

Summary of Findings, Strengths, & Challenges
A Précis for the Campus Community



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 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.

The 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/>, and a bound copy should be available through your department supervisor.) It is this report that the 2008 HLC site visit team will seek to validate during its visit next March.

Purpose of the Self-Study Process and Report

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. It is our declared vision that MSU graduates will be known for their erudition, character, compassion, tolerance, and sound judgment. The 2008 *Self-Study Report* sets an emphatic foundation for the realization of that vision.

Introductory Section of the 2008 Self-Study Report (17 pp.)

The 2008 *Self-Study 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 Enerson 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 the concluding chapter.

Individual Responses to the Five Criteria for Accreditation (141 pp.)

The following presents only the fundamental findings of the self-study task force team for each of the five Criteria for Accreditation. It does so in three contexts. First of all, narrative elements of the report from each task-force have been distilled into a set of concisely stated, bulleted *findings*. These findings lead to an enumeration of *strengths* that the findings suggest can be justifiably claimed for the institution. Finally, the section on strengths is followed by a set of *challenges* the task forces have recognized and a set of accompanying *actions* to be taken or planned for meeting those challenges. In sum, these three aspects distill the rather substantial bulk of the self-study report narrative into a skeleton of its case for renewed accreditation. The rationale behind all of these findings, strengths, challenges, and actions lies in the narrative of the 190-page report itself.

Criterion One – *Minot State University operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.*

Criterion One – Findings

- A. *The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.*
- The MSU mission has evolved significantly over the course of a decade and is now clearer, more specific, and more purposeful than before.
 - The process of mission development has become widely inclusive.
 - The new mission emphasizes student success and dedication to the common good.
 - The new mission has been shared with all constituencies.
- B. *In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.*
- MSU's new mission makes explicit commitments to honor and cultivate diversity.
- C. *Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.*
- The 2004-06 process of university mission development successfully sought full participation and feedback from all campus constituencies, including administration, faculty, staff, and students.
 - Faculty and student governance bodies support *Vision 2013*.
 - The PABC has facilitated all aspects of the development of the MSU mission and will coordinate implementation of the strategic plan.
 - College missions align with the new MSU mission.
- D. *The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.*
- Shared governance structures are firmly in place.
 - Faculty direct curricular developments through rigorous processes designed to maintain high academic standards and preserve curricular coherence.
 - Communication and shared decision-making have improved greatly in recent years, though a perception of full transparency has not yet been achieved.
 - Processes need to be further streamlined and duplications eliminated, as resource challenges push faculty and staff to do more with less.
- E. *The organization upholds and protects its integrity.*
- MSU upholds fiscal integrity through SBHE policy and best practice.
 - The institution provides and executes solid grievance policies and procedures.
 - MSU cares about accuracy of information and the success and consistency of its image.
 - A consistent campus archiving process needs to be established.

Criterion One – Strengths

- The past decade has been marked by steady gravitation toward authentic involvement of all constituencies in mission assessment and strategic planning; this openness promotes commitment and shared integrity.
- The *Vision 2013* planning process ensured consistent articulation and communication of vision, mission, goals, and strategies to faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. The new mission prioritizes institutional identity and suggests clear strategic planning directions; it has been enthusiastically embraced by MSU constituencies.
- Mission documents now clearly emphasize the importance of global perspectives. Minot State University values cultural diversity and the richness that diversity brings to its campus. The new mission's renewed commitment to diversity has encouraged discussion regarding foreign language requirements and expansion of study abroad and exchange opportunities.
- The university has established a Planning and Budgeting Council, with the responsibility for aligning operation of all units on campus with strategic priorities for efficiently reaching decisions on the distribution of financial resources, personnel, and facilities (see Criterion 2D).
- The university exercises strong financial integrity.

Criterion One – Challenges and Proposed Actions

- **Challenge:** Never before has MSU so carefully and inclusively constructed a mission. Likewise, never before has commitment to its mission been so strongly emphasized at MSU. It will be a challenge for everyone—administrators, faculty, staff, and students—to prioritize activities around the new mission.

Proposed actions:

- Continue the broad dissemination and honest discussion of MSU's new mission. It is crucial that all stakeholders be well-informed and feel that they have a voice in the immense changes underway (see Strategy Three in *Vision 2013*).
 - Use the new mission to focus on student achievement. While building a “premier public, regional university,” MSU must not forget its de facto mission of “students first” and must continue to provide top-notch educational opportunities for all who attend MSU (see Strategy Five of *Vision 2013*).
 - Seek out and allocate resources properly. Sweeping changes in mission will likely require increases in resources, and MSU must be canny in its acquisition of these resources, pursuing every avenue open to it (see Strategy Seven of *Vision 2013*).
- **Challenge:** MSU has successfully educated students for nearly one hundred years. Its history is replete with innovative programs and professors, provocative and challenging learning opportunities, and social and cultural interactions. MSU must continue to build upon what it has long done so well.

Proposed actions:

- Maintain viability of strong programs. In the rush to align with its new mission, MSU must be careful not to ignore programs (both intramural and extramural) that are already successful and important to the university and the community.
- Maintain faculty authority over curriculum. This is crucial to the quality of education at any institution. Faculty at MSU handle curricular issues very well and must continue to do so.
- Continue to improve communications among various campus entities. As MSU's new mission is disseminated and implemented, clear, concise, and timely communication among administrators, faculty, staff, and students is essential.

Criterion Two: *Minot State University'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.*

Criterion Two – Findings

- A. *The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.*
- MSU's recent strategic plan, *Vision 2013*, which was developed in collaboration with all university constituencies, provides an institutional response to multiple significant social and economic trends, including demographic shifts, increasing consumerism, threats to academic standards, increasing accountability pressures, and the need for civic engagement and global perspective.
 - In its ongoing responses to Roundtable accountability measures, MSU holds itself to standards adopted by the North Dakota Legislature, the primary funding agency for MSU.
 - Recent formulation of the Graduate School Strategic Plan and MSU's growing number of collaborative educational partnerships demonstrate a future-centered approach to planning.
- B. *The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.*
- While the North Dakota general fund has fluctuated over the past decade, allocations by the State Legislature to the NDUS and MSU remain relatively stable.
 - As traditional enrollment has declined, MSU has compensated through tuition increases and the expansion of distance education offerings.
 - MSU needs to seek additional funding from further external sources such as grants, endowments, and private donors.
 - The relationship between online and on-campus enrollments needs to be better understood. Limitations of the record-keeping software (PeopleSoft) have inhibited these efforts.
 - MSU is currently moving from a budgeting model based solely on credit-hour production to improved processes that will link operating budgets to strategic plans.
 - MSU is currently exploring the prioritization and viability of individual programs, as it finds ways to link programs to specific strategies within *Vision 2013*.
 - Through the work of the 2006-07 Compensation Task Force, MSU has made significant efforts to improve consistency and market equity in faculty and staff salaries, which currently lag behind national norms. The success of the CTF five-year plan depends upon a 5% legislative increase in salary/wage monies each year.
 - MSU has made excellent use of its resources to support good teaching, research, and grant-writing, as well as equipment needs and technology initiatives. However, in order to achieve growth, additional funding will be needed.
- C. *The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.*
- An annual report on the NDUS accountability measures provides useful and public data for regular institutional evaluation; the implementation of those data for campus change is, however, uneven.
 - Annual performance reviews of faculty and staff provide regular evaluation mechanisms.
 - Internal and external program reviews are conducted on a regular basis.
 - The general education program reviews its courses regularly via a common approach to course design and learning outcomes (five strands model).
 - The *Vision 2013* strategic planning process included comprehensive and effective scanning of internal and external constituents and helped the institution plan for improvement.
- D. *All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.*

- Past processes demonstrated improvement and organization in planning but lacked a central institutional model for progress. Faithful efforts have been made to coordinate MSU efforts with Roundtable Cornerstone goals.
- *Vision 2013* action teams have identified priority initiatives for each of seven strategies.
- Planning and implementation will be structured in a biennial process parallel to that of the ND Legislature and guided by the Planning and Budgeting Council.
- Clear communication of this new process, continued inclusive dialogue, and adequate planning time given to campus units will facilitate successful implementation.
- Care should be taken throughout the process to allow campus units to maintain their distinct identities and to continue promoting their best capabilities and expertise.

Criterion Two – Strengths

- Minot State University has entered into a planning process that promises to be the first step toward a thorough reconceptualization of what the institution ought to be. By drawing upon all the stakeholders both on and off campus, MSU has already gained enormous investment in *Vision 2013*. The goal that “Minot State University will achieve national distinction as one of the premier public, regional universities in the ‘great’ Great Plains” is clear, distinctive, and memorable.
- MSU has maintained relative stability despite a declining proportion of funding from the ND Legislature.
- Distance education programs have bolstered the university budget and provided a valuable service to the rural community and to non-traditional students.
- MSU has developed a host of state-of-the-art buildings on campus, through concerted efforts at renovation.
- MSU has been a leader within the NDUS in utilizing and improving technology for the purpose of education.

Criterion Two – Challenges and Proposed Actions

- **Challenge:** Institutional data that provide feedback on the quality of MSU’s programs can be used to greater potential.

Proposed action – Present data to faculty and interested parties in order to complete the feedback loop and use the data for positive institutional change and development.

- **Challenge:** Minot State University’s emphasis upon and growing enrollment within distance education does not necessarily align with the sense of place that is central to *Vision 2013*.

Proposed action – Within the continuing process of developing and implementing *Vision 2013*, conduct focused discussion on the topic of how distance education aligns with the mission.

- **Challenge:** Minot State University needs to prepare itself explicitly for the demographic realities of North Dakota, and for expected declining numbers of high school graduates in northwest North Dakota, its traditional market.

Proposed actions:

- Continue to develop an MSU marketing strategy and presence across the state.
- Find ways to further increase the number of recruitment officers in Enrollment Services.
- Focus increased effort on recruiting beyond North Dakota’s borders, particularly in western states that do not have places on their campuses for all their high school graduates.

- Continue efforts such as the Great Plains Scholars award program (see Introduction) to attract quality students.
- **Challenge:** There is little reason to believe that state government support for MSU will increase markedly in the near future. Recently, students have been asked to make up some of the difference through on-going and sometimes substantial tuition increases. Many plans, including those intended to increase compensation and faculty/staff retention, are dependent upon securing additional resources.

Proposed actions:

- Develop strategies that effectively increase alumni giving and the university's endowment.
- Step up pursuit of external grant funding and consider hiring a dedicated grant investigator and providing additional institutional support.
- Abandon the “do more with less” mentality, and begin to align planning with budgeting by making the difficult decisions to prioritize the programs which will receive support from finite financial resources.
- **Challenge:** Minot State University has pursued several planning efforts over the last few years; an ongoing challenge is to thoroughly align all levels of planning with *Vision 2013*.

Proposed actions:

- Re-cast previous efforts to align units across the campus in light of *Vision 2013*.
- Support and reward the investment of faculty and staff time in this process.
- In the on-going process of developing and implementing *Vision 2013*, continue to make connections with the NDUS Cornerstone goals.

Criterion Three: *Minot State University provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.*

Criterion Three – Findings

- A. *The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.*
- MSU provides evidence of student learning that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.
 - MSU values the academic experience of its students and works systematically to collect assessment data, review this information, and improve programs accordingly.
 - MSU's academic programs list clear goals and learning outcomes, and these are communicated to the campus in the MSU course catalogs; revised or newly defined program outcomes established after catalog publication are found in annual assessment reports.
 - The efficacy of MSU's faculty-driven approach to assessment and improvement of student learning is largely validated by successful external reviews.
 - Over the past decade, the faculty has diligently pursued a common model of program assessment that has seen participation grow to include nearly all major programs.
 - MSU's evolving assessment culture is increasingly leading faculty to act on assessment information in its decision making (see Criterion 3C). This is evident in annual reports as well as in a campus culture that is using broad assessment findings about student learning to ask direct and difficult questions. This effort was reflected in the work of the Faculty Senate's 2006 ad hoc committee devoted to cross-curricular issues.
 - MSU must engage in a concerted effort to determine whether students in online and on-campus courses achieve learning objectives in comparable fashion.

- The confluence of layered and multiple assessment and reporting requirements presents considerable time and resource challenges.

B. *The organization values and supports effective teaching.*

- MSU has well qualified instructors and places a focus on teaching quality, reinforced by annual assessments of teaching that include an innovative peer review and advising model (the Committee of Twelve).
- MSU specifies teaching excellence as a central component of its faculty hiring, review, tenure and promotion processes.
- Control of the curriculum is unambiguously vested in the MSU faculty and its representative committees (see also Criterion 1D).
- Recognition of teaching success includes a number of small but important symbolic measures including commendation letters. In addition, MSU celebrates success every year with a recognition luncheon and presentation of the Board of Regents teaching award.
- Quality teaching could be more consistently linked to merit pay.
- Effective teaching in the 21st century requires faculty to remain current in their fields, to model research for undergraduate learners, to share and improve pedagogical strategies, and to make effective use of technology. Within the limits of its resources, MSU does a commendable job of supporting these endeavors.
- The resources provided by the Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) provide development and support resources that are crucial to supporting the faculty who teach MSU's online courses. This office is increasingly encouraging new uses of educational technology by all MSU faculty.

C. *The organization creates effective learning environments.*

- MSU creates outstanding learning environments to enhance instruction, including physical spaces that enhance collaborative learning, small classes, employment of innovative classroom technologies, and a multitude of experiential learning options.
- Small class size is a strength of the university, especially in light of the *Vision 2013* emphasis on attention to student success.
- Faculty enjoy good support for new teaching strategies, particularly in areas related to learning technologies and distance education.
- MSU provides a number of specialized student support services that recognize diverse needs and enhance learning. The Student Development Center, in particular, provides excellent academic support services for students with disabilities.

D. *The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.*

- Academic support services are suitable and accessible, and have become essential in serving a student population that appears unevenly prepared in many areas. Rapid increase in demand for the MSU Writing Center demonstrates success but also very real staffing and resource limitations.
- Creative supplemental services such as SmarThinking provide essential online tutoring and have become an important tool supporting on-campus students.
- Library resources are exceptional for a campus this size and are well positioned to support the *Vision 2013* model of engaged and authentic student learning.
- Technology resources are carefully planned for, broadly deployed, and forward-looking, and support learning and teaching in comprehensive and creative fashion.
- Financial aid resources have increased at MSU through purposeful effort and supportive SBHE policy, despite significant decreases in funding for federal aid programs. MSU should continue to improve communication with students about the appropriate balance between work and study.

Criterion Three – Strengths

- A rich culture of assessment at MSU encourages faculty to examine programs and student learning data carefully to improve the academic environment and learning opportunities for MSU's students. Clearly stated goals and learning outcomes for MSU's programs, in conjunction with routine Annual Program Assessment Reports, make effective assessment possible. It is a system run by and for the faculty and is supported by an extensive program of Assessment Day education. The faculty have demonstrated a willingness to use findings to address large and small issues within the curriculum.
- MSU values effective teaching. Its processes for hiring and review identify teaching excellence as a primary and desired attribute. Clear structures exist to evaluate faculty teaching, and the university's system of traditional evaluation, mentoring, dual review through the Tenure and Promotion committees, its innovative Committee of Twelve requirement, and NDUS emphasis on annual faculty review all reinforce teaching as central to MSU.
- Working within its existing resources, MSU has made faculty development a priority, through research and professional study grants, support for the PIL program and conference attendance, and staff and technology resources that assist with development of innovative learning environments.
- Renovated physical facilities, improved technology resources, and the Gordon B. Olson Library are exceptional for a campus of this size and demonstrate that the campus uses its planning and fiscal resources to support the creation of creative, effective, and flexible learning environments

Criterion Three – Challenges and Proposed Actions

- **Challenge:** Assessment culture in the 21st century requires labor-intensive data gathering and analysis at the program and university level to make effective actions possible. Providing adequate support for this effort will help MSU maintain and increase recent high levels of faculty assessment participation and further its fundamental institutional goal of connecting decision making to student learning data.

Proposed actions:

- Employ broader, more centralized record keeping.
- Allocate resources to support the preservation of institutional memory to keep assessment from overwhelming crucial and primary faculty obligations in teaching and scholarship.
- **Challenge:** Extend meaningful faculty development opportunities.

Proposed actions:

- Continue such services as the PIL program and the Learning Communities Program, which were funded by Bush Foundation grants.
- Identify and allocate funding for developmental leave and sabbatical programs.
- **Challenge:** MSU has not yet systematically explored whether online and on-campus courses produce comparable results in terms of the achievement of student learning outcomes. This issue needs to be addressed, especially in light of the rapid expansion of online offerings in recent years.

Proposed action – Expand online assessment to include comparison with results from assessment of traditional on-campus classes.

- **Challenge:** A challenge for the campus is to protect the time MSU faculty require to deliver excellent teaching, engagement activities and scholarship. MSU needs to actively address the balance between

tenure-track faculty's 12-hour load and the overload assignments that have made online and other activities possible. Simultaneous growth in administrative duties, including the overlapping assessment and review demands of multiple accreditors, MSU initiatives, bureaucratic tasks and PeopleSoft training, all threaten to reduce faculty time for the critical activities of teaching and scholarship.

Proposed actions:

- Revise campus-wide requirements for teaching load.
- Provide sufficient time for faculty to review program goals and learning outcomes in light of *Vision 2013*.
- Allocate administrative resources to design and create an archive, both electronic and hard copy, for all campus reports. This archive should be available and accessible to all campus constituents.

Criterion Four: *Minot State University 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.*

Criterion Four – Findings

- A. *The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.*
- By mandate of the SBHE, MSU supports its faculty with full freedom in research and publication.
 - The Faculty and Development Research Committee effectively reviews research proposals and disburses numerous small grants to faculty.
 - MSU provides financial assistance for faculty advanced study, staff professional development, and faculty/staff tuition waivers.
 - Faculty and student research and creative efforts receive good visibility through university publications and campus poster sessions.
 - Support is given for faculty and students to attend and present at academic conferences; recent student participation has been particularly impressive in the sciences. Strong faculty follow-up to conferences is evident in the emerging multi-disciplinary campus effort to establish a Collaborative for the Applied Study of Cognition and Learning Sciences (CASCLS).
 - MSU has hosted a number of notable academic conferences since 1997.
 - Faculty research is exemplary and is recognized at the national level, as recent major federal grants attest.
 - Graduate programs provide many opportunities for continuing education, especially for area teachers.
 - The Center for Extended Learning provides outstanding opportunities for life-long learning, serving a wide variety of age groups and constituencies.
- 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.*
- In the last decade, MSU has refined a solid, faculty-governed general education program that values the importance of broad-based knowledge, transferable skills, and intellectual inquiry.
 - The general education Five-Strand assessment model and associated four-year recertification process have provided consistently applied practices for MSU's general education coursework. MSU is actively debating the merits of holistic general education assessment.
 - Undergraduate and graduate-level programs delineate clear student learning outcomes and measure solid student achievement through summative assessments such as capstone coursework, licensure exams, senior projects, independent research, and theses. (See Criterion 3A for additional evidence of student learning.)
 - Faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences have recently explored possible reform of the graduation requirements for a B.A. degree, with the aim of increasing rigor and requiring foreign language skills.

C. *The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.*

- A high rate of graduate placement, the development of the new six-credit diversity graduation requirement, the creation of up-to-date interdisciplinary programs, attention given to the needs of industry, and the specific efforts of individual courses to acknowledge social and technological change all demonstrate the utility and responsiveness of MSU's faculty-led curriculum to changing societal needs.
- Service learning efforts have been ongoing across campus in individual courses, and progress has been made in raising awareness regarding these pedagogies.
- Effective student-led effort has resulted in MSU's new smoke-free policy. While not all campus constituents agree with the policy, it clearly demonstrates the concrete results of student activism and concern for social issues.

D. *The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.*

- MSU has exercised a longstanding undergraduate Academic Honesty Policy that is well-publicized and consistently enforced. Students have appeal recourse through the Office of Student Affairs and the Student Rights Committee.
- Academic Honesty Policies for Graduate students are clear and communicate appeal procedures effectively. All forms of campus research follow IRB protocols.
- Faculty are bound to clear guidelines concerning academic integrity and intellectual property, as published in the *Faculty Handbook*.
- The Gordon B. Olson Library offers valuable services which strengthen student and faculty research integrity.

Criterion Four – Strengths

- MSU supports high-quality, nationally acknowledged faculty and student research efforts, through policy, financial resources, and public recognition of achievements
- MSU supports a multitude of continuing education opportunities for constituencies of all ages, through the Graduate School and the Center for Extended Learning
- Since 1997, MSU has undertaken the thoughtful institution and reliable execution of a five-strand general education assessment model. The campus shows a willingness to consider seriously how best to deliver broad-based education, evident in MSU's recent scanning efforts regarding general education, the open debate about its future, and a concerted effort within the College of Arts and Sciences to raise the standards for the B.A. degree.
- Student learning outcomes are clearly defined and communicated for MSU programs, and potential graduates demonstrate both their proficiency within the discipline and their critical thinking/rhetorical skills through required capstone classes, independent research projects, and theses.
- Implementation of a new, thoughtfully crafted six-credit diversity requirement for graduation reflects MSU's ongoing commitment to the inclusion of diversity issues within its curriculum.
- The Gordon B. Olson Library provides extensive information literacy and research integrity education for students, and follows best practice regarding copyright.

Criterion Four – Challenges and Proposed Actions

- ***Challenge:*** MSU should identify and acquire resources that will further support first-rate research and teaching.

Proposed actions: Find the necessary resources to:

- implement a faculty sabbatical policy.
- provide adequate staff and administrative support for the Academic Projects and Research Office.
- create a central campus clearinghouse for service learning initiatives.

- **Challenge:** The rapid growth of online and distance learning has created market-driven pressure for course and program development. While progress has been made in restructuring and realigning CEL with academic units, the University must continue to balance response to the growing market with thoughtful, faculty-driven, strategic programming.

Proposed actions:

- continue to improve communication between CEL and campus units, streamline processes, and align goals.
- define the role of distance education courses within *Vision 2013*.

- **Challenge:** Campus sentiment calls for a redesign of general education to increase rigor and encourage student engagement within the context of *Vision 2013*, while retaining the strengths of the existing program.

Proposed actions:

- conduct serious campus-wide reconsideration of the current model.
- consider summative program assessment for general education.

Criterion Five: *As called for by its mission, Minot State University identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.*

Criterion Five – Findings

A. *The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.*

- MSU has engaged in recent concerted efforts to seek feedback from its constituencies and the institution is making scanning a more habitual and regular practice.
- Since 1997, MSU has clearly improved its diversity profile and its attention to diversity-related issues, through assessments, academic initiatives, training, campus committee work, multicultural events, minority student centers, international student support, various related services, and student organizations. *Vision 2013* will continue to provide needed direction, as the institution seeks to heighten multicultural awareness and global sensibilities.
- The university continues to offer its long-standing educational services to Air Force personnel, with recent expansion in online courses and in the number of degrees offered at Minot Air Force Base.
- MSU offers outstanding outreach to its rural community through two of its Centers of Excellence, NDCPD and RCJC.

B. *The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.*

- The campus routinely offers its excellent physical facilities for a wide variety of community uses, often free of charge.
- MSU funds many activities that support community engagement and service to students. This is represented, for example, by its ongoing funding of the Intellectual Climate Committee.
- The university makes good efforts to listen to the concerns of its students and to address them. The Student Association is visible, active, and influential in campus decision-making, and the new Beaver Dam (designed with student input) has developed into an attractive gathering place for students.

- MSU engages directly with community members through many individual service learning initiatives. These efforts are fully reciprocal and benefit all involved.
- The many co-curricular activities available at MSU reveal a very strong institution-wide commitment to Minot and its surrounding regions. The university reaches out to a variety of constituents, and serves area youth with particular effectiveness.

C. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

- Entering freshmen depend upon MSU for transitional help, which is offered through required orientation (serving parents as well as students), a new optional mentoring program, a new first-year residence requirement, and a “Move-in Day” welcome students receive when they arrive on campus.
- Transfer students can shift readily between NDUS institutions, thanks to the GERTA agreement that permits mobility of general education courses. This agreement, however, has raised campus concerns about quality control and about limitations on course and program development.
- An MSU staff member in the Office of the Registrar is devoted to assisting the transcript needs of transfer students, and new approaches to orientation will help those students integrate in to campus structures with greater ease.
- MSU cooperates with a variety of NDUS institutions to offer distance degree programs and professional development opportunities for teachers.
- In response to positive demographic shifts, and an institutional will to improve cultural relations and collaboration with Native American partners, MSU has recently signed formal articulation agreements with three area tribal colleges.
- MSU has historically worked in close and highly successful collaboration with area P-12 schools, through student teacher placements, funding for advanced study, and assistance with new federal and state licensure requirements.
- Efforts to establish international partnerships recently took a giant step forward with the hiring of a Director for the Office of International Programs on campus. New articulation agreements will depend upon further strengthening institutional infrastructure and support services for international students.

D. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

- The MSU College of Business collaborates with the Minot business community extensively, playing a vital role in the economic vitality and growth of Minot and its surrounding communities.
- The Job Corps Executive Management Program provides a national service and prepares executives for senior leadership.
- Minot area organizations appreciate and value the services MSU provides, as evidenced by frequent positive feedback and high event attendance figures.
- MSU students, faculty, staff, and administrators have long cherished and exercised a high level of community engagement. This culture of engagement and service is exemplary.

Criterion Five – Strengths

- MSU’s current planning and scanning activities purposefully involve the community and campus.
- MSU has dramatically increased its attention to diversity since 1997, and *Vision 2013* will continue to provide needed direction in this area.
- Consideration of student concerns and suggestions informs campus improvements to services and facilities.
- MSU is an essential community asset, providing well received cultural, educational, athletic, and social activities for a large population of internal and external constituents.
- MSU strengthens economic development in the region and cultivates effective partnerships with the business community.

- Refined university orientations, a new Mentoring Program, the work of a dedicated Student Services Advisor, and participation in the Foundations of Excellence™ program all show improved attention to the first year experience and to student involvement on campus.
- Collaborative partnerships with other NDUS institutions, often facilitated through the Center for Extended Learning, have proved beneficial for MSU students.
- Creation of a dedicated Office of International Programs and expansion of staffing in this area supports MSU's global partnerships and international programming.
- Many individual MSU students, faculty, staff, and administrators care deeply about community engagement, setting the stage for an institutionalization of that principle.

Criterion Five – Challenges and Proposed Actions

- **Challenge:** Campus units and individuals need time and resources to integrate the community service and engagement aspects of *Vision 2013* with existing university activities. Burnout is a real danger; the financial and human toll on participants and organizers is considerable.

Proposed actions

- Since both campus and community members find outreach activities and events crucial to the health and vitality of the institution, MSU must:
 1. Analyze, recognize, and redefine academic loads to accommodate time-intensive engagement activities.
 2. Give colleges, divisions, and departments adequate time and resources to work toward alignment with Vision 2013.
 - The institution should provide dedicated resources for support and centralization of ongoing service learning initiatives.
- **Challenge:** As campus units align with *Vision 2013* they also need to be able to maintain their distinct identities and continue to promote their best capabilities and expertise.

Proposed action – Ensure that implementation of *Vision 2013* does not disrupt already successful programs and activities.

- **Challenge:** MSU must further explore how to incorporate distance learning, in particular online instruction, into the *Vision 2013* concept of engagement and place.

Proposed actions

- Discuss and develop an institutional plan for integrating distance learning into campus structures while recognizing the diverse needs of students on campus and those at a distance.
 - Define what is meant by engagement and place in the context of distance learning.
- **Challenge:** MSU needs a comprehensive plan for international student and faculty support services and articulation agreements need more active follow-up.

Proposed actions

- Develop a strategic plan for support of international faculty and students.
- Allocate resources to establish a formal English as a Second Language program.