

# **ADVANCEMENT SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

Minot State University

Minot, North Dakota

March 31 to April 2, 2008

FOR

### **The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

#### **EVALUATION TEAM**

Dr. Bette G. Midgarden, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Minnesota State University  
Moorhead, Moorhead, MN 56563 [Team Chairperson]

Dr. Donald Betz, Chancellor, University of Wisconsin - River Falls, River Falls, WI 54002

Dr. Eldon Clary, Jr., Dean of the Graduate School, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, AR  
728012222

Dr. Sherilyn Poole, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students,  
Governors State University, University Park, IL 60466

Dr. Russell E. Smith, Associate Dean, School of Business, Washburn University of Topeka,  
Topeka, KS 66621

Mr. Stephen Taksar, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, Indiana University  
Southeast, New Albany, IN 47150

Dr. Faye N. Vowell, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, Western New Mexico  
University, Silver City, NM 88062

## Contents

|  |   |
|--|---|
| I. Overall Observations about the Organization.....                              | 3 |
| II. Consultations of the Team.....   | 3 |
| A. General Education Program.....  | 3 |
| B. Greater Efficiencies in Procurement.....                                      | 4 |
| C. Placement of Graduate Admissions.....   | 4 |
| D. Selected Advice from Community Stakeholders.....                              | 5 |
| E. Students Function in a Global, Diverse, Technological Society.....            | 5 |
| F. Technology Policy Development .....   | 6 |
| G. Undergraduate Research/Faculty Workload.....                                  | 6 |
| III. Recognition of Significant Accomplishments, Progress, and/or Practices..... | 7 |
| A. Centers of Excellence .....   | 7 |
| B. Customer Orientation of the Information Technology Department.....            | 8 |
| C. Faculty and Student Friendly Facility Renovations.....                        | 8 |
| D. Outreach and Service .....  | 8 |
| E. <i>Vision 2013</i> .....  | 9 |

## I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Hard work by the citizens of Minot and northwestern North Dakota were recognized in 1907 and 1909 when legislation passed establishing a State Normal School at Minot. Since its opening in 1913-1914, Minot State University matured from a facility with 11 faculty members, 99 students, 60 acres, and three buildings to a regional comprehensive university with approximately 500 faculty, 3800 students, 102 acres, and 21 buildings. Minot State University (MSU) is the primary four-year institution in northwestern North Dakota and the only NDUS campus west of the Red River Valley authorized to provide a broad spectrum of graduate degree offerings.

Minot State University is a member of the North Dakota University System (NDUS) under the general administration and direction of the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE). Prior to 1990, North Dakota's public higher education institutions operated under a "commissioner" system of governance; namely, the SBHE and the commissioner functioned much like a school board and superintendent of schools. In 1990, the SBHE acted to create the North Dakota University System, which changed the role of the SBHE from coordination to governance. A system-wide chancellor designated as the executive officer of the newly formed university system replaced the former commissioner.

Since the prior HLC Team visit ten years ago, specifically since the appointment of the current President, MSU made notable progress in strategic planning, international exchange agreements, and in community engagement. *Vision 2013* is an ambitious strategic planning document, which was developed using a process that one corporate leader described as a "textbook execution for building a mission, vision, and plan with clear alignment and integration."

Minot State University and the City of Minot exemplify the partnership campuses and communities strive to attain. While the Team expected to observe an extensive, multi-faceted intertwining of community and University given the location of the institution, it must be noted that the mutually responsive relationship cited throughout this report is a dramatic departure from the immediate past. Minot community leaders attested that there is a renewed "sense of hope" about the future for Minot and that MSU is a major factor in this upbeat assessment.

## II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

### A. General Education Program

The general education model at Minot State University utilizes a five strand concept. These strands (critical, factual, historical, cultural, and aesthetic) have the potential to provide a distinctive identity for the general education program. The strands link

disciplines, provide for course design and allow for assessment of the general education program. Since 2003, approximately one-third of the areas in general education have been assessed primarily on the basis of skills development. In discussion with the General Education Committee, it was evident that the Committee was not in total agreement with this approach. The lack of full utilization of the five-strand approach diminishes the potential for the development of a distinctive general education program.

In the context of creating a culture of assessment, the MSU faculty works to create a quality general education program and to assess the individual courses. A General Education Web Site has been established. A detailed process is in place to review the general education courses in a four-year cycle. Courses which do not assess the five strands are not allowed to continue to be a part of general education. The various pieces of the general education program are assessed. As the Self Study notes, however, a formal, comprehensive assessment of the entire general education program does not exist at the present time. The Self Study also describes the ongoing campus conversation regarding general education, especially as it relates to *Vision 2013*. Given this desire to ensure that general education aligns with the institution's vision and goals, the faculty should continue to work to strengthen and revise the general education program and to assess the program comprehensively.

#### B. Greater Efficiencies in Procurement

While Minot State University adheres to North Dakota University System policies on the procurement of goods and services, increased focus on competitive procurement practices may yield more cost savings on contracts and significant purchases. The Vice President for Administration and Finance has made progress in this area for some of his units, which has resulted in significant cost savings, especially with service contracts in the physical plant area. Campus-wide efforts to implement more competitive bidding practices may yield similar results. The campus might also consider creating a new purchasing or contracts manager position to increase opportunities for cost savings and cost avoidance. This position would add to the consistency in procurement and policy development, while most likely paying for itself within a short period of time.

#### C. Graduate Program Resources

In discussion with the Graduate Dean, some consideration has been given to combining undergraduate and graduate admissions. The apparent rationale is to reduce the administrative load within the Graduate School. This is a legitimate concern identified in the 1997 report, which is even timelier now since MSU targets increased graduate enrollment as part of its emerging enrollment management plan.

There are, however, distinctive differences between undergraduate admissions and graduate admissions. Due to this distinctiveness, the prevailing practice among institutions is for graduate admissions to be placed within the Graduate Office. Any consideration for change should attend carefully to the specific needs of the graduate program.

#### D. Selected Advice from Community Stakeholders

Community members report increased engagement with MSU since the arrival of President Fuller. Areas for improvement cited by community members, which when addressed will better position MSU for the future, include: an increase in the number of recruiters to bolster traditional on-campus enrollment; enhanced retention strategies to bolster persistence to graduation; stabilization of the advancement/fundraising efforts that are now underway; the need for competitive faculty and staff compensation; the establishment of a more seamless enrollment experience, a “one stop shop mode;” and a clearer understanding of MSU’s service area. This last comment is congruent with the MSU *Vision 2013* “sense of place” initiative. All of the comments reflect increased awareness of the University that resulted from the *Vision 2013* process.

#### E. Students Function in a Global, Diverse, Technological Society

Several Team members suggest that MSU, in the spirit of *Vision 2013*, engage in an interesting exercise in futurology based on disaggregating Criterion 4, Core Component 4c,

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

**Part One:** As a planning strategy, MSU could *ambitiously* look forward and think carefully through what MSU students will need, going forward five to up to forty or fifty years, to a) live and b) work in a 1) global, 2) diverse, and 3) technological society. Thoughts and ideas could be placed within a six cell grid, two rows by three columns. Explicit consideration might be given to how far from North Dakota students are expected to go in life, or from how far away people will come to the places where North Dakota students go.

**Part Two:** MSU would then be in position to assess *now* to see if what is required is being provided; in the case of alumni, a survey would be effective.

**Part Three:** Based on the results of Parts One and Two, MSU could examine and redesign its curricula in such a way to be useful in the six cells of Part one. It is not at all unusual for other entities to look 20 to 40 years into the future. Four-year, or master-comprehensive educational institutions might benefit from doing the same.

#### F. Technology Policy Development

The campus utilizes technology to its maximum capability and recycles older equipment for less demanding applications in an effort to stretch its limited resources. The philosophy of the information technology unit is very strongly focused on customer service and meeting the needs of all its constituents, as evidenced by the success of its computer loan program. While this approach allows for maximum flexibility in meeting the needs of the campus, there does not appear to be a uniform campus policy or mandated replacement cycle for personal computers assigned to faculty and staff. While the information technology group assists departments in evaluating equipment and supports the technology, any decision to replace old equipment rests solely with the department, both in terms of what to buy and when to buy it. The campus could gain greater efficiencies and more uniformity in hardware and software by implementing policies which require replacement after three to four years and by requiring a standard hardware configuration and vendor. Maintaining multiple versions of different software on different equipment creates an unnecessary complexity to an already complex environment.

#### G. Undergraduate Research/Faculty Workload

Undergraduate research (UGR) at MSU has made a promising start and fits well with *Vision 2013* and with MSU's emphasis on student-focused learning. A Team member participated in a one-hour, energetic dialog with 35 faculty members and students. Psychology, English, selected social sciences, business, chemistry, and biology were present, which represent a wide range of disciplines. The 14 student researchers who attended the discussion enthusiastically confirmed the efficacy of this learning mode. One faculty member commented that UGR "cements learning" and encourages a high degree of cooperation.

At Minot State University, most UGR begins in the sophomore/junior year with "research methods" courses and is included in senior capstone experiences. A central concern appears to be no credit load compensation for faculty and no established mechanism for adjusting load for participating faculty. These issues are appropriate work for the MSU load study committee, a relevant initiative of the past few years.

At the present time, there is no central, University-wide coordination or promotion of UGR. While some students present their work outside of MSU, it appears that the institution does not send students to participate in the National Council for Undergraduate Research conferences. These events have proven to be exceedingly helpful in encouraging emerging researchers and mentoring faculty to pursue their collaborative interests. Faculty mentorship and involvement can be encouraged by more small grants and appropriate released time. Moreover, UGR issues are only

slightly separated from faculty research expectations, which again often involve workload considerations. Faculty present stated that they have the same research expectations whether they have a 9- or 12-hour semester load. The Team suggests that this issue should be referred to the Dean of the Graduate School/Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for analysis and recommendation.

UGR is a growing popular approach to teaching/learning at MSU and at comprehensive universities across the country. The Team believes that MSU can and should encourage more student participation by increasing the student wage offered in the summer to attract qualified students to spend their summer working in this way, as well as by using national best practices reviews to address faculty load and compensation issues.

### **III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES**

#### **A. Centers of Excellence**

Two Centers of Excellence at MSU offer unique services to the local community, the state, the region, and the nation. The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) offers interdisciplinary training for students, professionals, and families to help them provide effective direct services and conducts research to identify strategies and techniques to support individuals with disabilities. Students from a variety of MSU programs, including psychology, social work, communications disorders, and special education, participate in research activities and expand their academic programs by gaining real world, practical experiences to support their future careers. Current projects include the North Dakota Disability Health Project II, the Minot Infant Development Program, and the Northwest Infant Development Program. The NDCPD is part of a national network of similar centers.

The Rural Crime and Justice Center (RCJC) was originally formed to conduct research into the “unique characteristics of rural crime and deviance.” The focus of the Center has been expanded to include research and evaluation of a variety of components of criminal justice. Current projects of the RCJC include the Rural Methamphetamine Education Project, a project on Domestic Violence, and the Rural Law Enforcement Education Program. Clients of the RCJC include the U.S. Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and the North Dakota Council on Abused Women’s Services.

These two Centers of Excellence contribute to important research, offer training to students and practitioners, provide direct services to clients, and put MSU in the forefront of creating new knowledge and developing useful programs and activities. The Centers of Excellence make accessible unique learning and teaching opportunities for

students and faculty, which puts MSU in the forefront of offering innovative and important programs.

#### B. Customer Orientation of the Information Technology Department

The customer service focus of the Information Technology Department at MSU is a definite strength. The policies, procedures, facilities, and staffing enhance customer service delivery to faculty, as well as to students. Over 350 computers are available for student use in twelve general access and teaching laboratories on campus and at the Minot Air Force Base Education Center. Software for campus laboratories is distributed and maintained from a common set of software images. Niche labs are available in arts, sciences, humanities, nursing, education, and business. Internet capable learning spaces and kiosks are also available across campus. Computers are equipped with assistive technologies. Collaborative teaching tools make course information accessible online, on iPods, and on Smart phones. This dedication to accessibility and standardization allows students maximum flexibility and convenience in choosing where they to do their work.

#### C. Faculty and Student Friendly Facility Renovations

The Team confirmed that academic space renovation efforts are focused on redesigning facilities to the requirements of current and developing pedagogical practices, including providing technology support for Smart classrooms. Instructional space supports collaborative learning, small classes to encourage student interaction with faculty, and the use of interactive technologies. When the Cyril Moore Science Center was redesigned, faculty members worked with the architect to create a building to accommodate faculty-mentored, undergraduate research. Teaching laboratories are adjacent to instructors' offices, and instructors have laboratories as part of office space. Faculty input and expertise are equally obvious in the total renovation of Old Main and the Ann Nicole Nelson Hall, the associated concert hall. Student consultation and opinion are also evident. The Student Senate Office is now located near the Office of the President. The new student activity center in the Student Union, the Beaver Dam, is well used and highly popular with MSU students.

#### D. Outreach and Service

MSU faculty, students, and staff contribute in many commendable ways to the Minot community and individuals in the region. The University's resources and facilities are available to members of the community, often at no charge. Service learning activities are a joint academic and student affairs venture. Some of the service learning, outreach activities include the following: 1) students provide reading development and enhancement activities to local school children in a summer reading clinic; 2) students from the communications disorders program provide services to local children; 3)



students and faculty from the audiology program provide testing and follow-up to community members; 4) a VITA program allows accounting students to provide free tax assistance to community members; 5) the Mind/Brain Myth Busters seminars and conferences provide opportunities for members of the community and students to learn about and discuss myths about teaching and learning from a brain-based perspective; the International Concert Series offers five events in the MSU Ann Nicole Nelson Hall for \$50; the communications disorders department provides speech therapy services over the Internet; and the annual Powwow event is an educational activity, which values people and welcomes spring.

E. *Vision 2013*

*Vision 2013*, MSU's comprehensive strategic plan demonstrates the increased sophistication of Minot State University's planning skills; it is well done. It is not the plan itself, however, that the Team chooses to recognize in this final section, rather the inclusive process used to create it. Many opportunities were provided to faculty, staff, administrators, students, and external stakeholders to participate. The Planning and Budgeting Council conducted 18 focus group sessions with a broad array of constituencies. Working in teams, the PABC compiled, organized, prepared preliminary goals and objectives, and variously disseminated results. Both MSU and community members reviewed results and proposed revisions. During the luncheon for community members and at many other sessions during the visit, Team members heard from community members and corporate partners that their ideas and feedback were appreciated, respected, valued, and *used*. While not the only initiative led by President Fuller to re-engage Minot State University with the City of Minot and the wider region, it was stunningly effective and well worthy of emulation.