Evaluation Committee Suggestions for Statutory Reconsideration

The relevant sections of the code are noted. Appendix F contains the Code of Alabama 1975, Chapter 16, Section 5 of the Code of Alabama 1975, pertaining to the ACHE.

***Commissioner qualifications (16-5-2):*** To ensure that each Commission member accepts and fulfills the current statutory expectations, it should be required that ACHE staff provide a member orientation, and on-going education and development opportunities for Commission members. It should also be required that the Commission develop a list of selection criteria and qualifications to recommend to the Governor and members of the Senate for future appointments, and to update the list periodically. Examples of Commission member criteria and qualifications to consider, include:

1. Integrity, with a code of personal honor and ethics above reproach.
2. Independence from outside influence.
3. An inquiring mind and an ability to speak it articulately and succinctly.
4. Ability to challenge, support and motivate the staff and executive leadership.
5. An orientation to the future with an appreciation of higher education’s heritage (and that of each university or college in the system).
6. The capability and willingness to function as a member of a diverse group in an atmosphere of collegiality and selflessness.
7. An appreciation of the public nature of the position and the agency, including the open process of decision-making and service.
8. Valid knowledge and experience that can bear on college or university problems, opportunities, and deliberations.
9. An understanding of the Commission’s role in state policy formulation, strategic advice, and oversight.
10. A proven record of contribution with one or more appropriate organizations.
11. Commitment to education.

12. An understanding and acceptance of the mission of all state institutions, and an understanding of the role of each within the broader higher-education system of the state.
13. A willingness to commit the time and energy necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of a Commission member.
14. Willingness to forego, while a Commission member, any partisan political activity that could be disruptive or harmful to the agency or the Commission.
15. The capability to provide nine [six] years of constructive and productive service.
16. Overriding loyalty to the state and to the public interest rather than to any region or constituency.

***Commission terms of office (16-5-3):*** ACHE Commissioners serve nine-year terms. The average term of office on other coordinating boards is 5.5 years. Six-year terms could be more realistic and attractive to candidates for the position. Also, consideration should be given as to whether members should be eligible for a second term.

***ACHE executive director's appointment requiring senate confirmation (16-5-4):*** The executive director should report to the Commission; the needed concurrence of the Senate should be deleted.

The executive director should have one boss, the 12 members of the Commission, who select, evaluate, and compensate him or her. The evaluation committee has seen too many state higher education agencies that have compromised the independence of the Commission or executive staff, most often by requiring Governor's approval of the executive director's appointment. State agencies for higher education are most effective if there is a strong working relationship between the agency chief executive and the Commission that is built on trust, candor, integrity, and effectiveness, and not confused by dual loyalties, dual reporting or lack of independence.

***Regarding current language to "analyze and evaluate education needs with advisory groups including a Council of Presidents" (16-5-5):*** Revisions should be considered to broaden the scope and focus on state policy rather than institutional programs. We feel that the statutory language is too narrow and that the added language will be more in keeping with the envisioned role of ACHE. Indeed, ACHE appears most effective now when its leadership provides policy information and options—witness the popularity of regional workforce discussions hosted by ACHE's executive director, supplemented by pertinent data presented in readable brochures targeted at the region.

*Making the **Council of Presidents** optional (16-5-5):* The council meets only once a year, often with surrogates instead of presidents. If the presidents and ACHE leadership desire to meet at key times to discuss critical state policy issues, scheduling meetings to do so on an “as-needed” basis may make more sense and be more productive than a single, yearly meeting that is sporadically attended. Opportunities for the presidents and ACHE leadership to meet are also possible in conjunction with other ACHE meetings, such as a statewide trustee conference discussed below.

***Advising the Governor and Legislature on state and capital funding** (16-5-6):* A more policy oriented description should be written that is directed at the Commission members’ collective role and responsibility to advise the Governor and Legislature to help ensure that state funds are used to pursue the best interests of the state through higher education.

*Regarding the current provision **on statewide long-range planning for postsecondary education** (16-5-6):* The provision on long-range planning should be revised to say something like: “establish a strategic state plan for the next five-year period focusing on the major statewide policy issues facing Alabama and its postsecondary education system.” ACHE should be charged with facilitating a collaborative process to define the top few priorities for Alabama higher education, with incentives for institutions to help achieve the priorities.

Although much needs to be done to ensure a collaborative process and the engagement of top state and institutional leaders, especially as a new five-year plan is about to commence, this change more accurately recognizes how ACHE’s planning process is evolving from master planning to strategic planning, especially as ACHE continues to shift the plan’s focus from largely internal institutional issues to broader statewide issues that colleges and universities can help address. As noted under Model 1, alignment with institutional and system plans is desired in ACHE’s plan, but institutional planning should in no way drive the ACHE planning process, nor should ACHE’s plan be a summation of institutional plans. ACHE’s plan should seek to inform institutional planning and focus on intended results.

*A suggested provision on **incentive and performance funding** (16-5-6):* Over 50 percent of survey respondents think that incorporating performance based funding elements that are agreed to by colleges and universities, should be part of seeking necessary funds for higher education. We assume that any allocation for performance would be a relatively small proportion of the total budget. We suggest that ACHE provide support for the process, but we are careful not to propose usurping legislative prerogative on the allocation of state monies. The Legislature would determine priorities, preferably in consultation with institutions and ACHE, and the Legislature would determine the amount of money for distribution. In addition, we recommend a small amount of money on

the margins to incentivize institutions to implement and make progress on the goals of the state plan for higher education in order to make the plan more compelling and relevant. ACHE would distribute these funds in a manner it sees best, and not in excess of a certain predetermined amount or percentage of the annual appropriation for postsecondary education.

*Regarding the provision on the **student unit record system** (16-5-7):* The provision should be retained and the emphasis on a student unit record system to aid decisions and recommendations by all Alabama policy makers should be expanded and developed further, but making the data more accessible to analysts and providing data-informed reports for decisions and policies are top priority recommendations, whether the statute is revised or not. The recommendation under Model 1 regarding the Statewide Data Base is applicable here, as well.

*Regarding the provision to “design and establish a college/university information system, **including a faculty unit record system capable of analyzing faculty workloads**” (16-5-7):* This requirement for a faculty unit record system could be deleted due to scarce resources and higher priorities.

*Regarding ACHE involvement with **new program proposals, program viability, and off-campus program delivery** (16-5-8):* Protecting geographic turf and controlling program duplication no longer make sense; they handicap Alabama’s public institutions from pursuing local or distant service opportunities for Alabama citizens, given that any institution from anywhere has the potential to be a local competitor. Establishing ACHE as a gateway for institutional and program development (a) sets ACHE up for failure, since governing boards and the Legislature can overrule ACHE decisions (already, the two constitutional boards may not require ACHE approval), b) sets ACHE up as a potential adversary of the institutions rather than a colleague in the effort to advance higher education in service to the state, and (c) diverts significant Commission and staff time and effort away from more worthwhile functions including policy analysis, data and information services, and focusing attention and efforts on major state initiatives to improve access, quality, and productivity.

We recommend revising the statutory language to either delete ACHE review of new undergraduate programs and units, or revise the process so that it reduces and relaxes the processing time from a proposal to approval and requires less staff time. Also, the provision to authorize and regulate off-campus offerings should be deleted. Primary responsibility for these decisions should be left to governing boards and accreditors. ACHE program involvement should focus on assessing the ongoing cost-benefit and viability of small programs and tools ACHE could use to encourage or require their elimination when warranted.

*Requiring ACHE to “receive, evaluate and coordinate **budget requests for the public institutions** ... hold open hearings ... present a single unified budget report ...” (16-5-9):* We suggest leaving decisions on operating and capital budget requests to the governing boards, Governor, and Legislature unless or until such time as ACHE can provide a service that will add value to the process.

*Serve as the state agency for the administration of those titles of the **Higher Education Act of 1965** ... (16-5-10):* This provision should be retained and updated or revised as necessary.

*Regarding provision to authorize and regulate **instructional programs or units offered by non-Alabama institutions** of postsecondary education (16-5-10):* Depending on the recommendations by the appointed committee on whether Alabama should join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) and resulting legislation, as a result of Executive Order #48, this language may have to be updated. Alabama is one of several states wrestling with the issue of reciprocity. Regardless of the outcome of the committee’s deliberations, we feel that enhancing ACHE’s ability to ensure quality and value and provide useful consumer information will be of significant benefit and ensure that ACHE continues to play an important role with out-of-state distance education providers, as well as for those providers who wish to establish a physical presence in the state.

*Suggestion to delete ACHE’s responsibility for viewing and **coordinating budget requests** (16-5-9) and **facilities master plans** (16-5-15):* The evaluation committee heard repeatedly that the Unified Budget Request (now called the Consolidated Budget Request) is an exercise that is time consuming for both ACHE staff and institutional staff and not used by legislative fiscal staff or the Governor’s staff. The same holds for the ACHE review of capital budget requests for facilities that emanate from institutions’ master plans. ACHE could continue to provide state fiscal staff with benchmarks that show credible funding comparisons from previous years’ levels or those of peer institutions.

*Regarding the provision for “such **surveys and evaluations** of higher education as are believed necessary and “conduct a program of **public information**” (16-5-10):* The first provision should be retained and revised or updated as needed. It relates to the second provision, where language should be added specifically to charge ACHE with designing and delivering policy-oriented reports on a regular basis, to include an annual or biennial “report card” on how the state is performing on key indicators such as education level of the population (attainment), proportion of low-income students enrolled (access), retention and graduation rates (student success), and research activity.



This broad authority could be useful to the ACHE planning process and could include any needed or legislatively desired surveys of the faculty, as well as other critical institutional information or data that can inform state higher education policy. ACHE's annual Institutional Student Profiles, which emanate from ACHE's student database, provide important data (both institutional and aggregated statewide) on enrollment, retention, and completion. For an annual or biennial report card, the Profiles could be supplemented by performance measures for the priorities and goals of the five-year state plans for higher education (such as the number of degrees in STEM fields), and by other data such as research activity and degree attainment of the state's population (which can be attained from primary sources such as the National Science Foundation and the U. S Census).

The purpose of any assessment should be to improve future performance, and what appears lacking in ACHE's annual Profiles is trend data and analysis that compares one year to the next and change or progress over multiple years. A report card should have this comparative data and analysis. It should be stressed that a report card should be primarily an assessment of the state and not individual institutions, although individual institutions could still be identified in the report card if and when necessary, as they are in the current Institutional Student Profiles. Alternative approaches to a report card are also possible. Similar to the areas assessed in *Measuring Up*, the National Report Card on Higher Education from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education that was issued from 2000 to 2008, the questions are:

- Are Alabama students ready for college-level learning and a high skill workforce?
- Are Alabama students progressing through the education pipeline from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to a college degree or postsecondary certificate?
- Are they completing high school ready for college-level learning, entering college, and persisting to graduation?
- Are Alabama students completing certificates and degrees, especially in areas critical to the state's and each region's economies?
- Is the state's investment in R&D linked to the future competitiveness of the state and each of its regions?
- Is college affordable for all Alabamians in relationship to their ability to pay?

Interestingly, and as noted in the 2006 report of the eighth quadrennial review committee, the State Plan for Higher Education 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 placed the state's performance in a national context using the data generated about Alabama for *Measuring Up 2004*.

**Quadrennial Committee to evaluate the Commission (16-5-12):** We recommend that the Commission be encouraged to evaluate itself annually, in addition to the quadrennial evaluation and the annual report to the Governor and Legislature.

The annual written report to the Legislature and the Governor on the activities of the Commission and the state of higher education, combined with the quadrennial review, provide a substantive examination of the work and performance of ACHE. Effective boards and commissions also evaluate their own performance annually. A comprehensive self-evaluation (facilitated by a neutral third-party at a Commission retreat) would enable Commissioners to understand and address much more thoroughly their strengths and weaknesses as a collective body. Therefore, the evaluation team suggests that language be added that encourages, but does not mandate, a self-evaluation. Periodic self-evaluations could also happen without any change in the Code.

***ACHE's relationship to governing boards (16-5-13):*** The evaluation committee suggests that ACHE be charged with hosting an annual or biennial statewide conference for the state's college and university trustees. Fourteen state coordinating agencies are conducting such conferences (trustees of private colleges and universities in Arkansas, Kentucky and Missouri are invited to join their public board member counterparts) and they are particularly beneficial in states with multiple governing boards where topics like board responsibilities, the state fiscal and budget outlook, and state education policy issues are examined and discussed. ACHE has hosted occasional trustee conferences in past years and compelling issues in the state call for an annual or biennial conference that can be a forum for communication and interaction among ACHE Commissioners, presidents, chancellors, and the college and university trustees.

***Requiring ACHE to review the master plans of each institution and shall make known any concerns and/or recommendations (16-5-15):*** We suggest leaving decisions on facilities and master plans to the governing boards unless or until such time as ACHE can provide a service that will add value to the process.

***Regarding the provision creating a steering committee on college participation (16-5-30):*** This could be modified to charge ACHE with conducting an annual forum, meeting, or conference on participation, retention, and completion that would be advised by a broad-based advisory committee selected by the Commission. The event could be held separately or in conjunction with another ACHE conference.

***Enter into a contract with a state educational institution to establish a Postsecondary Education Communication Center to operate a statewide computer network and to perform the functions prescribed in this section (16-5-32):*** This provision should be revised, deleted or updated as necessary.

## ACHE Recommendations 2010

1. Raising and informing issues in reports and other communications for debate, discussion, and action by policy makers, educators, and the public.
2. ACHE's most powerful potential role is to provide information as an advocate for a well- educated citizenry and workforce for Alabama—to elucidate problems for those with the means to pursue solutions.
3. ACHE could be more involved with these matters by reallocating resources from some of the more time-consuming and less valuable activities, and by identifying simpler, more straightforward and possibly less regulatory approaches.
4. The State Plan for higher education, Forging Strategic Alliances: 2009-2014, should be the guide for much of ACHE's work in statewide policy leadership and in encouraging statewide policy discussions.
5. The focus of the State Plan for higher education on overall state educational achievement is admirable. But ACHE should clarify higher and postsecondary's expectations and responsibilities for achieving the Plan's priorities and goals.
6. Using the statewide student database, ACHE should produce more on statewide or regional education issues that illuminate policy debates and options and strategic issues for the legislature and Governor.
7. ACHE should also seek to overcome resistance and expand collection of course-level data, which is needed to help learn how to improve student retention, streamline the education process, analyze opportunities for collaboration, and other meaningful purposes.
8. ACHE should consider retaining new program review only for the purpose of ensuring academic quality, adherence to academic mission, and, where relevant, the state's need for graduates in that field. Program duplication has all but disappeared as a rational criterion for program review in most states; the time has come to reconsider it in Alabama.
9. The ACHE process of building a consolidated budget recommendation appears to be a worthwhile process but may be unnecessarily cumbersome. The time required to crunch the numbers should be the minimum necessary to provide credible benchmarks.
10. The mandated ACHE capital funding request and annual updates to the facilities master plan appear to be meaningless exercises without state capital support and should be discontinued.
11. ACHE should consider seeking the blessings of the Governor and legislature to create a broad institutional-based study group to develop and recommend a strong, fair, and equitable funding formula (or financing plan) that would be used to build the consolidated budget recommendation and fund institutions.
12. ACHE should be a stronger voice for affordability and expanded student aid programs. Going forward, using its research capacity, ACHE should bring visibility to institutional and state policymakers on the affordability problem, including comparable data with other southern states.
13. ACHE should devise a strategy to revitalize the Council of Presidents through fewer meetings but more compelling agendas.

14. ACHE should host an annual or biannual Governor's Conference for the board members of all public and private institutions.
15. Commission meetings should devote sufficient time, if not a majority of time, to assessing progress on the State Plan for Higher Education.
16. Alabama's new Governor should create a PK-20 Council by executive order, or propose legislation to do so.
17. The Governor should consider allowing the executive director of the Commission to sit with the Governor's cabinet. This should not be as the Governor's appointee member of the cabinet, however, but as the head of an important agency.
18. ACHE should be formally included on, and participate in, the State Workforce Planning Council.
19. To ensure high caliber individuals on the Commission as vacancies occur, a statement of desirable qualifications and Commission member responsibilities should be developed by the Commission as a guide to the Governor and other elected leaders when making appointments.
20. The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House need to make appointments to the ACHE Commission in a timely manner when vacancies occur. Doing so will ensure a vital Commission and agency and continuity for policy decision making.

## **ACHE Recommendations, 2006**

### 2006 Recommendations to the Governor:

- Appoint a blue-ribbon commission for P-20.
- Establish an Education Cabinet, chaired by the Governor.
- Convene annual conference on college and university trustee leadership.

### 2006 Recommendations to the Governor and State Legislature:

- Charge ACHE to develop and recommend substantial revision of current policies and methods for financing higher education.
- Significantly increase state funding for student financial aid targeted to low-income students.
- Enact substantially strengthened oversight of delivery by out-of-state providers.

### 2006 Recommendations to ACHE:

- Reframe the mission of ACHE from regulatory role to policy leadership.
- Shape next strategic plan: involve business and civic leaders, focus on HE contribution to the future of Alabama, include measurable goals and benchmarks, tie budget and financing policies to the action plan, link institutional accountability to plan performance.
- Lead higher education's role in support P-12: use a regional approach, use regional data/information, and convene regional forums.
- Streamline core functions work, link program review to state plan.

- Develop a recommended long-range financing plan.
- Give priority to capital needs procedures and financial aid incentives to middle school level.
- Strengthen oversight of out-of-state providers.
- Redesign ACHE's meeting agendas: monitor a limited set of basic questions, use consent agendas, and aim for 75% of time on policy leadership.
- Increase ACHE staffing in strategic planning, data/information systems, and P-12 alignment.
- Reassess statutory mandates for data collection.
- Establish a consumer information portal.