Administrative Services Review: An Approach for Higher Education

A consistent, data-informed approach to evaluating performance and allocating resources across administrative areas.

How to Use This Resource

Learn how to understand and analyze current administrative operating units by developing core metrics for those through an Administrative Services Review (ASR).

1	**Learn about an ASR analysis** *(Slide 3)*	What is an ASR, and how would system leaders use it?
2	**Learn how an ASR is conducted** *(Slide 5)*	See how the required data is assembled and turned into core metrics through five sequential analyses of each administrative unit.
3	**See sample approaches to an ASR** *(Slides 6–16)*	Review worked examples showing what an ASR produces — sample metrics and benchmarks for each administrative function, from finance and human resources (HR) to facilities and information technology (IT).
4	**Replicate across your system** *(Slides 17–18)*	Apply this approach to each institution, then compare findings across campuses to surface system-wide patterns, reduce program redundancy, and identify opportunities for differentiation.
5	**Drive system-level portfolio decisions** *(Slides 19–20)*	Use the combined insights to guide resource reallocation, new program investments, cross-campus collaboration, and workforce-aligned optimization across the system.

What is an Administrative Services Review (ASR)?

AN INTERNAL LENS ON AN INSTITUTION'S ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

01 What is it?

A holistic institutional assessment that verifies every administrative unit is operating efficiently and effectively — protecting or enhancing service levels, removing pain points, and reducing the cost of service delivery.

02 What do system leaders need to know?

It surfaces resource needs and reallocation opportunities, aligns operations to national best practice, and keeps student success the priority — while building institutional capacity for ongoing assessment and continuous improvement.

03 How is an ASR conducted?

Each administrative function is assessed over a three-year window using interviews and focus groups, document and data review, and org-chart analysis to pinpoint process and service improvements, cost savings, and investment needs.

04 How is an ASR used by systems?

Findings shape an action plan to modernize operations for efficiency and quality, guide resource reallocation, and embed a repeatable, best-practice approach to continuous improvement across institutions and within the system.

How to Deploy This Approach

This resource is a guide for system leaders to deploy a consistent, data-informed resource allocation framework across a portfolio of institutions.

1. **Baseline**
   Collect 3 years of core data; confirm org charts, FTE, and vacancy lists.
2. **Metric Design**
   Define the metric set for each function; validate availability and reliability.
3. **Benchmarking**
   Calculate ratios & trends; benchmark against peers and prior performance.
4. **Staffing Plans**
   Build minimum-staffing plans for fixed-operation and critical-service units.
5. **Report & Refresh**
   Publish to campus; refresh annually; add new metrics as needs evolve.

- **Establish a data baseline.** Direct each institution to assemble the foundational data sets — three years of financial, staffing, and organizational records — so that every allocation decision rests on verified, comparable evidence.
- **Deploy in phases across the system.** Sequence the rollout — from baselining through **metric design**, **peer benchmarking**, **staffing plans**, and recurring reporting — so institutions build on early wins and sustain continuous improvement.
- **Calibrate metrics to institutional context.** Apply the function-level metric examples as a common starting point, then let each campus adjust measures for its size, mission, and student-success priorities while maintaining system-wide comparability.
- **Champion transparency and accountability.** Publish metrics, methods, and outcomes at both the system and campus levels so boards, faculty, staff, and students see how resources align with student success and continuous improvement.

How is an ASR Conducted?

ASSEMBLE THE DATA, THEN RUN FIVE SEQUENTIAL ANALYSES ACROSS EACH INSTITUTION AND ROLL THEM UP

DATA REQUIREMENTS

Organizational Charts: Current charts showing reporting relationships, managerial layers, and span of control for every administrative unit.

Qualitative Input: Interview and focus-group notes on service levels, pain points, and process bottlenecks gathered from staff in each administrative unit.

Unit-Level Documents & Data: Three years of general ledger, budget-vs-actual, audit reports, faculty/staff FTE, and vacant-position lists per function.

1. **Organizational Review**
   Map reporting lines, layers, and span of control to size each unit and surface structural inefficiencies.
2. **Interviews and Focus Groups**
   Gather qualitative context from staff on pain points, service levels, and process bottlenecks.
3. **Document Review & Data Analysis**
   Convert three years of financial, staffing, and org data into FTE ratios, productivity, and expense metrics.
4. **Replicate Across the System**
   Run the same analysis at every institution so findings stay consistent and comparable across campuses.
5. **Drive System-Level Structural Decisions**
   Roll up campus results to guide reallocation, consolidation, and targeted investment system-wide.

Sample ASR Approach & Output: Institution Level

See how administrative insights can improve efficiencies and redirect resources to high need areas.

Why a Consistent Resource Allocation Framework Matters

Institutions face mounting pressure to demonstrate that every dollar supports students, efficiency, and financial health.

All

Administrative functions evaluated

3 yrs

Minimum institutional data required

1

Consistent, transparent framework

The Institutional Imperative

Higher education institutions and systems should use a consistent set of methods and metrics to allocate resources and evaluate performance across **all** administrative areas — not just the academic core. A shared framework ensures that funding decisions are data-informed, transparent, and student-centered, even when revenues tighten or priorities shift.

Four Strategic Objectives

What a consistent resource allocation approach must accomplish at every institution.

01
Pinpoint investment priorities

Identify where targeted investment will most improve performance, operational efficiency, and student success across every unit.

02
Build thorough metrics

Create comprehensive, comparable measures that guide allocation and fuel continuous improvement — especially when funding is tight or revenues decline.

03
Ensure data quality

Make certain every metric is readily available, uniform, and dependable so progress can be tracked and improved over time.

04
Define minimum staffing

For fixed-operation or mission-critical areas, set minimum staffing grounded in allocation metrics, future demand, and the service levels students depend on.

Guiding Principles for Allocation Decisions

Resource allocation should rely on both quantitative and qualitative evidence — and be communicated openly to the campus.

Data-informed	Blend quantitative measures with qualitative context so leaders see a complete picture and can refine decisions over time.
Transparent	Publish metrics, methods, and results so the campus community — including students — can see how allocation conclusions are reached.
Student-centered	Anchor every allocation trade-off to student access, success, and the quality of learning and support.
Consistent & comparable	Apply the same methods across every administrative area so trade-offs stay fair and improvement can be tracked over time.

Foundation: Institutional Data Elements

Six core data sets — three years when available — underpin the metrics for every administrative function.

General Ledger

Complete GL financial data across all accounts and periods.

Budget vs. Actual

All funds — capital, operating, auxiliary — with variance detail.

Annual Audit Reports

Independent audit reports covering the past three years.

Faculty & Staff FTE

By position, managerial level, org code, division, and department.

Vacant Position List

Current open positions by division and department.

Organizational Charts

Current org charts showing reporting relationships and structure.

The Approach Should Cover Every Administrative Function

Systems and institutions should be intentional in sequencing the implementation of metrics informing resource allocation to build upon early wins and leverage lessons learned.
Functions are organized into four pillars — each with its own scope of metrics, but a shared underlying method. Examples from a hypothetical institution are provided below.

Academic Core

6 FUNCTIONS

- Academic Administration
- Academic Advising & Coaching
- Library Services
- Office of Sponsored Projects
- Institutional Research / Effectiveness
- Assessment

Enrollment & Student Finance

4 FUNCTIONS

- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Bursar / Student Financial Services
- One Stop Student Services

Student Experience

5 FUNCTIONS

- Student Life
- Career Services
- Counseling Services
- Student Health Services
- Dining Services

Operations & Administration

8 FUNCTIONS

- Facilities
- Finance & Budget
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Campus Police
- General Counsel & Compliance
- Marketing & Communications
- Athletics

Sample: Academic Core – Key Metrics

Measure academic delivery and research support with FTE ratios, student credit-hour (SCH) productivity, and expense efficiency.

Academic Administration

SCH per Faculty FTE | Faculty per Admin staff | Direct expense per SCH

Advising & Coaching

Sessions per advisor | Students per advisor | Retention & persistence of engaged students

Library Services

Visits per staff | Librarians per student | Collection spend per student | User satisfaction

Sponsored Projects

$ secured per Office of Sponsored Projects FTE | Indirect cost recovery | Compliance findings

Institutional Research

Reports & dashboards per Staff FTE | External deliverables | Data request turnaround

Assessment

Student artifacts evaluated | Faculty trained | SLO trends | Process refresh cadence

Direct expenses per unit FTE is a standard measure applied consistently across all units.

Sample: Enrollment & Student Finance — Key Metrics

Track the cost and conversion of every prospective student, and the service quality of every financial touchpoint.

Admissions

Applications per staff | Yield | Visit conversion | Cost per acquisition

Financial Aid

Aid disbursed per staff | % students aided | Avg aid package | Apps processed per staff

Bursar / SFS

Accounts per staff | % on payment plans | AR balance | Processing cycle time

One Stop

Contacts per staff | First-contact resolution rate | Wait & response times

Direct expenses per unit FTE is a standard measure applied consistently across all units.

Sample: Student Experience – Key Metrics

Quantify engagement, outcomes, and cost recovery across the support services that shape student life.

Student Life

Students per staff | Programs & event participation | Housing revenue vs. expense

Career Services

Encounters per staff | Employer partners | 6-month placement rate | Internship fill rate

Counseling

Students per counselor ratio | Sessions per staff | Wait time | Outreach programs

Health Services

Visits per staff | Health ed participation | Cost vs. health fee | Insurance revenue

Dining Services

Meal plan revenue & utilization | Cost recovery | Catering revenue | Satisfaction

Direct expenses per unit FTE is a standard measure applied consistently across all units.

Sample: Operations & Administration — Key Metrics

Apply consistent FTE, ratio, and transaction-volume metrics across every operational function.

Facilities

Sqft and/or acreage per staff FTE | Maintenance response | Deferred maintenance | Unique spaces (i.e., science labs)

Finance & Budget

Budget per staff FTE | Reports by audience | Audit findings | Composite Financial Index

Human Resources

Employees per HR FTE | Vacancy & turnover | Searches per staff | New hires processed

Information Technology

Tickets per staff | Resolution time | Devices & systems per staff | EDUCAUSE benchmark percentile

Campus Police

Response times | Sqft and/or acreage covered | Reported incidents | Service satisfaction

General Counsel & Compliance

Contracts reviewed per staff | Compliance reviews | Findings & improvements

Marketing & Communications

Campaigns per staff | Engagement | Conversion rate | Email performance

Athletics

Revenue & expense by sport | Spend per athlete | Scholarships | Retention / Grad rates | Title IX compliance

Direct expenses per unit FTE is a standard measure applied consistently across all units.

Example: How One Function Breaks Down

Financial Aid shows the pattern — an FTE baseline, productivity ratios, and expense efficiency, all tracked over time.

FINANCIAL AID

Counselors, advisors, and aid-office staff administering student financial assistance.

7

metrics define the function

All tracked as trends over time

1	Number of financial aid staff (counselors, advisors, aid office)
2	Total aid applications (FAFSA) processed each term and year
3	Total aid recipients by aid type and in total
4	Active aid programs administered (federal, state, institutional)
5	Total aid dollars awarded by source; dollars awarded per aid FTE ratio
6	Aid recipients per financial aid staff ratio
7	Direct financial aid office expenses; expense per aid recipient ratio

Sample ASR Approach: System Level

See how to leverage institution level findings at the system level.

System Implementation Roadmap

Who does what at each phase — institutions execute on their own campus, while the system sets standards, supplies comparisons, and rolls findings up.

	1 Baseline	2 Metric Design	3 Benchmarking	4 Staffing Plans	5 Report & Refresh
INSTITUTION — executes on campus	Assemble three years of GL, FTE staff, vacancy, and org-chart data for every unit.	Calibrate the common metric set to campus size, mission, and priorities.	Calculate ratios and trends; interpret results against prior campus performance.	Build minimum-staffing plans for fixed-operation and critical-service units.	Publish results to the campus community and refresh the metrics annually.
SYSTEM — sets standards, compares, and rolls up	Set data definitions and submission templates so campus data stays comparable.	Define the common metric set every institution reports.	Supply the peer and cross-campus comparison set no single campus can build.	Review plans against portfolio service levels and system standards.	Aggregate campus results into system-level findings and portfolio decisions.

Ongoing: Institutions maintain and publish their own metrics; the system refreshes cross-campus benchmarks each cycle and returns them to every campus.

System-Level Findings & Opportunities

COMBINING SYSTEM-WIDE ASR RESULTS SURFACES FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSTITUTIONS

Benchmark administrative cost and service

Finding: A shared metric set lets the system compare cost-per-unit, FTE ratios, and service levels for the same function across every campus.

Right-size staffing to service levels

Finding: FTE staffing, vacancy, and span-of-control data expose over- and under-staffed units and where minimum service levels are at risk.

Consolidate and share back-office functions

Finding: Transaction-volume and expense metrics reveal duplicated capacity in finance, HR, IT, and facilities across campuses.

Reinvest efficiencies in student success

Finding: Closing gaps against peers and/or best practices and prior-year trends frees up resources to redirect toward the student-facing priorities that drive outcomes.

Consider Shared Services Across the System

DELIVER A FUNCTION ONCE AND LET EVERY CAMPUS LEVERAGE IT

Deliver once, leverage everywhere

What it is: One team runs a back-office function for all campuses instead of each staffing its own, raising service quality while lowering cost per unit.

Choose the delivery model

Two models: A system-hosted center of excellence, or a lead institution strong in the function that hosts it for others under a cost-sharing agreement.

Target the right functions

Best fit: IT and cybersecurity, HR and payroll, finance and procurement, compliance, and marketing; transaction- and expertise-heavy areas gain most.

Reinvest the savings

Payoff: Lower cost per transaction and fewer duplicated roles convert directly into funding for advising, instruction, and student support.

rpk GROUP

from mission to market

MGT