The Academic Affairs Success Framework

The Central Office Workbook

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A Four-Pillar Model for Institutional Effectiveness in Higher Education

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A. Academic Affairs Budget Strategy & Financial Planning Checklist

SCORING SCALE:

☐ **Yes.** The budget practice is fully met, consistently implemented, documented, and functioning as intended across Academic Affairs. Formal policy or documented process exists. There is demonstrated, consistent practice. Data reports confirm this achievement, and clear alignment is shown with institutional goals, accreditation expectations, and risk controls.

☐ **Partially.** The budget practice is **partially met**. Some components are implemented, but gaps exist in consistency, documentation, resourcing, or execution. Implementation is uneven across colleges or programs. Documentation exists but is incomplete. Practice is informal or newly adopted. Additional investment, staffing, or planning is needed.

☐ **No.** The budget practice is **not in place**, not documented, or not consistently practiced. There is no clear evidence of implementation. No established process, policy, or supporting documentation. Practice varies widely with no standardization. Work is ad hoc or dependent on individual effort. Gaps may exist that pose financial, accreditation, or compliance risks.

CHECKLIST ITEM	STATUS
1. ALIGNMENT WITH ACADEMIC PRIORITIES & INSTITUTIONAL MISSION	
Academic budget allocations align with program quality, student success priorities, and institutional mission.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Funding decisions reflect workforce alignment, accreditation obligations, and community demand.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Academic Affairs uses a documented prioritization framework for investment, maintenance, or reduction.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Budget planning integrates enrollment planning, recruitment pipelines, and retention strategy.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Opportunity costs for academic investments are clearly documented.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

2. ACADEMIC REVENUE MIX, FORECASTING & SUSTAINABILITY	
Academic Affairs has multi-year revenue projections tied to student credit hours (SCH) trends, program mix, and modality.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Tuition revenue forecasts account for discounting, retention, yield, and stop-out patterns.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Scenario modeling is used for academic staffing and section planning.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Revenue dependencies (undergraduate, graduate, online, dual enrollment) are monitored for volatility.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Academic Affairs participates in revenue diversification initiatives.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
3. ACADEMIC COST STRUCTURE, EFFICIENCY & LABOR MODELING	
Cost-per-student, cost-per-credit, and instructional cost are calculated by program.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Full-time, part-time, and overload instructional costs are modeled each term.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Faculty line planning includes retirements, sabbaticals, and tenure-track commitments.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Section fill and seat utilization rates inform workload optimization.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Labor cost modeling includes fringe, benefits, and long-term implications.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
4. PROGRAM-LEVEL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE & PORTFOLIO HEALTH	
Contribution margin is calculated and reviewed for every program.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Low-margin programs have action plans, timelines, and required evidence for continuation.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

High-demand programs receive prioritized investment for faculty, technology, and labs.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Break-even analysis is conducted for new and redesigned programs.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
A standard rubric evaluates program viability and sustainability.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

5. CAPITAL PLANNING, INSTRUCTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE & EQUIPMENT	
Academic Affairs maintains a multi-year capital and equipment plan.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Lifecycle plans exist for labs, simulation centers, and specialized equipment.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Total cost of ownership is evaluated before capital or equipment approval.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Deferred maintenance in academic spaces is tracked and prioritized.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Facilities and equipment investments align with accreditation and instructional standards.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

6. TECHNOLOGY ECOSYSTEM FOR TEACHING & LEARNING	
LMS, SIS, advising, and assessment platforms integrate effectively.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Classroom and hybrid technology standards are established and funded.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Academic software licensing is evaluated annually for ROI.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Faculty, staff, and students receive training aligned to academic technology needs.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

Technology reliability and user experience data inform decisions.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
7. ACADEMIC COMPLIANCE, ACCREDITATION & RISK MANAGEMENT	
Budget planning addresses accreditation requirements for faculty, labs, and facilities.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Academic Affairs participates in federal/state compliance budgeting.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Audit and accreditation findings inform budget adjustments.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Contingency plans are in place for instructional and clinical disruptions.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Risk indicators (adjunct dependency, single-faculty programs) inform planning.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
8. EQUITY, STUDENT IMPACT & ACCESS-DRIVEN BUDGETING	
Budgeting addresses equity gaps in academic support services.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Course materials, lab fees, and technology costs are evaluated for affordability.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Resource parity exists across campuses, modalities, and student groups.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Investments tie directly to retention, progression, and completion outcomes.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Accessibility and UDL needs are funded and monitored.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
9. EXTERNAL FUNDING, GRANTS, PHILANTHROPY & PARTNERSHIPS	
Academic Affairs collaborates with Advancement on fundraising priorities.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

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Grant pipeline data informs staffing and sustainability planning.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Long-term sustainability of grant-funded programs is evaluated.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Partnerships contribute to instructional capacity and cost reduction.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Endowment earnings tied to academic programs are tracked.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
10. FORWARD-LOOKING ACADEMIC PLANNING, INNOVATION & AGILITY	
Predictive analytics guide hiring, scheduling, and space planning.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Emerging technologies (AI, simulation, automation) are evaluated for impact.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Innovation funds support new programs and redesigns.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Demographic and workforce trends inform academic budget strategy.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
Academic Affairs evaluates long-term financial resilience annually.	☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

SCORING GUIDE:

Maximum Score: 100 points (50 items ✕ 2 points each)

Yes = 2 points, Partially = 1 point, No = 0 points

Interpretation Guide

85–100 (Strong, Aligned, and Sustainable). Academic Affairs budgeting is strategically driven, data-informed, aligned with the mission, and well documented. Only minor refinements are needed.

70–84 (Stable but Needs Strengthening). Most core elements are in place, but several operational or documentation gaps require attention. Improvements will increase reliability and reduce risk.

50–69 (Developing / Inconsistent). Significant variability across units. Some practices exist but are informal or under-resourced. Academic Affairs needs targeted improvements in planning, forecasting, and financial controls.

0–49 (High Risk / Needs Immediate Intervention). The budget strategy lacks structure, consistency, and documentation. Significant gaps exist in forecasting, cost modeling, portfolio management, compliance, or resource alignment.

About the Author
Juline E. Mills, PhD is a higher education leader with more than two decades of experience in academic affairs, accreditation, and institutional strategy. She has served as a senior academic administrator guiding infrastructure, accreditation, curriculum, and student success initiatives. Her work has helped colleges and universities strengthen governance, ensure compliance, and build cultures of excellence that support both students and faculty.

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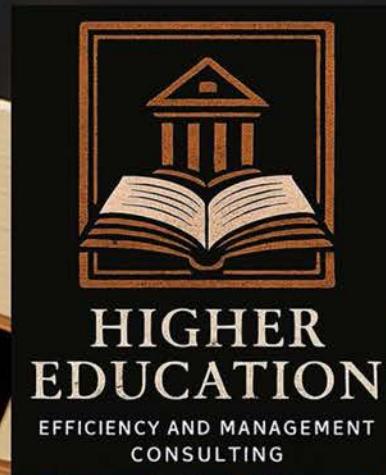
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