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Efficiency review consultant requested 230-plus items from universities

Deloitte Consulting LLP delivered its “initial data request” March 13

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The massive information request made of Iowa’s three public universities last month in connection with a Board of Regents-commissioned efficiency review asked for more than 230 items – many of which required staff to produce numerous documents and data sets.

Deloitte Consulting LLP delivered its “initial data request” to the University of Iowa, Iowa State University and University of Northern Iowa on March 13 as part of a comprehensive study aimed at finding efficiencies and cost savings at the public universities.

The request, which the consultant called a “preliminary list,” asked to have the data returned by March 21 – the Friday of spring break and only one week after the request was made. According to the request, details of which were made public Wednesday, ongoing conversations and a review of the initial data “will lead to more refined and targeted requests.”

The list of requested information was broken down into 12 operational categories, including human resources, finance and administration, academic programs, and student services. For most categories, Deloitte requested things like policies and procedures, lists of technology tools, organizational charts, and recent process improvement projects.

Many of the 230-some items on the list included numerous requests – like one asking for the universities’ payroll data, including number of employees, number of payrolls processed, a breakdown of the payroll payment method, and the number of off-cycle checks, for example.

Other requested items included financial aid data – requiring, among other things, information on average student debt upon graduation, percent of students served, and percent of students

employed by the institution – and data for all academic facilities – including room types, key room features, room ownership and capacity.

Employees across the university systems worked quickly – and, in some cases, put in long hours – to provide the information within the short time frame. In the UI’s case, for example, administrators sent Deloitte 90 to 95 percent of the data by March 21 and the rest early the following week, said Mark Braun, chief of staff to UI President Sally Mason and vice president for external relations.

The goal of the efficiency review, announced last year and officially launched on the university campuses last month, is to improve the efficiency of Iowa’s regent universities by identifying ways to cut costs, share resources, and possibly consolidate programs. The regents’ “most ambitious cost-saving review in a quarter century” is necessary as all higher education is facing severe economic constraints, according to the board.

The Board of Regents last month hired Deloitte Consulting to assist with the review at an initial \$2.5 million. In addition to reviewing data collected from each university, Deloitte consultants are holding public forums on each campus and conducting hundreds of interviews in this first phase of the review.

The consultant in the coming months will develop a list of possible cost-saving measures that the Board of Regents will review, discuss and decide whether to implement.

Critics have questioned the need for the review, the motives behind it and the cost to hire Deloitte. Regent and university officials have stressed that savings resulting from the study will be reinvested back into those universities where they originated.

Read more: <http://thegazette.com/2014/04/02/efficiency-review-consultant-requested-230-plus-items-from-universities/#ixzz2xmce2BYd>