



Minot State
UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary



2008 Institutional Self-Study Report
to the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Higher Learning Commission

The Higher Learning Commission, MSU and Accreditation

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is a recently-renamed arm of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), founded in 1895 as one of six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. It used to be called the NCA Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. It accredits degree-granting educational institutions in 19 states, from West Virginia to Arizona. Like that of higher education arms of the five other regional accrediting agencies (Middle States, New England, Northwest, Southern, and Western Associations), its role is to assure that colleges and universities in its region meet certain standards in terms of mission, operation, and activities related to learning, discovery and promotion of knowledge, and service. The recent change in name reflects a shift toward greater accountability for student learning.

Minot State University received initial accreditation from NCA in 1917 for the period 1917-1922. Its accreditation was renewed for the period 1925-1934, and it has since been renewed regularly in 10-year periods through this academic year. The last NCA Commission on Institutions of Higher Education site visit took place October 20-22, 1997. The next, Higher Learning Commission, site visit is scheduled for 30 March through 2 April 2008.



Five Criteria for Accreditation

In 2003 HLC presented five new “Criteria for Accreditation,” each with four or five “Core Components.” The five criterion statements very broadly define attributes now necessary for accreditation by HLC. An organization must be judged by HLC to have met all five criteria in order to receive initial or renewed accreditation. This document outlines and briefly summarizes the findings, strengths and challenges presented in Minot State University’s *2008 Self-Study Report*. (The report is available in its entirety on the MSU Self-Study Web link at http://www.minotstateu.edu/selfstudy/draft_report.shtml.) It is this report that the 2008 HLC site visit team will seek to validate during its visit next March.

The Five HLC Criteria for Accreditation and Their 21 Core Components

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity. *The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.*

- A. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
- B. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- C. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
- D. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- E. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.



Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future. *The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.*

- A. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- B. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- C. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- D. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching. *The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.*

- A. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
- B. The organization values and supports effective teaching.
- C. The organization creates effective learning environments.
- D. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge. *The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.*

- A. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
- B. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
- C. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
- D. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.



Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. *As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.*

- A. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- B. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
- C. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
- D. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

Grounded and Visionary — A Summary of MSU’s Response to the Criteria for Accreditation



Minot State University’s *2008 Self-Study Report* speaks directly to the five new Criteria for Accreditation outlined by HLC. As outlined in this summary, the report demonstrates clearly and without equivocation that Minot State University meets all five Criteria for Accreditation and therefore is seeking re-accreditation through the 2017-2018 academic year. The report is analytic in

nature, explicitly defining the university’s many strengths, its important challenges, and its present and intended actions toward growth and improvement.

The report addresses two audiences. Speaking to HLC evaluation team members directly, it is designed to guide them instantly toward evidence that will support each claim being made. The report is much more than a petition for continuing accreditation, however. It is a benchmark report to and for the university itself



and for all of its constituents. Based upon its rich and colorful history, MSU looks toward a future of national reputation as a place where students will be proud to be and to have been, of a learning community that is diverse, engaged, globally oriented and dedicated to working for the common good. It is our shared vision that MSU graduates will be known as people of erudition, character, compassion, tolerance and sound judgment. The *2008 Self-Study Report* sets an emphatic foundation for the realization of that vision.

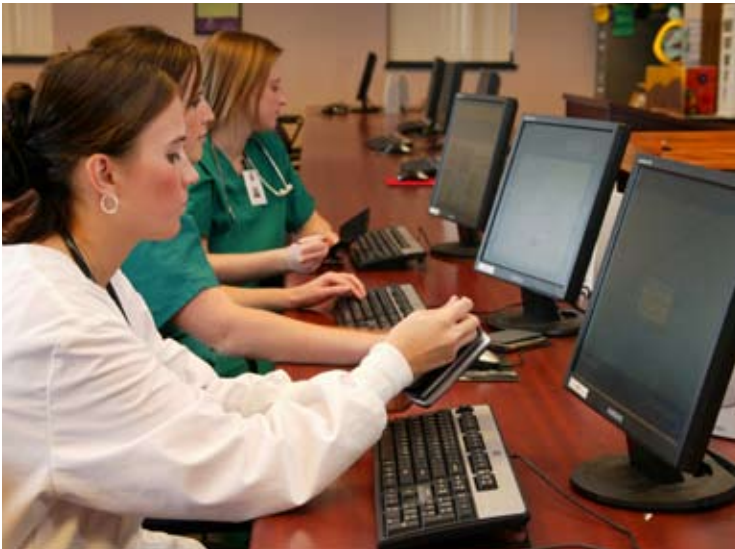
The report begins with an introductory overview of the institution, its history, and the *Vision 2013* process, including its seven strategies and the role of the Planning and Budgeting Council in their implementation. This is followed by an extensive overview of MSU's response to each of the three areas of concern cited in the 1997 site visit report — taking assessment seriously, defining and supporting graduate programs administratively, and attending to enrollment management. These sections are followed by an overview of other key developments since 1997. In addition to the *Vision 2013* process, these include the Legislative Roundtable and Cornerstones, important campus technology initiatives, the many building and grounds initiatives, the Clark Enersen Partners campus master plan, and diversity initiatives (including elements of the recent Rankin and Associates findings). The introduction concludes with an explanatory outline of the recently completed self-study process leading to the *2008 Self-Study Report*. Much of what is presented in the report's introductory section is elucidated in detail within its subsequent sections on the five Criteria for Accreditation or in cited evidence.

The following summarization only outlines fundamental findings of the self-study “task force” team for each of the five HLC Criteria for Accreditation. The complete argument, including a detailed rationale for each of the findings, strengths, challenges and action plans relating to the criteria, lies in the narrative of the full report, available on the self-study Web page. This summary uses the Higher Learning Commission's four cross-cutting themes as a way of drawing some of the self-study findings conclusively together. In discussing each of these four themes, it touches on only the more noteworthy strengths discovered by the study. In that process it also recognizes some of the opportunities for improvement discovered along the way.



Minot State University is a Future-Focused Organization — As it nears its centennial, MSU has set a distinctive new path for itself, which it has called *Vision 2013*. The university has redefined its mission upon that foundation as “first and foremost dedicated to the success of all students: their growth and development as educated citizens, their confidence, and their life-long devotion to the common good and the welfare of others.” With widespread support, MSU is implementing *Vision 2013*, and the university has begun a systematic effort to align budgeting with planning for its second century.

The past decade has been marked by steady movement toward true strategic planning. The *Vision 2013* process has addressed and articulated vision, mission, goals and planning strategies together at the same time, perhaps for the first time in the university’s history. The new mission determines clear strategic planning directions, especially emphasizing the importance of engagement, place and global perspective. Within a global context, MSU’s substantial commitment to diversity is evidenced by initiatives in such areas as curricular requirements, student support services, international opportunities, multicultural centers and community events. The university has for the first time endowed a Planning and Budgeting Council with responsibility for aligning campus operation with strategic priorities. All of these efforts seek to define and then to materialize what the institution and its many constituencies believe MSU ought to be. This goal has been explicitly summarized in the *Vision 2013* document: “Minot State University will achieve national distinction



as one of the premier public, regional universities in the ‘great’ Great Plains.”

Meanwhile, a rich assessment culture encourages faculty continuously to examine extant programs and student outcome data

in order to improve curriculum and provide new learning opportunities. Clearly stated goals and learning outcomes for MSU’s degree programs make this possible. MSU has also made faculty development a high priority. MSU creates effective and flexible learning environments and opportunities through purposeful application of

technology and renovation of physical facilities on the campus itself. Establishment of an Office of International Programs has resulted in an increasing number of international partnerships, and these are expected to continue growing in both number and extent. Students, faculty, staff and administration are clearly committed to civic engagement, both locally and globally, preparing MSU to institutionalize that principle as a foundation for future growth in many of the university's programs.

MSU's commitment to its constituents and to *Vision 2013* has led the institution to an authentic future-focused perspective. At a time when all institutions in the state face shifting demographics, MSU's mission, identity and purpose create a highly desired learning environment for students. *Vision 2013* will continue to provide direction for the university well beyond its centennial in 2013.

Minot State University is a Learning-Focused Organization — MSU's highly qualified faculty, a pervasive culture of assessment and faculty control of curriculum clearly demonstrate that student learning is the centerpiece of academic endeavors in the university. Structures that support good teaching, including the university's systems for faculty mentoring and dual review through Tenure and Promotion Committees, along with the unique Committee of Twelve system for evaluation and guidance of probationary faculty, emphasize the centrality of good teaching and student achievement in MSU's fundamental conception of itself as a learning-focused organization.

Over the past decade, MSU has made instructional development a high priority through professional study grants, support for programs such as Partners in Learning (PIL), pedagogically related conference attendance, and provision of cutting-edge technological resources for developing innovative learning environments. All of these efforts likewise demonstrate the university's central emphasis on helping students to attain program learning outcomes. Similarly, a decade of renovating physical facilities clearly demonstrates that the university values and protects its fundamental infrastructure as the basis for creating modern, effective and flexible learning environments.



Minot State University is a Connected Organization — Because it is a public institution of higher learning, MSU has always been aware of its essential role of serving the people of North Dakota and the northern Great Plains. From its beginnings as a state normal school to its present-day internships, community outreach and service learning projects, the institution has always held the common good as a central objective in its mission. The dramatic accent of *Vision 2013* upon engagement and place only reinforces this position, for in it one of the university’s stated core values is “supporting the values of community and place.” This already takes concrete form in many ways. Hundreds of MSU students are involved in practica and research projects in surrounding communities each semester. MSU’s faculty, staff and students provide the backbone of artistic and cultural events in the Minot community. The university’s proposal for a multi-million dollar Center of Excellence project (Great Plains Knowledge and Data Center) fosters collaboration of a local company, SRT Communications, Inc., and the New York-based *InfoTech* MTC, with Minot State University in software development and application. Such cooperative learning endeavors exemplify an entrenched commitment to connectivity beyond the campus.



In addition to connection with constituencies outside the campus, MSU strives to sustain productive connections within the institution itself. In addition to continuous electronic campus network connectivity, numerous committee meetings, open forums and interdepartmental publications are underlain by a formal system of truly shared governance in which students, staff and faculty are regularly both seen and heard. It is noteworthy that in findings of a fall 2006 survey by the Office of Academic Projects and Research, more than 70 percent of faculty and staff agreed or strongly agreed that “there are opportunities for getting involved in campus decision making.”

Minot State University is a Distinctive Organization — Minot State University is the only public Carnegie Classification Master’s I institution within the NDUS. From its beginnings as a teacher’s college, the university has grown steadily toward distinction as an institution dedicated principally to public service, through many programs besides those in teacher education — nursing, communication disorders, speech and language pathology, criminal justice and business information technology are examples. *Vision 2013* has added a new dimension to this distinction,

bringing a focus on *engagement* and *place* into the university's conception of itself and increasingly into the public conception of the university. As the rationale for this new perspective declares, "this vision rests on the assumption that the university will provide an extraordinary connection between academic subjects and the reality of life on the Great Plains, between theory and practice, and between the local and the global."

MSU's guiding principle has long been "students first," and has led the university to respond directly to student needs. This distinctive approach is reflected in small class size and research opportunities for undergraduates; renovations to physical facilities such as the Student Center and Crane Hall; and, most recently, improved focus on first-year



students with on-campus living requirements for freshmen, a freshman mentoring program, and the Foundations of Excellence™ program for first-year students.

Minot State University's distinctive new vision thus focuses "intentionally and unwaveringly on service to its people, its community, and its special place and location." That focus includes high expectations for learning and institutional performance. It depends upon a demand for rigorous study and scholarship, and on good judgment based on strong ethical and moral principles.

Conclusion

Minot State University is proud of its many accomplishments during its first 95 years of existence, and in increasingly challenging times both locally and globally, it remains optimistic about its future. The campus community recognizes that achieving the vision it has set for itself will take studied, deliberate, and at times painful work, and this study shows that MSU is ready for that work. The remarkable openness of the self-study process has given solid evidence of the strong sense of mission shared by the MSU campus community. It has also afforded everyone an opportunity to look at his or her own role, both objectively and critically, and in the process, to reaffirm a shared commitment to the work already begun by *Vision 2013*. Throughout the self-study process, the Steering Committee has guided the most inclusive, open and honest self-assessment of the university in its history, as a result producing a comprehensive, frank and accurate assessment of the institution. The Steering Committee and the dozens of individuals who have contributed to this self-study, both directly and indirectly, believe that Minot State University clearly meets all five HLC Criteria for Accreditation and is therefore worthy of continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission.

