VISION 2013: Unabridged Report

A working copy for directors, deans, vice presidents, department chairs, and coordinators.

January 8, 2007

Be seen. Be heard.
This document includes a complete report of the VISION 2013. An abridged version of the plan published and distributed in December 2006 has been presented to all faculty, staff, members of Faculty and Staff Senate, Student Association, Members of the Board of Regents, Foundation Board, Alumni Association, University Cabinet, and university groups.

January 8, 2007
Minot State University will achieve national distinction as one of the premier public, regional universities in the “great” Great Plains.
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Minot State University wishes to acknowledge and thank the many people who have participated actively in its strategic planning work. Special thanks are due to Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Association, MSU Alumni Board, and Board of Regents, each of which provided invaluable commentary, feedback, and support. Many students, faculty, staff, parents, and Minot community members who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the planning and focus groups deserve a special note of appreciation. They offered valuable and candid perspectives on Minot State University and its future. Members of University Cabinet and President’s Staff also contributed insightful comments and suggestions regarding the key components of the plan.

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Years of considerable planning and effort by the citizens of Minot and the Northwest region of North Dakota led to the passage of the 1907 and 1909 legislative bills establishing the State Normal School at Minot. As reported in the 1916 *Magician*, the first published annual for the institution, “an overwhelming majority” of the North Dakota voters approved the constitutional amendment in November 1911. Minot pioneer Erik Ramstad donated 60 acres for the location of the institution. The school opened September 30, 1913, in temporary quarters. During the spring of the academic year the Pioneer Hall dormitory and “Main Building” (Old Main) were completed and occupied. The community, students, and staff were enthusiastic about the new college and its future. *The Magician* described the ideal and the spirit of the new school in its first publication:

*The personality of Pres. A.G. Crane and his consistent upholding of the ideal of ‘Service First’ have been dominant factors in vitalizing the spirit of the school. The progress thus far stands as a monument to the spirit of co-operation [sic] which has prevailed among the students and faculty and has been reinforced by the people of the entire north-western [sic] section of the state.*

Since 1913-1914, the school has grown from 11 faculty, 99 students, 60 acres, and two buildings to approximately 500 faculty and staff, 3,800 students, 102 acres, and 21 buildings, including five residence halls, two apartment buildings, seven classroom buildings, the student union, library, domed athletic facility, a concert hall, two theaters, and two art galleries. In its early years, the State Normal School at Minot offered two-year certificates and prepared teachers for rural schools. Through a variety of names over the years, the institution is now Minot State University, a comprehensive institution offering undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Despite the significant changes and growth during the nearly 100 years of existence, the university remains steadfastly focused on its original commitment to students, to service, and to its place in Northwest North Dakota. The university’s ideal of “service first” has indeed been responsible over these years in vitalizing the special identity of Minot State University.

The spirit of cooperation and the strong support of the people of North Dakota’s northwest region will continue to offer the foundation on which the university will reach and celebrate its centennial. That foundation and the strategic plan described in this report will help realize a vision for the future and the beginning of the next 100 years.
Core Values and Purpose

Core values are deeply imbedded in the minds of the people who serve and sustain the institution. Those values are readily recognized and appreciated as well by those served by the institution. Planning for the future depends on the affirmation of Minot State University’s core values and core purpose. Minot State University is built upon a core commitment to students, learning, service, and cooperation, and upon a respect for people and place.

Core Values
MSU cares deeply about its students, their learning, and their growth. The university is proud of its values and long-term commitment to:

- Teaching and learning with excellence, integrity, and engagement
- Serving students and others respectfully and responsibly
- Following high ethical and moral principles
- Supporting community and place where all members are valued and respected for their work, contributions, and freedom of expression.

Core Purpose
Minot State University helps people appreciate life and learning and contribute meaningfully to the lives of others.

Mission
Minot State University is a regional, public institution located in the northwest region of North Dakota, serving students from Minot, the region, state, nation, and other countries. Undergraduate and graduate courses and programs are offered on campus and at a distance, through face-to-face, online, and alternative modes of delivery. Non-credit and professional training and experiences are offered to students and community members.

Committed to high academic standards and professional support for students, the university is dedicated to student success, engaged and life-long learning, advancement of knowledge, effective student service, and development of students of character. These commitments are grounded in effective and motivated teaching and learning, scholarship, and service. General studies and a variety of programs are offered in the arts and sciences, business, and education and health sciences. A wide range of student support services is provided to on-campus and off-campus students. A partnership with MSU-Bottineau, a two-year college located in Bottineau, ND, offers associate and certificate programs.
The university also delivers programs to a variety of off-campus locations such as Bismarck, ND and the Minot Air Force Base.

The university values critical and creative thinking, vitality of communities and cultures, stewardship of place, and the multicultural and global environment. The university honors and supports the dignity and rights of diverse individuals, freedom of expression, academic freedom, ethical and moral behavior, integrity, fairness, and honesty.

Minot State University is 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.
Planning for the Future

Background to Institutional Planning at Minot State University

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the regional agency that accredits Minot State University, requires institutions to engage in strategic planning and to ensure the commission that they will continue to fulfill their stated purposes and missions in the future.

In 1987, the HLC (then referred to as the North Central Association) accreditation team visited Minot State University and cited the university’s planning as an area of weakness or concern. The evaluation team described Minot State University’s strategic planning as “irregular, projective, additive, and facilities centered.” The team called for the university to develop a planning process that is “ongoing, strategic, prioritizing and program centered.” As a part of the evaluation, the HLC required the university to submit a monitoring report two years following the date of the visit and to show how planning processes had been instituted and improved. In 1989 MSU submitted the report and described a plan for a “tiered strategic planning process,” which involved “tiers” of leadership councils and committees identifying strategic goals and objectives.

The university developed a five-year plan in 1990. The implementation of the plan was delayed for a year in 1992 upon the retirement of President Gordon B. Olson, and then completed in 1996, one year prior to the 1997 HLC comprehensive visit. While a number of new initiatives were identified and completed during that planning cycle, the overall results of the tiered planning process were perceived by the campus to be less than satisfactory. In response and in preparation for the 1997 HLC visit, MSU appointed a new dean for institutional planning to oversee the process of improving the planning on campus.

When the Higher Learning Commission team visited campus, it observed that the university had taken appropriate steps to get planning back on track. Although the HLC did not identify planning as an area of concern, it did advise the institution to develop a workable strategic planning process. The team advised the university to identify a “collective vision of the University for the 21st Century,” which should “drive the strategic planning process at all levels.” Under the direction of the dean of planning, a general faculty and staff meeting was held in April 1998 to identify institutional strengths, weaknesses, and threats. That meeting was followed a year later in August 1999 with a workshop led by a visiting planning consultant. The consultant assisted MSU in its effort to define its core values and beliefs and to articulate a new mission and series of vision statements.
A new mission statement and a list of core values and beliefs were distributed to campus. There was no subsequent follow-up work to develop a formal strategic plan based on the new vision and values; however, in 2000, the university participated in the State Board of Higher Education’s mandate to create and implement goals as a part of an annual response to the new Roundtable initiative. The Roundtable initiative was a statewide economic development plan to engage higher education, the private sector, and the legislature in setting goals and fulfilling tasks related to the Roundtable. Since the start of the “Cornerstone” process in 2000, the university has set annual goals and objectives and completed Cornerstone reports in response to the Roundtable initiative. The university, however, has not developed a strategic plan since the beginning of the Roundtable processes.

Following the arrival of the new president in 2004, MSU appointed a new strategic planning council. The Planning and Budgeting Council was charged with the task of conducting strategic research and developing a strategic plan focused on the 2013 Centennial. The current planning initiative and the new vision and strategic plan, which will be first shared with the campus in August 2006, are described in this report.
Current Planning Processes

Planning and Budgeting Council
The Planning and Budgeting Council members, nominated by their respective senates and boards, embarked on a thorough process of research and fact finding in both external and internal environments. The council was also charged with the development of a plan and processes for implementing it. The purpose of the planning processes was to provide direction that would ensure Minot State University’s competitive advantage, quality, and growth. External demographic data, assessments, literature, and reports were collected and reviewed. Focus groups, open forums, surveys, and a variety of reports and internal data provided information about the university’s internal environment.

Focus Groups
Eighteen focus-groups were scheduled and conducted in the spring of 2005. The responses were documented, summarized, and analyzed. Focus-group participants responded to seven questions:

1. How would you describe MSU to someone who isn’t familiar with the institution?
2. What is the MSU mission?
3. What are MSU strengths?
4. What are MSU weaknesses?
5. What should be the first initiative by the new president?
6. What are the major threats to the university?
7. What will MSU look like in 2013?

Focus groups were held with full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, professional staff, support staff, full-time students, part-time students, and distance students. Other focus groups were conducted with parents of current students, regional educators, community medical personnel, news media representatives, members of the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce, Minot State University’s Board of Regents, and Minot community leaders.

Teams from the Planning and Budgeting Council conducted the focus-group meetings, recorded the discussions, and wrote key responses on large flip-chart pages. The notes were later transcribed and compiled.
The council gathered additional feedback during a series of campus open forums and a Vision 2013 Open House in October 2005. At that open house, all flip-chart pages from the focus groups were displayed in the Student Union atrium. University students, faculty, staff, and community members attended the event, viewed the displayed comments, and were given the opportunity to offer their own written responses to each question. Hundreds of additional responses were collected and summarized. Summaries of the results and the planning processes were published in the Red & Green and the Minot Daily News. All responses were compiled, sorted, discussed, and analyzed by the Planning and Budgeting Council.
Discoveries

Internal Reviews and Results
The Planning and Budgeting Council analyzed the responses to the questions from the focus-group participants and considered other comments provided at open forums and through a variety of surveys. Responses to each focus-group question were tallied, analyzed, and summarized to provide a detailed and revealing portrait of Minot State University and its internal context. General summaries of the responses to each question and the analyses are included below.

- **How would you describe MSU to someone who isn’t familiar with the institution?**
  Minot State University is perceived as a supportive community, safe, caring, flexible, and interested in individuals, not numbers. One-on-one work with professors is seen as an advantage, as are the small size of classes and the competitive tuition rates. The university is also perceived as making good contributions to the larger community, particularly in the arts. Referred to as “one of the best walking campuses in the state,” the campus is respected for its positive ambience—its cleanliness, beauty, and utility. It is non-intimidating, especially to rural students, and includes a number of beautiful buildings, such as the library and Old Main. Some participants explained that they would mention to someone unfamiliar with MSU the low wages in North Dakota, the cold weather, the remote location, and the inconsistencies in student preparedness.

- **What is the MSU mission?**
  The university’s mission is not well understood or easily articulated (e.g., local news media personnel were unclear as to the mission of the university). There were, however, many suggestions about what the mission should entail. Many suggestions were offered regarding the need for a new and distinctive mission and vision. For instance, there were frequent suggestions that the mission should focus more on life skills than job skills, and that it should promote general well-roundedness of experience and thought, with the abilities to choose right from wrong courses of action and to approach problems from diverse points of view. A prevalent suggestion was that the emphasis of the mission should be placed on strong critical thinking skills or the ability to exercise intellectual discernment. Other suggestions included the need for emphasis on service to the community and the region, on furthering economic development, on responding to the ever-changing needs of the community, and on participating as a major partner with and responsibility to the community.
What are MSU’s notable strengths?
Participants noted a number of institutional strengths related to programs, faculty, and facilities. The quality, quantity, and flexibility of course offerings and programs, and the wide range of programs including general education, nursing, music, arts, science, business, as well as graduate and online programs were seen as strengths. Dedicated faculty who are committed to students, comprised of people who are knowledgeable, approachable, and willing to participate in the community, was identified as a notable strength of the university.

What are MSU’s weaknesses?
Internal issues were cited as predominant weaknesses of the university. Support staff, administrators, and faculty described the university as a closed campus, lacking in customer service, with inflexible and often inaccessible staff members. The lack of marketing was cited as a serious weakness needing to be addressed in both the short term and the long term. Parents, students, chamber members, and part-time faculty expressed criticisms of campus life and its limited activities scheduled on campus, particularly on weekends. Restricted hours of campus operation were seen as a significant weakness. Faculty members expressed concern about insufficient opportunities for students to interact and participate in campus life. Faculty noted that students’ lack of involvement is commonly due to job and family conflicts. Faculty worried that this lack of interaction results in a close-minded, non-creative student body that lacks diversity awareness and cultural tolerance. Concern was repeatedly expressed that students feel disconnected with campus. It was observed that many students learn to operate in a “silo-mode,” complete their general education courses, and then move on. Some students referred to their experience at the university as a continuation of high school—not the demanding experience they had expected or the adult-level university experience they anticipated finding. The lack of internships and job opportunities were cited as a weakness, resulting in additional disconnect with the community and the surrounding area.

What should be the first initiative by the new president?
The focus-group participants offered many recommendations to improve or enhance the services at Minot State University. The most common and pressing recommendations referred to the need for improvements in campus infrastructure, marketing and communications, student service and support, recruitment and retention. Concern was expressed about the need to improve the university identity, and change the status of the university. There were recommendations to dedicate more resources to marketing and to hire a full-time marketing director who would help increase the visibility and prominence of the university.
Recommendations addressed improved campus infrastructure, primarily specific facilities and housing, and student services and support. Other comments included the need for more support for faculty and staff, improved campus life, and a system to evaluate and assess needs. The evaluation of current programs and assessment of student and societal needs, based on broad input from many stakeholders, were recommended as important means to identifying new and competitive programs and to determining how current programs can be improved. Through such assessments and evaluations, new niches, centers, and distinctive programs could be identified and current programs strengthened to enhance the university’s identity, status, and reputation.

Repeated and specific recommendations expressed need for a Greek system, a move by the athletic program to NCAA Div II conference, better relationships with local high schools, a child care facility, improved student employment, and much better support for first-year students.

What are the major threats to the university?
Participants identified two notable threats to MSU, one dealing with internal issues, and the other funding and legislative support. The internal issues referred to attitude: apathy, lack of pride, lack of team playing, resistance to change, and lack of campus focus. Internal threats included the perceived lack of space to expand, a perception that larger schools are better, and the observation that some of the university’s programs are stagnant. The lack of a clear sense of the university’s mission or purpose contributed to differing attitudes about the university’s statewide image. Inadequate financial support from state legislature, rising tuition, low faculty salaries, and restrictive budgets were cited as significant threats. External threats, such as the state demographics, declining population, lack of well salaried jobs, “rural-ness,” the slumping economy, rising energy prices, and the possibility of Minot Air Force Base closure were also noted.

What will MSU look like in 2013?
Asked what the university will look like in 2013, participants identified a number of potential features. For instance, the university will be a regional center of learning, a center of culture, and a repository of history, with an extended influence throughout the region. There will be greater interaction among students and faculty with other schools in the region and with the community at large. Improvements on campus will include, for example, a child care center, a wellness center, and better access to all facilities for persons with disabilities.

It was the opinion of some and the interpretation of the Planning and Budgeting team that the campus will enroll 6,500 students (4,500 on campus and at remote location centers; 2,000 online). There will be stepped-up marketing and recruitment, including enrollments beyond
North Dakota, with many students from Canada and other countries. As a result, there will be more diverse student and faculty populations. Graduate enrollments will be significantly increased (especially in teacher education, special education, and business), and there will be more centers of excellence programs on campus. The Rural Crime and Justice Center (RCJC) and the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) will continue to garner national recognition and, along with other centers programs, emerge as campus niches. The university’s endowment will reach $50 million as a result of stepped-up fund raising and increased personnel in advancement and alumni services.

In short, Minot State University will enjoy a continuing pattern of slow, steady growth. There will be greater pride and awareness of MSU outside the campus. Continuing competition among the state, regional, and national institutions of higher learning will keep Minot State University focused on quality improvement and growth, and the identification of several niches, which will affect the definition of MSU’s role and its mission.

External Reviews and Results

DEMOGRAPHICS AND FINANCES
State and national data and literature offer projections and point to a number of educational trends. Declining financial support for higher education is one of the most serious threats to colleges and universities. Declining financial support for public institutions has caused institutions to increase tuition. Rising student debt, increased efforts to secure federal and private grants, aggressive recruitment, retention efforts, and marketing initiatives have been results of the decline in resources. Colleges and universities in North Dakota and in the Upper Great Plains face these challenges as well, because of the small population base from which to garner financial support and because they recruit from a dwindling pool of prospective students.

Declines in the populations of rural North Dakota communities have resulted in a challenge for colleges and universities to recruit students from other areas and markets. The prediction that by 2017 the state will graduate 30 percent fewer high school students has raised a serious concern for colleges and universities and prompted them to make changes in their operations that will sustain and increase enrollment. Continuing to raise tuition to offset declines in enrollments and in state and federal support is not a viable or responsible option, especially in view of significant increases in the amount of student debt and in the continued pressure on students to earn a college degree.
THE COLLEGE DEGREE
A college degree is touted as essential for financial security and future career success. The financial advantages of earning a college degree are well documented and provide a compelling reason for prospective students to go to college directly out of high school or to enroll in college later in life. Recent U.S. Census data show that a college graduate earns on the average $27,000 more per year than an individual with only a high school diploma. It is not surprising that a college degree is seen by many as a proven way to earn more money and to secure a better future.

It is also not surprising that many students shop and attend colleges guided by a growing consumer perspective—find the best deal, with the best quality, at the best price, with the most convenience. Unfortunately, that consumer perspective fosters, for some, an expectation of an “easier” and less demanding route to a college degree. That expectation puts further pressures on colleges and universities to compete in an environment in which other institutions market accelerated and shortened degree paths. Online courses, for example, have provided institutions and students with an alternative learning format, which is exceptionally convenient for students who wish to take courses and complete programs from their homes. Online courses and programs have been able to compete with the on-campus, bricks-and-mortar courses because not only are they convenient, they are proving to be highly effective learning experiences.

EDUCATION either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

—PAULO FREIRE
ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY

Advances in technology and the pervasive consumerism affecting people of all ages have made online courses and programs especially attractive as an alternative to courses offered on campus. The significant increase in the number of online courses and programs and the increase in the number of “accelerated” degree completion programs have provided educational consumers with better deals, demanding less time to complete a degree, offering more convenience, and resulting in fewer costs compared to traditional college experiences requiring living on campus, traveling to campus, and taking time away from job and family. Technology and consumer pressures will continue to force change in the way colleges and universities, especially regional public institutions, operate and offer teaching and learning opportunities.

ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY

State and federal budgets are tight because of the many state and federal programs competing for limited funding. In this environment, with the demographic and population changes, an increasing number of low-income and culturally diverse students are seeking access to colleges. New forms of course and program delivery, and increased pressures for accessibility and accountability from the public and lawmakers are forcing institutions to prove that students are satisfied consumers and that they are getting what they have paid for. The pressures for accountability and accessibility will continue to affect the way colleges and universities operate and respond to external dictates and inquiries.

STUDENT PREPARATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Questions are frequently raised about the effectiveness of K-12 educators in preparing students for college. It is often asked whether the increasing numbers of college-educated people are capable of performing at a level expected from college-educated adults. An initial draft report from a recent study by the National Commission on Higher Education concluded that federal funding of programs needs to be overhauled and that colleges and universities should reduce their expenditures. In characteristically consumer-like language, the report identified the need for colleges and universities to “improve their productivity” and do a better job measuring what students learn. Suspicions that students are not learning what they should be are growing at a notable rate and affecting the way lawmakers think of higher education and, consequently, provide financial support for it. Higher education is often perceived as not doing its job and not deserving of increased financial funding.
RISEN C0ST5 AND TUITI0N

Changing attitudes about higher education and questions about accessibility and “productivity” have led to subsequent reductions in the amount of state support for public institutions. This reduction has forced many institutions to pursue other sources of revenue. One of these is tuition increases. Those increases have led to escalating student debt, heightened consumerism to find the best deal, and pressures on students to find employment while attending college. Some students report that the increased debt and cost of tuition have made them drop out of college.

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

With these various pressures and threats facing higher education, one might anticipate that colleges and universities must be devoting more resources to reacting to changes and financial demands and less time focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. The term “productivity” used by the national commission report unfortunately does a great disservice to colleges and universities. Colleges and universities do not create products in the same way factories assemble widgets or retail stores ring up a tube of toothpaste. However, financial pressures and the heightened consumerism on the part of students will continue to test the abilities of colleges and universities to provide high quality teaching and learning.

CHALLENGES

The challenge for Minot State University and other public institutions in the Great Plains is to determine how to remain financially viable without compromising quality or without losing sight of the fact that they are working with students, one at a time, and not producing “products.” Remaining viable and keeping focus on student growth and success requires quality and persistent strategic planning. Reactionary thinking and acting won’t lead to effective solutions in the same way that conscientious planning will lead to sustainable and long-term results. In this context, strategic planning, involving many individuals who are well informed about external and internal facts and figures, is particularly important for Minot State University, especially as the institution contemplates its future and works to make appropriate adjustments to its operations in response to the many pressures and opportunities in the higher-education environment.

OPPORTUNITIES

Multiculturalism

While projections and commentary often refer to challenges and difficulties, there are nevertheless positive signs and opportunities. Large numbers of students nationally are enrolling in colleges and universities, including a growing number of low-income and culturally diverse students. Opportunities are many for attracting international students and for United States students to study abroad.
Despite international tensions and conflicts, U.S. and international institutions are forming partnerships and exchanges. Expectations for improving diversity on college and university campuses have never been higher, with a growing number of culturally diverse populations entering higher education. Cultural diversity on college campuses, especially on those that are predominantly Caucasian, will continue to add a new and rich multicultural atmosphere in which students can appreciate and honor different cultures, backgrounds, and ideas.

**Civic Engagement**
The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and other educational organizations have been instrumental in encouraging and supporting the engagement of colleges and universities in the civic welfare of society. Institutional involvement in civic activities enriches curricula, offers students new and motivating learning experiences, provides them most-needed civic skills, and contributes to the advancement and improvement of society.

Research and scholarship regarding engaged learning have helped colleges and universities do a better job responding to individual learning needs. Increased attention to the value of engagement and the related assessment tools available to measure the impact of engagement on learning are raising awareness of the value of active learning, participation, hands-on activities, and other methods connecting theory and practice.

**Assessment**
The research on the integration of online and in-class activities is revealing new approaches to integrating different forms of instruction in exciting and effective learning environments. The ever-present call for academic assessment, when understood as a valuable means of studying and understanding teaching and learning in the classroom, has led to effective initiatives improve curricula. Initial mandates about assessment have now evolved to a more sophisticated approach to engaging in the assessment of learning for the benefit of the student and not exclusively for the use by external agencies. The Higher Learning Commission’s new criteria for accreditation reflect the new emphasis on learning and less on mandated documentation.

**Renewed Cause for Enhanced Learning**
The belief of many that consumerism and corporate models are seriously affecting the quality of education is realistic. Such concerns and scholarly debates will lead to a renewed understanding of the value of the liberal arts, scholarship, and study. Those debates are valuable for us to make sure that education is not viewed as a necessary inconvenience on the path to receiving a diploma and getting a job.
Opportunities for continuing to provide students with new knowledge, the best of culture, and valuable skills are more prevalent now than ever before. With heightened consumerism and myriad appeals, a college and university education is especially essential for providing students the skills necessary for making good judgments, for acting morally and ethically, for being able to recognize and avoid manipulation, and for understanding how to see beyond the prevalent call for material goods. The justifications for appreciating culture and the finer features of life and contributing meaningfully as informed citizens to the common good are being espoused and recognized as compelling causes for higher education.

Service for the Common Good
Keeping our vision on the common good and the finer aspects of our culture and life will necessarily allow students to understand the values of civic engagement, helping others, volunteering, working as stewards to protect our environment, and appreciating and contributing to our local and global place. Educating good citizens, contributing meaningfully to society, and leading a purposeful and satisfying life remain high and realistic ideals for education. Students can learn how to appreciate life and learning, and, as Paulo Freire maintains, to participate in the transformation of their world, and to contribute meaningfully to the common good.

American Association of State Colleges and University’s Study
In a 2005 study and report (Student Success in State Colleges and Universities, AASCU, September 2005), 12 state colleges and universities, known for their favorable retention and graduation rates, were examined to determine why they enjoyed such a high level of student success. Teams of evaluators visited those campuses and found an interesting irony that “student success at these institutions is more a product of an overarching shared culture than it is a result of a more narrowly-conceived, deliberate ‘retention effort’” (9).

RESULTS
The report noted that while there is a remarkable diversity in this list of campuses, from “large to small, urban to rural, and specialized mission to general purpose,” there are three characteristics in their cultures that are common and distinguishable:

1) there is a “pervasive attitude that all students can succeed, reinforced by a wider culture that is not content to rest on past success;” 2) there is “a sense of inclusiveness on the part of all members of the campus community frequently characterized as a ‘family’”; and 3) “there is a strongly held sense of institutional mission that recognized the campus as ‘distinctive’ or ‘special’” (9).
These campuses were also distinguished by their “pervasive belief that demography is not destiny; all of the students they admit have the potential to graduate, and they should be held to high levels of expectation” (9-10). The study also revealed that academic programs and learning characteristics at these 12 institutions were: intentional, integrated, and collaborative.

With Minot State University’s student-centered mission and its continued interest in supporting students and improving retention, the results of this study are relevant and informative for the university’s strategic planning initiatives. The interests 1) to strive to support a pervasive attitude that all students can succeed and that the campus itself enjoy a sense of inclusiveness, and 2) to define and support a distinctive mission and vision reflect many of the interests and recommendations expressed by focus-group participants and open forums involving campus members.
A variety of themes emerges from the internal and external scanning, the focus group and open forum comments, the AASCU study, and other sources. These themes offer the direction for strategic goals, initiatives, and action plans necessary to build on the university's strengths and to respond to weaknesses and concerns.

**Rationale**

A change in vision must have a compelling reason and respond to the issues apparent in the internal and external research and be focused intentionally and unwaveringly on service to its people, its community, and its special place and location. The focus should also be on high expectations for learning and institutional performance. Expecting rigorous study and scholarship, teaching students how to make good judgments, and engaging and motivating others purposefully in the best of what we know for the betterment of others, both locally and globally, should provide the foundation for a distinctive vision and future.

**Distinctive Vision Centered on Place and Engagement**

Minot State University of the future will be known as one of the premier public regional institutions in the Great Plains because of its direct connection to place, to campus, to the northwest region of North Dakota, and to the larger global environment.

Wendell Berry, a well known bio-regionalist, claims that “if you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.” He explains: “With a sense of place, your identity is defined—to a significant extent—by the natural features of the place where you live.” Knowledge of one’s self, culture, society, and the world depends first, as Berry maintains, on knowing one’s place.

Higher education in North Dakota has a monumental role to play, not only for the justifiably legitimate cause of economic development of the state, but also for the cause of understanding and appreciating its place in this state and in this world. This is much more than accumulating facts about this place and the world; it’s about providing the opportunity to get to know and appreciate and care for one’s place and its people. It’s more than teaching for the sake of knowledge; it’s learning for the good of students, for their wonder and curiosity about how educational knowledge applies to practical problems and contexts.

The Minot State University experience 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. From that local and close-up study, through service learning, through internships, through field trips, through experiential learning activities, through an intense study of local
ecosystems, and through use of local issues and topics as the focus of study, student perspective and character should necessarily grow and flourish. From such close focus and proximity comes wonder. This is an educational philosophy all of us can endorse without compromising our own academic freedoms and perspectives.

**Educational Philosophy**

The educational philosophy underlying this focus on place is both idealistic and pragmatic. It is guided by an idealistic view that all students can learn, grow, and succeed if given the support, guidance, and engaging experience. It is pragmatic as well because the learning, the theory, and the ideas depend on reflection, engagement, and practice. John Dewey asserts in his *Democracy and Education*: “We can and do supply ready-made ‘ideas’ by the thousand; we do not usually take much pains to see that the one learning engages in significant situations where his own activities generate, support, and clinch ideas—that is, perceiving meanings or connections.” Dewey observes that educational methods should not fix the student’s “attention upon the fact that [the student] has to learn something and so make his/[her] attitude self-conscious and constrained.” Instead, Dewey maintains, the methods should “engage his/[her] activities and in the process of engagement, he/[she] learns…” The philosophy underlying this vision centers on the notions of engagement and the realities of place.

The progression begins with learning experiences that extend spatially and intellectually: from a sound knowledge base, an understanding of theory and intellectual methods, to an intense study and knowledge of the local place; from not only an enhanced knowledge but an enhanced appreciation and sensitivity, to the realization that the world and knowledge is interconnected and interdependent; and through the best of what we know about all domains of knowledge. From such an educational focus and study should come motivated learning that leads to development of moral and ethical convictions, qualities that develop character, integrity, creativity, and an understanding of our obligation to the common good. With an appreciation, understanding, and devotion to a place and its people, the motivation to think beyond one’s self becomes much more pronounced and realizable. William Butler Yeats’ comment is particularly germane here, that education is not filling buckets, but lighting fires.

**Implementation of a Vision of Place and Engagement**

What would this mean for Minot State University? A 2001 AASCU report, titled “Stepping Forward as Stewards of Place,” is particularly informative. It suggested that a primary responsibility of public higher education institutions is to contribute to the common good through what they called public engagement. The report included an outline of what institutions can do to be more directly involved
in their communities’ and regions’ welfare. The report concludes: “If public engagement is to thrive, campus CEOs must take the first step to challenge their institutions to be stewards of their regions, stewards of place” (35). The outcome is to build and strengthen local communities and regions through partnerships, faculty and staff involvement, contributions to the community, and increased awareness of local needs and problems. The contributions of an involved community are reciprocal, as per student welfare and growth.

Results
For students, the AASCU report explains, “working on community and regional issues:”

- Provides a more substantial linkage between theory and practice than might otherwise be presented in a traditional setting;
- Helps to keep the curriculum more current and responsive;
- Brings critical thinking/problem solving alive, thus making the classroom experience more interesting;
- Allows for more effective and lasting integration of skills such as leadership that will contribute to ‘competitive advantage’ in the workplace and beyond;
- Brings ethical issues into the classroom;
- Offers a foundation for meaningful discussion about the responsibilities of citizens and the nature of dynamics of a successful community;
- Supports service learning initiatives; and
- Prepares (students) for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship.

Examples of effective curriculum and classroom activities are many: studying geology through field trips, studying literature by reading authors who are dealing with the human condition, not only globally but through regional life, or getting an in-depth understanding of the development of one’s state or city through the primary and secondary historical records, or understanding the impact of environmental issues through the study of local conflicts and problems are ways to engage students in their place and to link theory, knowledge, and practice. With such curricula and activities, an excitement and engagement in learning and an engagement in the local community and region can result. Through such curricula and a distinctive institutional focus, students can develop a strong intellectual sense of and commitment to this place and to learning.
Minot State University and Place

Kathleen Norris, the author of *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, recalls a friend’s comment that the “size and gravitational pull” of the prairie actually holds people to the prairie and gives people their sense of the planet. Norris suggests that this sense “allows Dakotans to feel as if they are in the middle of the world rather than, as others would have it in the middle of nowhere” (128). Minot State University can become intentionally engaged in the life and future of this community, region, state, and the Great Plains by exposing students to the concept, or at least confirming their own vague sense that they are indeed in the middle of the world, and can be proud of it.

There are compelling and substantial reasons to locate and recognize the importance of Minot State University’s place in Minot, the northwest region of North Dakota, the state of North Dakota, the Great Plains, and the Midwest. An increasing amount of scholarship and research is providing a strong argument for retaining the physical place of a campus for more than just acting as a center for distributing information. Effective education depends on not only knowledge transfer but also on the basic human principles of dialogue, human interaction, and intensive first-hand involvement in one’s subject and place. Connecting knowledge, theory, practice and place to the realities of human existence, problem solving, and life remains a compelling reason to foster the students’ engagement in their learning, and to focus on the university’s place in the Great Plains.

The aim of higher education at Minot State University is to educate, train, and develop students into good citizens, people who will contribute meaningfully, productively, and ethically to the welfare of society, the lives of others, and the stewardship of the local and global place, and their natural and social environments. As a result, the student is learned, intelligent, and an individual of character.

The university’s commitment to learning and place confirms its commitment to the value of grounding education in both the theoretical and the practical, and thus to helping students value, respect, and contribute to the welfare of people and place. This integration also offers students opportunities for stimulating their intellectual curiosity, their emotions about learning, and their sympathies for each subject of study.

People and place—ranging from the literal to the most broad sense, including the campus, Minot, northwestern North Dakota, the Great Plains, and the Earth itself—provide palpable, real, and wide-open classrooms and laboratories for study and practice. In these cases, students experience a variety of learning situations, including real-life human problems to solve, primary source research, hands-on learning experiences, field-based exercises and trips, intensive study of the local, regional, national, and global environments, as well as other experiential activities, such as service learning and internships.
Students will gain cutting edge knowledge about the world, develop effective critical thinking and communication skills, and experience engaging opportunities to connect theory and practice. This engagement also affirms and highlights the role of the liberal arts in practice and civic life. The results will be evident in the new students—in their character development, their intellectual and emotional engagement, their knowledge and intelligence, their sound judgment, their devotion to continued learning, and their genuine dedication to the common good.

EDUCATION does not mean teaching people what they do not know. Rather, education is a painful, continued and difficult work to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precepts, and by praise, but above all—by example.

—JOHN RUSKIN
Strategic Priorities

To achieve that goal and realize the vision, Minot State University will raise expectations exceptionally high for the quality and rigor of student learning, study, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and professionalism. The university will:

- Promote and support students’ engagement in and respect for the learning processes.
- Define and publicize standards for student work and accomplishments.
- Set and publicize equally high expectations for the quality of teaching and the contributions of faculty and staff.
- Value and support contributions and needs of faculty and staff within a unified community focused on high-quality learning.
- Set high expectations and standards for student success.
- Become an engaged, diverse, respectful, and collegial campus community.
- Complement high expectations for learning and success with civic engagement experiences, field-based and experiential learning activities, and other means for integrating theory, knowledge, and practice.
- Maintain a campus culture focused unwaveringly and pervasively on student abilities, character development, integrity, and potential for success.
- Demonstrate a persistent and strongly held commitment to a learning community, based on academic assessment, institutional review and research, and quality improvement.
- Engage in institutional research and assessment to set key benchmarks and indicators and monitor progress in reaching these goals and meeting these high expectations and standards.

In short, Minot State University will create a community that is pervasively focused on: student growth, learning, and success; the development of students with integrity, character, and intelligence; institutional commitment to civic engagement; stewardship of its local and global place; and meaningful service for the welfare of others.
Minot State University will serve students and others so that they can appreciate life, grow through continued learning, and make a difference in the world for others. To do that requires not only advancing knowledge but engaging and motivating others purposefully in the best of what we know for the betterment of others. Achieving this goal depends on a powerful and distinctive vision focused on service to students, place, and learning.

**Goal**

Minot State University will achieve national distinction as one of the premier public, regional universities in the “great” Great Plains.

To help develop the student of the future and to meet these high expectations for the university, Minot State University must provide students with broad and in-depth knowledge, effective critical thinking and communication skills, opportunities for rigorous study, and strong and engaging learning experiences. Students will be engaged in theory, research, hands-on study, service learning, civic activities, internships, volunteerism, experiential learning activities, and other practices that connect the learning of the contemporary classroom with the needs, problems, and experiences of civic life and place. The aim is to help students connect, engage, and understand the powerful means by which knowledge merges with application.

**Vision for the University and Graduates**

Minot State University of the future will achieve national reputation as an institution of place and engagement that is dedicated to high-quality student learning within an inclusive community, to student growth, character, and success, to diversity and multiculturalism, to valuing and supporting faculty and staff, and to a life-long commitment to the common good.

Concomitantly, the MSU graduate of the future will be known for vision, creativity, compassion, tolerance, character, sound judgment, and commitment to the life of the community and the common good. Confident, insightful, and learned, and devoted to life-long learning, the MSU graduate will be well prepared for the future, and capable of realizing positive achievements and accomplishments in career, life, and service to others.
To realize this vision and mission will depend on how well the university can take effective and appropriate actions to get there. Calls for a distinctive vision and mission, for engaged learning and a dynamic campus environment, and for the support of exceptional and dedicated faculty and staff within an engaged community are clearly heard and understood from many of the university’s stakeholders. The need for an engaged campus community that values and honors diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusiveness is derived from a common understanding that the university must demonstrate its commitment to all people and cultures. Equally critical for the university is the need to make sure its students achieve success as individuals, as contributing members of society, and in their future careers or endeavors. Moreover, their future success must be built upon their philosophical and practical devotion to the welfare of others and upon their continued interest in civic engagement and contribution. To accomplish these goals, the university must remain strong, viable, competitive, and positioned for future growth. To get there, all of the university’s personnel and its external stakeholders and friends must be dedicated to keeping the university strong, so that it can continue to dedicate itself to students’ growth, welfare, and success.

The seven strategies that follow are primary means by which the university can reach its vision and goal. Priorities defined under each strategy define general directions. Specific action plans will be developed by the campus community for each priority. Strategies, priorities, initiatives, and action plans will remain flexible and responsive for the campus to make progress in realizing the vision and achieving the goal.
STRATEGY ONE
Creating a Distinctive Mission Focused on Engagement and Place

Create and promote a distinctive mission, vision and premier institutional character based on curricula and services known for high quality, engagement, relationship to place, and the integration of knowledge, theory and practice.

Minot State University will create a new and distinctive mission and purpose focused on place and engagement, including distinctive niche programs, clear institutional focus, and a pervasive sense of empowerment and direction for the future. This distinctive mission will be grounded in the substance of its teaching, learning, and services, reflected in its academic and campus programs, and highlighted by special and reputable niche programs. The distinctive character of the university will garner a clear commitment and professional enthusiasm from faculty, staff, and students, and it will lead to a distinctive national reputation.

Priorities:
1. Schedule and host campus-wide forums to engage faculty, staff, and students and help them understand and realize this new vision.
2. Conduct institutional audits and assessments to determine the baseline of engagement and activities related to place.
3. Set goals and performance standards for achieving this vision of engagement and place.
4. Identify performance objectives to raise the university’s academic program reputation and achieve the distinction as an institution that holds exceptionally high expectations for student learning, through a rigorous course of study, the merger of theory and practice, and objectives related to place.

Initiatives:
1. Identify new programs and services to fulfill this vision.
2. Investigate the redesign of existing programs and services to fulfill the vision.
3. Share the distinctive mission and vision with the greater community and region; engage the wider community in the dialogue about the new vision.
4. Examine and assess current and potential programs required to create competitive niche programs with national and international reputations.
5. Set performance objectives to raise the university’s academic program reputation and achieve the distinction as an institution that holds exceptionally high expectations for student learning, through a rigorous course of study, the merger of theory and practice, and objectives related to place.
STRATEGY TWO
Fostering Engaged Learning and Place for the Benefit of Students

Raise academic standards and expectations exceptionally high for quality teaching and engaged learning; create and sustain a dynamic place and engaged campus atmosphere and design conducive to high-quality learning and student support.

Minot State University will fulfill its primary obligation to students and learning by directing its efforts to identify high professional academic standards for teaching and learning. Attentive to the needs of individual students and defined outcomes for student success, the university will fulfill its distinctive mission, realize its vision, direct its resources, and support its personnel to motivate students and offer engaging, rigorous, and long-lasting learning.

Minot State University will further provide for an engaging campus atmosphere and student life that integrates living and learning, and support a well-conceived campus design and infrastructure for use by campus and community members. The atmosphere will be enhanced by effective, accessible, convenient, and engaging student services and activities and programs and activities appropriate for people both on and off campus.

Priorities:
1. Study current standards and performance results to determine benchmarks and specific objectives for high-quality teaching and learning; identify key indicators and examine current expectations and professional information to establish metrics for high academic performance and first-rate student support services.
2. Plan and develop a first-rate comprehensive program to support first-year students, their retention, and their success.
3. Enrich and strengthen teaching and learning with new and distinctive strategies for engaging students in the integration of theory, practice, and sense of place.

Initiatives:
1. Expand opportunities for field-based learning to complement class study.
2. Provide ample experiences and opportunities for student clubs, athletic participation, and other activities.
3. Integrate advanced technology and know-how with classroom and learning experiences; promote balance between the use of technology and the preservation and integrity of human values.
4. Pursue ideas for integrating technology and on-campus coursework for state-of-the-art educational experiences.
5. Pursue initiatives that integrate and connect academic affairs with student affairs, such as the inclusion of academic programs within the residence halls.
6. Throughout the curriculum, incorporate effective critical thinking and communication experiences, and training to ensure student competency in these areas.

7. Support, promote, expect, and realize a pervasive community focus on student engagement in and respect for the learning processes.

8. Foster a sense of community involvement within MSU.

9. Significantly increase the level of participation by students in “campus life,” including academic and social activities; define key indicators for creating an attractive and inviting campus life and priorities to enhance a dynamic campus culture.

10. Identify key actions to strengthen the university’s reputation for exceptionally effective student services and support both for on-campus and off-campus students.

11. Study and honor the university’s place, ensuring a deep awareness of and appreciation for the local and the global.
STRATEGY THREE
Valuing Faculty and Staff within an Engaged Community

Recruit, retain, and support well-qualified faculty and staff as valued members of an inclusive community, dedicated and devoted to the institutional mission, to engaged learning, and to student support and success.

Minot State University will meet its high standards for learning and student success by valuing and supporting high quality faculty and staff who are devoted to student engagement, quality learning, and meaningful service. The university will establish a priority to recruit and retain highly-qualified, effective teachers and scholars, who are devoted to the institutional mission and philosophy that integrates theory, knowledge, and practice. This faculty will see its primary responsibility as service to and support of students and their learning, and will carry out its responsibilities collegially, with deep sense of a community. The university will further recruit and retain staff members who believe that all students can succeed and that student welfare and support are their primary responsibilities. Faculty and staff will be well qualified in their particular specialties and devoted to the view that all students can succeed.

Priorities:
1. Set high performance standards and expectations for the work of faculty and staff and their contributions to student success.
2. Continue to work toward achieving competitive compensation goals and packages for all employees.
3. Offer professional development support for faculty and staff (professional opportunities in a quality environment), to ensure their commitment to the mission and vision.
4. Recruit and retain well-qualified faculty, who pursue scholarship in their disciplines, demonstrate excellence in their teaching, and support the institutional goals for engaged learning and community service.

Initiatives:
1. Create a campus atmosphere of shared decision-making, openness, and inclusiveness for all employees.
2. Reward and recognize outstanding teaching and the contributions of outstanding service and achievements.
3. Provide faculty and staff with encouragement and support for their active participation in and service to campus life, place, and the community at large.
4. Develop evaluation criteria for faculty and staff to reflect the institutional mission and goals.
5. Provide quality training, support services, and wellness opportunities for all employees.
6. Build a campus atmosphere for faculty and staff that appreciates and values their work and contributions.
Develop and support a diverse, multicultural, and inclusive campus community.

Minot State University will become a campus known for its dedication to cultural diversity and its effective support of multiculturalism apparent in its programming, services, curricula, activities, design, and philosophy of inclusiveness. The university will demonstrate to students and others its abiding respect for and engagement with all cultures, people, and points of view. All ethnic groups and cultures will be accorded respect and support for sharing their backgrounds and for equal participation in the life of the campus and the learning in its classrooms. The dedication to multiculturalism will be further demonstrated and supported through partnerships and outreach with Native American colleges and communities, other ethnic populations, other countries, and international university exchanges. Specific programs focused on accessibility and support for persons with disabilities, will be strengthened and expanded. The internal support and the external outreach will offer the campus opportunities to demonstrate the university’s strong commitment to diversity and multiculturalism.

Priorities:
1. Use results from the diversity climate survey results to identify weaknesses, strengths, and new initiatives to improve the multicultural climate and the diversity of the campus.
2. Continue to strengthen the university’s relationships with Native American colleges and peoples.
3. Internationalize the campus with increased international student recruitment and support, international faculty and student exchanges; an increased number of cooperative agreements with foreign institutions, and study abroad and study tour opportunities.
4. Nurture a campus atmosphere devoted to multiculturalism and inclusiveness; foster an atmosphere on campus that respects and honors diversity and respect for different points of view and different cultures with programs, activities, displays, and locations to honor and foster multiculturalism; continue to monitor and improve the university’s plan for supporting and serving persons with disabilities.
Initiatives:
1. Across the curriculum, increase the awareness and appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism.
2. Develop faculty and staff recruitment strategies to attract and hire people from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds.
3. Develop deliberate student recruitment strategies to attract students from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and provide a campus support system for these populations.
4. Provide a friendly and open campus atmosphere full of opportunities for all people.
5. Create on campus a global awareness, appreciation, and understanding with programs, activities, displays, and places for honoring and respecting international cultures.
6. Expand support for multicultural student clubs and activities.
STRATEGY FIVE
Focusing on Student Success and Future Achievements

Provide students with a strong and engaging academic experience for intellectual and personal growth, formation of sound character, and development of abilities and skills required for success in future careers and endeavors.

Minot State University will provide high-quality teaching and learning, and maintain a concerted focus on student character development and on the abilities necessary for making good judgments, thinking critically, and treating others respectfully. Student academic and personal development will offer the foundation to provide for life-long learning and professional success. In this way the university will build and strengthen student abilities required for leading a meaningful and rewarding life, achieving professional success, performing responsibly and effectively in any chosen career, and contributing to the common good.

Priorities:
1. Develop an effective, proactive, advising system that will provide students appropriate guidance in achieving success in their studies and in their future career choices.
2. Expand and improve the university’s career counseling and training; gain a reputation for placement and effective preparation.
3. Develop methods to emphasize ways to teach, inspire, and model how to acquire the knowledge as well as the critical thinking, problem solving, communication, life skills, and people skills necessary for a successful and meaningful career, continuation in graduate school, and the pursuit of other professional directions.
4. Publish and prominently post clear standards and expectations for students’ ethical and moral behavior in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community.

Initiatives:
1. Offer increased numbers of effective and well-designed internship programs for all students.
2. Incorporate volunteer programs within each program of study.
3. Identify characteristics and activities in established “character counts” programs to incorporate within the curriculum and student life.
4. Throughout the educational experience, incorporate expectations for and training in appropriate ethical and moral behavior, reasoning, and actions.
5. Offer rigorous and effective academic programs based on learner outcomes to guide faculty and students and that will prepare students for life-long learning and rewarding professional careers and lives.
6. Identify and publicize high expectations for the entire university, demonstrating the commitment to student growth, character, and professional success.
7. Create activities and programs that demonstrate a university culture focused unwaveringly and pervasively on student character development, ability, and integrity.
STRATEGY SIX
Creating a Commitment to Civic Engagement, Service, and the Common Good

Enhance and strengthen the university's mission and purview to include civic engagement, experiential learning, and activities focused on collaboration, partnerships, community relations and involvement; complementing the institution's educational function through a concerted and deliberate effort to connect higher education and the common good.

Minot State University will complement the high expectations for learning and success through civic engagement activities, field-based and experiential learning, and other forms of practical application of theoretical and factual knowledge. In this way, learning will be connected to practical applications and fostered through a commitment to the common good. Minot State University will become a campus known for its dedication to helping students understand the value of providing meaningful service for the welfare of others, participating in civic engagement efforts, and working as stewards of place and community. This strategy presupposes the primary educational responsibility to develop citizens and individuals knowledgeable and skilled in serving and helping others.

Priorities:
1. Implement a variety of opportunities for civic engagement training and experience in general education and majors through service learning initiatives, activities associated with the American Democracy Project, internships, and other means. Provide faculty and staff professional development support for this new expectation.
2. Develop support to promote and stimulate civic learning and service learning.
3. Conduct an analysis of the extent to which the university currently participates in civic engagement activities, and use these data as a benchmark for future assessment.
4. Strengthen and expand community relationships and partnerships with educational organizations, businesses, government agencies, and others.
   Continue to pursue new opportunities for collaboration with MSU-Bottineau.

Initiatives:
1. Investigate new academic experiences focused on civic engagement.
2. Increase and enhance the extent to which the university community is integrated with the city of Minot and the region. A strong sense of the university's participation should permeate the Minot area, and should demonstrate faculty, staff, and student involvement in the life of the community and region.
3. Publicize and post the values and importance of contributing to the common good.
4. In the classroom and programs, incorporate special areas of study devoted to altruism, the necessity of contributing to the civic welfare, and the role of active citizenship.
5. Develop a first-year comprehensive student program (orientation, first-year seminar, mentoring, and advising) that provides a unique experience in civic engagement.
STRATEGY SEVEN
Ensuring Future Institutional Viability, Vitality, and Growth

Ensure MSU’s future viability, the vitality of its campus proper, and its success and competitiveness

Minot State University shall remain focused on institutional growth, flexibility, and support. Working together, the university’s faculty and staff will effectively and prudently manage its resources, seek other revenue funds, and remain competitive in student recruitment, securing grants, and engaging in partnerships for mutual benefit. The university will also market itself exceptionally well to a national and international audience, revealing the distinctiveness of the vision and mission, the quality of its programs, and the extent of its accomplishments and achievements.

MSU will remain attentive to a campus master plan focused on learning and scholarship. It will maintain a well-landscaped and beautiful campus that is inviting and accessible and that provides a satisfying and engaging experience for students, employees and members of the public, including those with disabilities. Well-designed, well-maintained, and environmentally-friendly buildings will support effective learning and a collegial and satisfying environment and community interaction.

Priorities:
1. Engage in institutional research and assessment to set key benchmarks and indicators; monitor progress in reaching strategic goals and meeting high expectations and standards of performance.
2. Develop and support a strong and responsive integrated marketing program and plan to significantly increase the visibility and reputation of Minot State University on local, regional, and national levels.
3. Create a highly effective and responsive recruitment and retention service in order to increase enrollments strategically and to ensure campus vitality and focus on mission and vision.
4. Ensure the university’s financial viability through resource management and development; pursue increased and new revenue sources.
5. Complete the new campus master plan and set objectives for completion and funding.

Initiatives:
1. Pursue and create strategic partnerships for recruitment and collaborative ventures.
2. Actively participate in raising the consciousness of legislators and community leaders about the needs, quality, and mission of the university.
3. Maintain strong and responsive advancement and fund-raising efforts through relationships with alumni and friends, and by soliciting donations through annual and comprehensive campaigns.
4. Work to see that the friendliness and safety of Minot State University will become the envy of peer institutions nationwide.
5. Sustain an engaging, attractive, and state-of-the-art campus infrastructure that is beautifully designed, well maintained, and supportive of enhanced teaching and learning; renovate buildings to offer campus vitality in learning and living environments.
6. Demonstrate the university’s commitment to assessment, review, and quality improvement.
From the outset, this planning process has involved the entire campus community and other critical stakeholders in the community and region. This work involved critical and honest thought, and it presents the best scenario devised by many people about an ideal future for the institution. This plan has been developed with the input of many. The vision has been reviewed and endorsed by the Faculty Senate, the Staff Senate, the Student Association, and the Alumni Board, and drafts of the plan have been reviewed and discussed by University Cabinet, President’s Staff, and the Board of Regents.

The resulting plan is understood to provide the background, the case, and the direction for an exciting future in which a growing number of people feel compelled and empowered to participate. The plan is not a marketing device, although its findings and directions could indeed provide ample material for advancing the market and visibility of the university. Advancement and implementation of the strategic plan depend upon the university’s many active and devoted stakeholders. Implementation of the plan is not the responsibility of a few; it depends on the active involvement of everyone. The plan and its various parts, from the action plans, to the strategies and initiatives, to the goal and vision, offer direction and define general guidelines. The plan with its respective parts do not describe rigid guarantees, nor do they imply assurances. Instead, the plan is a document describing possibilities and opportunities; it is a blueprint from which faculty, staff, and other stakeholders can work and contribute responsibility to see that the design itself is realized.

The vision and plan will succeed or fail based on the extent to which faculty, staff, and students, as well as departments, colleges, programs, projects, and other areas work to align their operations and planning with the direction set by the institutional plan. If the specific areas, either on or off the campus, fail to align their own plans with this strategic plan, or worse yet do not work to plan and contribute to the future, the university will remain a loose collection of disparate parts focused predominantly on individual interests and representing a poorly defined regional, public, comprehensive university. If the people and areas of the university are aligned with this plan, the university has a great chance to realize this vision and accomplish this critical goal. Successful implementation of this plan will depend on all faculty and staff and other stakeholders assuming responsibility and contributing to its advancement.
The plan will be implemented in these ways.

- The first approach is through the work of seven action teams which will identify, define, and focus on one priority for each strategy. Action teams will work directly on key action plans for each of those annual priority items. Those priority initiatives will be aligned with the Cornerstone goals and thus will provide a clear link between the university’s plan and the Roundtable initiative.

- The second approach is to have major units and areas on campus—academic and non-academic (e.g., those areas represented in the University Cabinet)—develop their own strategic plans and work to align them with the vision, goal, and strategies of the institutional plan. The first year of implementation will be devoted to development of plans and review of ways to align the unit plan and the institutional plan.

- The third approach is for the campus to embark initially on a review of the university’s basic infrastructure and processes—those processes used for recruitment, professional development, compensation, and evaluation. This review will be guided by a need to align the vision and goals of the plan with the processes the university follows in hiring and evaluating personnel. It is important that the hiring processes and the evaluation processes reflect the institutional priorities and vision. Student recruitment and marketing reviews will involve a careful review and revision to reflect the goals of the plan.

- Another approach is to pursue special initiatives, objectives, and action plans.

- Finally, the plan will be further advanced by communicating regularly, publicizing the goals and objectives, and reporting on the progress and achievements.

The strategies, priorities, and initiatives provide the campus a general framework for fulfilling the institutional goal and realizing the vision for the short term and the long term. These statements are broad in nature in order to provide direction and encourage plans for specific action on the department and unit level. The Faculty Senate, the Staff Senate, the Student Association, the University Cabinet, the Alumni Board, and the Board of Regents will be asked to identify specific action plans related to the key priorities in the plan and relevance to their constituencies. The senates will also be asked to nominate individuals to serve on priority action teams.

The Planning and Budgeting Council will coordinate these processes, communicate with the campus, seek reports on progress, monitor the progress on the plan, and publicize the results.
Plans for Alignment with colleges, department, program and other units
Each unit will be asked to begin processes of setting goals and identifying action plans, coordinating recruitment criteria and evaluation rubrics, in concert with the institutional vision. Supervisors, directors, and administrators will be responsible for seeing that a mission and specific purposes for the individual unit are defined and shared with all members of the unit. Annual goals and action plans for the unit and for the faculty and staff within the unit will be developed to align with the institutional vision and mission. Annual reports and annual evaluations should include specific documentation showing the extent to which the goals and plans have been accomplished.

Relationship to SBHE plan and Roundtable Goals
In the first year of each two-year cycle, the institution will identify specific action plans that will fulfill each of the Cornerstone goals. Identified as two-year projects to align with the schedule of the strategic plan, the action plans will be assessed and reported at the end of the first year, with possible continuance into the second year of the cycle. Priority items for each strategy will be aligned with the six Cornerstone goals: Economic Development, Education Excellence, Flexible and Responsive System, Accessible System, Funding and Rewards, and Sustaining the Vision.
Schedule

- 2004-2005 Formation of council, research conducted, open forums, and development of a draft
- 2005-2006 Open forums, draft development, sharing with campus and external constituencies; sharing and revising plan draft with the senates, Alumni Board, Board of Regents, community members and others; first year of 2005-2007 biennium
- 2006-2007 Publication of Vision 2013; distribution of draft to campus at general convocation, distribution to other stakeholders, general marketing of plan; alignment of goals explained for unit planning and goal setting; legislative session and funding reviewed and approved; initiatives aligned with targets in legislative initiatives; alignment of recruiting and evaluation procedures; action plans developed and commenced on campus and by individual units; case for capital campaign developed; campaign consultants hired; review conducted for start up of silent phase in 2007-2009.
- 2007-2008 Defining Action Plans; capital campaign commences focused on Centennial in September 2013; review and modification of initiatives and action plans; measurement and report on accomplishments; developing institutional budget to be in line with strategic goals and unit; first year of 2007-2009 biennium; plan for the first year of biennia next year; publication of unit plans; visit by HLC in April 2008
- 2008-2009 Reviewing Results and Revising; publish and distribute revised plan; year of legislative session
- 2009-2010 Defining Action Plans; first year of 2009-2011 biennium
- 2010-2011 Reviewing Results and Revising Plan; year of legislative session
- 2011-2012 Defining Action Plans; first year of 2011-2013 biennium
- 2012-2013 Reviewing Results and Revising Plan; year of legislative session
- 2013-2014 Summarizing results of strategic plan; first year of 2013-2015 biennium; formal celebration of Centennial on September 30, possibly to occur during Homecoming
- 2014-2015 Research for new plan; year of the legislative session
- 2015-2016 First year of 2015-2017 biennium
- 2016-2017 Planning for HLC visit continues
- 2017-2018 HLC re-accreditation visit
**Review and revision**

Bi-annual review and evaluation will be coordinated by the Planning and Budgeting Council and distributed to the campus. The first year of the two-year cycle, which parallels the legislative biennium, will be devoted to definition of action plans. The second year will be devoted to a review of the results of the action plans and the revision of the strategic plan. The revision will lead to publication and distribution of the results and the new initiatives. The campus focus will be on action plans, measurement, and review in the second year of each biennium. An annual report and review of data will be completed at the end of the second year of the cycle. The first year of each two-year cycle will begin in the fall with review of this vision, values, strategies, priorities, and action plans; examination of the assessments of accomplishments, and communication of results to campus for feedback and discussion and revisions of the plan. In the spring semester of the second year revisions and drafting will occur, with presentations made to senates, boards, Board of Regents, strategic planning subgroup, followed by the full board; and other groups. At the beginning of the next two-year cycle, the revised plan and priorities will be shared with the campus and distributed widely.

**Assessment and Measurement**

Each of the approved action plans for the institutional strategic plan will include brief and specific steps to take to accomplish the governing strategy and priority. Each action plan will include a list of definite tasks to be completed, a specified timeline and completion date, an individual and/or group assigned to complete the task, and specific indicators or metrics that will show the completion. Responsible individuals are to monitor completion and provide a final report showing the results.
Financing the Plan and Action Plans

The plan, its strategies, priorities, and action plan will be used as the center-piece for future action and budgeting. Further, the plan will provide the campus with the rationale and specific direction for fundraising, grant writing, financial decisions, allocations, and legislative budget proposals. State, national, and private grants, federal earmarks, biennium proposals, decisions about budget allocations, and institutional fundraising will be developed with the plan and its priorities in mind.

Minot State University’s Advancement Office and Alumni Services will use the strategic plan as the primary document for annual fund raising and for a major comprehensive capital campaign focused on the university’s Centennial in 2013. Key initiatives of the strategic plan and the campus master plan will provide strong cases for major contributions to the campaign.

The Planning and Budgeting Council, by virtue of its charge and name, is responsible for connecting budgeting priorities to the planning priorities of the university. Campus open forums will continue to be held to discuss how the strategic plan and funding priorities are aligned.

Communication

A complete “working” plan was distributed to all faculty, staff, and student leaders at the campus open meeting at the beginning of the fall semester 2006. This document included all the background material, the mission, vision, and strategies. An abbreviated version will be published to distribute to other stakeholders, such as selected alumni, the Board of Regents, and other external constituencies. At that time, explanations will be provided about the plan, questions solicited and answered, and general directions provided as to how the plan will be implemented.

The vision, goal, and strategies will be communicated to faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders through a variety of communications and publications. The goal of these communications will be to make sure that the plan, its rationale, and its implementation strategies are well understood and used.
In view of the results of the research into the external and internal environments, a compelling case can be made to support a bold vision for the future for Minot State University. The vision depends on the university building on its documented strengths and responding directly and effectively to the challenges, threats, and weaknesses. The future of Minot State University is not a future of business as usual, of holding on to the status quo, of resisting the obvious changes that are necessary for continued growth and effectiveness as a regional institution, of rationalizing that public support will keep us out of trouble, or of merely reacting quickly to changes and pressures.

This vision depends on a unity of purpose and a commitment by all faculty and staff to think and act strategically and proactively. In the next 10 to 15 years and beyond, educational institutions must make significant changes to remain viable and competitive. Those regional institutions that are unable to make those changes or to plan strategically and responsibly will continue to lose enrollments, public support, revenues, and the abilities to serve its students and the society effectively. Minot State University will not be one of those institutions. Minot State University instead will be a university with national distinction as one of the premier public, regional universities in the “great” Great Plains.
Glossary

Mission
A general statement describing the current purposes and scope of responsibilities of an organization.

Vision
“A realistic, credible, attractive future for an organization. Visions are about possibilities, about desired futures. Simply, a vision is an ideal and unique image of the future.” (Joel Lapham, 1999)

Goal
“A broad statement that describes ultimate ends and achievements for an organization and provides a general focus for organization action.” (Joel Lapham, 1999)

Strategies
General descriptions of the broad direction an institution must pursue to reach its future goal or vision.

Priority
General directions and steps to fulfill a strategy. These are steps an institution must take first, in a sequence of stages, to fulfill the strategy and eventually the institutional goal. Priorities take precedence over initiatives and are to be completed in the immediate year.

Initiatives
Initiatives are the same as priorities but do not assume the immediate status of a priority. The initiatives remain general in nature and describe essential steps to take to fulfill a strategy.

Core Values
“(V)alues that are widely understood, publicly endorsed and consistently acted upon by the organization and each of its members. (Charles Schwahn and William Spady, 1998)
**Action Plans**
A specific action necessary to fulfill a priority or initiative completely or in part. These plans describe specific and realistic actions that identify what outcome will be accomplished, when it will be accomplished, who will accomplish it, what the anticipated costs will be, and what measures will be defined to understand if the plan is accomplished.

**Core Purpose**
Describes the essential reason for the existence of an institution and the work of its people. It is not a general mission statement, but a statement that captures the inherent and driving reason for the work of an institution and its stakeholders.