

Introduction

Minot State University (MSU) is a public university dedicated to excellence in education, scholarship, and community engagement. Founded as a normal school in 1913, MSU's steady evolution for more than a century has fulfilled its commitment to serving North Dakota's changing needs and to creating opportunities for its citizens.

Today MSU, as the only Carnegie Master's College and University – Medium Program in the North Dakota University System, distinguishes itself by preparing graduates to serve the public good. Its strategic plan, *Empowering Generations*, strives to provide comparable, meaningful learning to all its students wherever it takes place: on campus, through distance technology, or in a clinical or remote environment. MSU's programs span the arts and sciences as well as applied areas such as nursing, communication sciences and disorders, accounting, criminal justice, and, in keeping with the institution's founding charter, education.

This assurance report serves two purposes and audiences. Most immediately, it demonstrates MSU's fulfillment of each of the criteria set by The Higher Learning Commission to the 2022 Site-Visit team. In addition, this report serves as a comprehensive benchmark and enduring reference tool for the MSU community as it celebrates the institution's achievements, acknowledges its challenges, and builds on its strengths in coming years.

Although the untimely arrival of a global pandemic during the study year (2020-2021) of this report necessitated temporary adjustments, detailed as appropriate in the assurance argument and a separate COVID-19 report, MSU's refinement in the three preceding years – of its processes for assessment of academic and co-curricular learning, for comparability of courses across modalities, and for connecting assessment, planning, and budgeting – have all enabled the institution to traverse the past two years without compromising its core mission.

We are proud to share the successes of our faculty, staff, and students as part of the Higher Learning Commission's comprehensive evaluation.

Go Beavers!

Criterion 1

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Summary

As a Carnegie Master's-level public institution of higher education, MSU is committed to its mission, vision, and strategic plan, *Empowering Generations*. These documents guide MSU's institutional operations and are articulated publicly on the website, in its catalogs, and on the walls of all campus buildings. The mission directs the campus to provide excellent educational opportunities to twenty-first century students, when, where, and how they need them.

MSU's mission calls for rigorous and active academic opportunities for students, which empowers faculty to continually review courses and programs to ensure teaching and learning is meaningful, real, and designed to help students deal with today's complex issues. It also drives the university's commitment to provide research opportunities to its graduate and undergraduate students and enables faculty to ask difficult questions and advance knowledge in creative ways. Collectively, all these activities support a campus that advances the public good and supports the community at large.

Finally, MSU provides a vibrant campus life that embraces the diversity of its members and the wider world. In the past year MSU, under the leadership of the MSU Diversity Council, extended its long record of diversity-related events by hosting public talks on racism, offering anti-racism training, and drafting a formal land acknowledgment for the campus.

Criterion 2

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Summary

As a member of the North Dakota University System, MSU is governed by the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) and follows policies and procedures set at the system level to ensure fair and ethical behavior across all campus financial, academic, hiring, and auxiliary activities. Policies are in place related to key university functions such as conflict of interest, intellectual property, academic honesty, academic freedom, Title IX, nepotism, undue influence, and data protection. Handbooks for faculty, staff, and student behavior and expectations are all publicly posted, regularly updated, and followed. The campus presents its constituents, both prospective and current, with transparent and public information regarding costs, admission requirements, graduation requirements and grievance procedures.

The responsible pursuit of knowledge is central to MSU's mission. Research is guided by appropriate and established SHBE policies and guidelines provided by the Office of Sponsored Programs and regulated by institutional IRB policies based on national standards. Academic honesty is expected and woven into the campus culture for all members of the MSU community, with clear guidance provided through the General Education program, on faculty syllabi, in MSU catalogs, in discipline-specific courses, and in Human Resources policies.

Academic freedom is valued and respected at MSU. Faculty and students are free to pursue knowledge and questions across wide-ranging, complex, and controversial topics. The broad variety of academic research topics and public discussions on the MSU campus every year underscore the institution's commitment to the encouragement of intellectual inquiry from diverse perspectives as essential to campus life.

Criterion 3

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Summary

MSU serves the public good through distinctive undergraduate and graduate programs taught by experienced, qualified faculty in small-class settings. Its offerings are rigorous and accessible, with expected learning outcomes clearly stated to the public in the catalog and syllabi and with courses offered in consistent, comparable forms across in-person, hybrid, and remote modalities. MSU's First-Year Experience and General Education programs emphasize developmental skills, capacities, and experiences to prepare graduates to be life-long learners in a culturally diverse and technologically complex world. MSU supports these activities with exceptional facilities to support curricular and co-curricular learning, including a state-of-the-art Nursing simulation clinic, a beautifully renovated building housing Kinesiology and Education, a student-focused Wellness Center and athletic complex, and one of the state's premier concert halls. Technology upgrades for HyFlex and hybrid teaching during the pandemic to nearly all MSU's classrooms have endowed the campus with exceptional capacity to deliver on its mission of offering courses to students when, where, and how they need them. Finally, a \$25 million project starting in Summer 2022 will renovate Hartnett Hall to provide an additional recital hall and dedicated studios and teaching facilities for Art, Music, Theater, Broadcasting, Professional Communications, and World Languages.

Criterion 4

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Summary

MSU follows established assessment processes that are robust and cover program reviews, yearly assessment of academic and co-curricular learning by faculty and staff, and student performance on developmental general education skills and capacities. Faculty review courses systematically to ensure comparability across modalities and locations, a set of processes that served the campus particularly well during the pandemic to ensure continuity of instruction during rapid expansion of various types of remote instruction. Feedback on each type of assessment drives improvement in student learning through curricular change, provides justification for budget requests, and shapes adjustments to courses and programs. General education assessment, with three full cycles (4.5 years total) of data collection and university-wide discussion, now allows detailed understanding of student proficiency across a wide range of developmental criteria and has raised awareness of areas needing attention and those with consistently high achievement. At the same time, it has become evident that managing and explaining this complex model requires significant resources and faculty time. In 2021-2022 Faculty Senate committees are actively exploring simplifying the current model or potentially replacing it with something less complex.

Criterion 5

The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Summary

MSU has made significant progress in the past four years regarding budgeting and its connection to campus priorities and academic needs. The campus has completed three iterations of a budget process that includes requests based on academic and assessment needs and justified by strategic plan priorities. These are evaluated through public presentations and ranked and recommended by the Strategic Planning and Budget Council to President's Staff for final decisions. A fourth cycle (2021-2022) is nearly complete. These processes position MSU to respond to changing priorities and environments, including unpredictable events such as the pandemic and enrollment and state funding trends, which it tracks carefully. Finally, MSU administration and faculty recognize the need to thoughtfully discuss changes to MSU's organizational structure. Important conversations regarding possible changes are currently underway, particularly regarding the arrangement of academic units.