

# AMERICAN EXECUTIVE

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## *Nurturing* Ideas

Whirlpool's Henry Marcy says his company's innovation journey brought serendipitous employee engagement.





## Minot State University

A new vision is invigorating the campus of this state university. President David Fuller provides the details.

# Agent of Change



**W**illiam Butler Yeats once said, “Education is not filling buckets, but lighting fires.” Following that sentiment, David Fuller, Ph.D., president of Minot State University in Minot, North Dakota, said, “If we can engage our students in the beauty and challenges of the Great Plains, they’ll understand why we learn and will contribute to others.”

Those thoughts and many others were the impetus behind the development of MSU’s Vision 2013, a comprehensive, strategic plan to enhance the university’s relationship with its community, its students, and the world by the time it celebrates its 100th birthday.

The first step the university took to tackle such a tall order was to gather its key stakeholders together to ask what MSU is to them and what the university can do to better serve their needs.

After gathering and analyzing the data, MSU’s administrative team saw a number of common themes in the responses. To the positive, many said that when they think of MSU, they think of a university that values a good education and community involvement. But there were some critical responses too.

“A number of focus groups showed concern about our infrastructure, if it’s established enough to truly represent students



across the board, from the registrar's office to the assistants and various offices," said Fuller. "It raised our concerns about professional development and getting people to be aware of what service means to students."

The theme of engagement was also prevalent. It has since become one of the seven key themes of Vision 2013, which include: creating a distinctive mission focused on engagement and place, fostering engaged learning and place for the benefit of students, and creating a commitment to civic engagement, service, and the common good.

These three themes also tie back to Fuller's idea that if MSU can get its students engaged in Northwestern North Dakota, solving community problems, helping the community through volunteer work, and adding field-based learning



activities to the curriculum, they will take that understanding with them as they move forward in their lives.

"We offer a variety of engaging activities that will provide a rich experience for the students that include traditional academics, arts and sciences, as well as traveling and studying abroad," said Fuller. "Those are the kinds of rich engagements we want to become powerful at doing."

### Building diversity

Another of MSU's seven strategies is to build diversity and multiculturalism. But in a state where in 2005 more than 93% of the population was white, creating opportunities to interact with a variety of cultures isn't easy.

Minot has an advantage with the Minot Air Force Base, which Fuller said brings a great deal of diversity to create balance, but a significant number of students participate in off-campus schooling. So to address this strategy, MSU developed exchange program partnerships with China's SIAS International University in Henan Province, Denmark's Aalborg University, Norway's Telemark University College, South Korea's PaiChai University, Sweden's Kristianstad University, and Turkey's Kadir Has University in Istanbul.

In addition, in 2007, MSU brought 15 students from China to North Dakota for an accelerated master's degree in management program. The university has also reached out to three North Dakotan Native American community colleges: United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt, and Fort Berthold Community College in New Town.

Although North Dakota's rural populations are shrinking, the university has seen an increase in Native American, Canadian, and international students. It's also seen an increase in its outreach and online student populations, but Fuller said the work isn't done yet.

"We have to think about being smarter in recruiting and retention, what we can do to keep students and help them succeed," he said. "It comes back to the notion of service. The better, genuine service you can provide to students so they can graduate, the better we can do."

### Supporting success

In any business, to provide a higher quality of service, you must show your employees—in this case staff and faculty—that you value the skills they bring to the table. To illustrate that understanding, one of the seven strategies of Vision 2013 is valuing faculty and staff within an engaged community. MSU set four priorities to recruit, retain, and support faculty and staff; inspire dedication and devotion to the institutional mission; and help them engage students and support their successes.

The first is setting high performance standards and expectations for the work of faculty and staff. The second is successfully providing competitive salary goals and packages for all employees. To ensure a commitment to the university's mission and vision, MSU will also focus on offering professional development support. And to build a supportive community, the university hopes to recruit and retain faculty dedicated to continuing their education in their fields of study and supporting Vision 2013 by concentrating on creating engagement-focused curriculum.



The final two strategies of Vision 2013 are to focus on student success and future achievements and to ensure future institutional viability, vitality, and growth. A key component to the success of these strategies, as well as the other five, is the willingness of the faculty, staff, and students to do their part to transform MSU into a place that not only produces university graduates but also agents of change.

Listed within the pages of Vision 2013 is a quote by John Ruskin that illustrates the point: “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.”



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In the fall of 2006, a copy of Vision 2013 was handed out to all faculty, staff, and student leaders at an open campus meeting. And with the groundwork laid two years into the plan, Fuller is hopeful and excited about the future of MSU.

“If you ask faculty and staff what our value is, they often say it is to serve students. It’s a mantra here, it’s our responsibility, and it’s good to have that placed out there for all to see and adhere to,” Fuller concluded. ☐

—Amanda Gaines

# HOW MANY ENGINEERS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A PLANET?



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