

Welcome to Valley City State University!

Every August, I give a State of the University address as part of fall convocation week. Many times during the 1990s, I opened that address with a train metaphor to represent the process of change. In 1993, I arrived to find a University that was poised for dramatic adventures with people champing at the bit to run with their dreams. I said then that the train was in the station, loading passengers. Over the years, it eventually turned into a rocket ship hurtling through space.

The people of VCSU got on board, figured out who could best take which roles, kept their eyes on a shared target, and did each and every thing necessary to get us there. As we entered new frontiers, they got out and laid tracks. When we ran short of provisions, they hunted and gathered. They found booster rockets and created aerodynamic shapes. By 1995, we knew our students needed full-time use of a portable computer, in and out of class – but always, always as a tool to achieve learner-centered education, as a means to greater ends. By 1997, we could describe our shared target as “customized learning” that is convenient, efficient, and effective for learners.

The associated benefits of our journey are multiple. We are now able to help people learn to think and work in a digital age. Businesses seek us out as partners. Local leaders have declared our graduates to be the most valuable renewable resource in the region, working with us in major efforts to keep those graduates employed here. Academic projects such as the Medicine Wheel and the Community School of the Arts have boosted both the University and the community. Our evolutionary process and our commitment to professional development have enabled a number of students and others to develop high-demand technology skills that benefit both them and the University.

We are transforming the teaching and learning processes by taking our vision, mission, and purposes so seriously that we cannot help but change. We are pleased to present to you a dynamic Valley City State University, and we welcome your contributions to its continuous improvement.

Ellen-Earle Chaffee
President

We are pleased to present to you a dynamic Valley City State University, and we welcome your contributions to its continuous improvement.

Valley City State University was established by the North Dakota Constitutional Convention as a land grant institution in 1889. In 1894, the first graduating class, consisting of three members, received normal school certificates.

Historical Overview

Valley City State University was established by the North Dakota Constitutional Convention as a land grant institution in 1889. From the beginning, the institution was a product of both local community initiative and direction from the North Dakota legislative assembly. Eager for early action, representatives of the Valley City community prevailed upon the first legislative assembly to pass a bill implementing the constitutional provision. The Normal School opened on October 13, 1890, in rented quarters in Valley City and in September of 1892 moved to its present location. In 1894, the first graduating class, consisting of three members, received normal school certificates.

In 1921, the legislative assembly authorized the State Normal School at Valley City to award a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education (later changed to Bachelor of Science in Education), and designated the institution as Valley City State Teachers College, effective July 1, 1921. The new collegiate status subjected the College to new standards of academic quality and breadth of program. The curriculum in the liberal arts and general education expanded to provide a broader intellectual foundation. The purpose of the institution was enlarged to include the preparation of secondary school teachers and supervisors as well as elementary school teachers, and preparation of students for vocations and professions other than teaching. In 1939, an important development in governance of the institution occurred with a constitutional revision creating a State Board of Higher Education and placing all of the state's institutions of higher education under its control.

Although the College had offered a liberal arts program since 1946, it was not until 1963 that the legislative assembly recognized the expanded mission and designated the institution as Valley City State College. In 1987, the name was changed to Valley City State University.

Accreditation History

Valley City State University is currently accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and by the National Association of Schools of Music.

The State Normal School at Valley City received its initial accreditation by the North Central Association in 1915. Recent accreditation history includes comprehensive evaluations conducted in 1982-83 and 1991-92, followed by recommendations for continuing accreditation. However, at the time of the most recent comprehensive evaluation, March 30 - April 1, 1992, the NCA team noted that the University's mission statement, which had been under review since 1989, had not yet been approved. While recommending continuing accreditation, the team required a June 1, 1994 report on the continuing development of the University's program to document student academic achievement, and an additional evaluation during 1996-97 focused on the mission of the institution.

In May 1994, Valley City State University's report on the continuing development of the program to document student academic achievement was submitted to North Central; it was accepted July 20. Following consultation with the NCA liaison, the date of VCSU's focused visit was advanced by one year and coordinated with the comprehensive evaluation scheduled at Mayville State University. The focused visit was completed satisfactorily in April 1996.

A Decade of Transformation: A Play in Three Acts

Ten years ago, Valley City State University was a very different place – not the way Chicago is different from Nashville, but the way a cornfield is different in fall from spring. The changes are organic, evolutionary, and productive, but nonetheless dramatic. In the spirit of drama, the University's last ten years are presented here as a play in three acts, depicting a decade of transformation.

Act I – The Stage is Set (c. 1989-1993) ***Political, economic, and demographic realities set in***

To a degree few people fully comprehended at the time, the 1980s were a decade of farm closures and out-migration for North Dakota. The loss of rural economic activity and young families is the undercurrent for all major trends that have been playing out in the state ever since. During the later 1980s and into the 1990s, a number of school districts merged together as enrollments began to decline.

The 1989 legislative session based its 1989-91 state budget on modest tax increases. Legislators' apparent insensitivity to the economic stresses on taxpayers in the 1980s prompted the people to reject the tax increases in a popular referendum in late 1989, which led to cuts in all state budgets and serious re-examination of priorities and public relations.

Perhaps the most famous phrase in North Dakota history is the "too much mistake," coined by state historian Elwyn Robinson. The state's founders, he argued, were overly optimistic on most dimensions, including the establishment of too many postsecondary education institutions. The refrain in public discourse that responded to this notion throughout the 20th century was "close small colleges." In 1990-91, the State Board of Higher Education sought to demonstrate its responsiveness to the people's tax rejection without yielding to the closure refrain. Whatever the Board members may have wanted to do, closing small colleges was a political and legal impracticality, since the colleges have vocal defenders and constitutional status.

Coincidentally, two other major events occurred at the same time. The 1989 legislature also passed a law requiring creation of a seven-year plan for higher education. The Board had spent much effort in the 1980s to organize and flesh out its first policy manual, and the time was right for its first formal statewide planning initiative. Responding to the law brought the Board and campus leaders together in new ways. It also began to increase substantive communication among the Board, the legislature, and the executive branch. In addition, Board members studied a management philosophy that came to be known as Total Quality Improvement

Ten years ago, Valley City State University was a very different place. The changes are organic, evolutionary, and productive, but nonetheless dramatic.

TQI). The concept emphasized ideas such as customer focus, decentralization, and rational decision making.

The Board made three major decisions in the 1990-92 time period to try to demonstrate its responsiveness to cost-conscious taxpayers without harming institutions.

First, the Board created the North Dakota University System (NDUS), headed by a chancellor. The change was primarily symbolic. The Board already governed all affected institutions and employed a Commissioner. Over time, the change has encompassed more centralized budget development and legislative relations, with the campus presidents more clearly reporting to the chancellor rather than the Board.

Second, the Board adopted Total Quality Improvement on behalf of itself and the campuses. The Board published a booklet for all employees explaining TQI and expressing its commitment. Ultimately, the Board did not follow through on this commitment. It was important at the time, however, in shaping the Board's thinking about its options and in making a statement about what kind of University System the Board wished to encourage.

Third, the Board investigated two proposed structural changes among the campuses and eventually adopted one of them. During the exploration process, the Board put a moratorium on approving proposed revisions of institutional mission statements. This moratorium and lack of clarity about how the new university system might impact institutional autonomy led a visiting team from the North Central Association to require an interim report and visit for Valley City State University.

The proposed structural change that was not adopted was to place North Dakota State University in partnership with the North Dakota State College of Science. The other, which the Board adopted in December 1992, was to place Valley City State University in partnership with Mayville State University, with shared top administrators and the intent to improve opportunities for students. The two universities were the smallest baccalaureate institutions in the state. They had and would retain constitutional, budgetary, and accreditation autonomy. To support improved opportunities for students, the state had been among the first to develop a comprehensive statewide interactive video system (IVN), and it had a statewide online library catalog (ODIN). Although unstated, it is likely that the two primary goals for the new structure were (a) to make a dramatic statement to the people of North Dakota and (b) to decrease administrative overhead costs and allow the savings to fund salaries and instructional activities on each campus.

And at Valley City State University in 1989-1993 . . .

Valley City State University was preparing for a ten-year North Central Association reaccreditation review. Assessment of student learning was a major new requirement

The Board made three major decisions to try to demonstrate its responsiveness to taxpayers:

- 1. The Board created the North Dakota University System.*
- 2. The Board adopted Total Quality Improvement on behalf of itself and the campuses.*
- 3. The Board investigated two proposed structural changes among the campuses.*

for the accreditation process, and the University prepared its first assessment plan, which NCA accepted.

Key individuals at VCSU had long been fascinated by the potential of instructional technology. In the 1980s, then-president Charles House showcased a mobile instructional technology unit at Board meetings and other events. Through such activities, the Board recognized VCSU's emerging innovation in teaching and learning using technology throughout the curriculum. In 1990, as part of the Board's response to the public mandate for change, President House requested and received Board designation for VCSU as the state's leading institution for instructional technologies and excellence in rural education.

Much of the development of instructional technology came from an informal group of like-minded faculty and staff that organized itself at that time as the Committee for Innovation in Instruction (CII). Its primary purpose was to discuss ways to advance the newly added portion of the mission relating to technology and innovation. All faculty and staff participants in CII were volunteers, and they represented all six academic divisions.

The group obtained a Bush Foundation faculty development grant (1992-95) to provide opportunities for faculty to learn more about instructional technology. It led in developing a new instructional technology degree program, which was approved in 1993. It also worked with K-12 educators to propose establishment of a state-funded center to assist K-12 and other educators in learning how to use technology for instruction. When the legislature funded the proposed organization in 1993, it took on the Center for Innovation in Instruction name and the mission "to improve teaching with technology." CII has been extraordinarily successful. It is located on the VCSU campus but is quasi-independent. Meanwhile, the VCSU interest group changed its name to the Committee for Innovation and Technology in Education (CITE) and continued to meet, plan, and support relevant initiatives.

Also evident in the new mission statement was the extent to which the Board's interest in Total Quality Improvement resonated with the VCSU culture. The University brought state and national Total Quality experts to campus on several occasions in the early 1990s and strongly endorsed student-centered learning as its highest commitment. For example, in a major strategic planning initiative in 1993-94, VCSU adopted this vision statement, which remains in effect: "Valley City State University is a nationally recognized learner-centered caring community committed to continuous improvement."

Recognizing the vulnerability of small campuses, the importance of enrollment growth, and the Board's growing emphasis in the 1980s on inter-institutional collaboration, VCSU reached out for two new student markets. One was in the larger community of Jamestown, just 30 minutes away, where VCSU offered an array of courses aimed primarily at the placebound adult student.

The other was in Fargo, on the campus of North Dakota State University, an hour away. NDSU is authorized to offer secondary education, but not elementary education. Its elementary students had been capitalizing on the Tri-College University

Recognizing the vulnerability of small campuses, the importance of enrollment growth, and the Board's growing emphasis in the 1980s on inter-institutional collaboration, VCSU reached out for two new student markets offering courses in Jamestown and an elementary education program at Fargo, in collaboration with NDSU.

INTRODUCTION

The State Board of Higher Education decided in December 1992 that VCSU would share administrators with Mayville State.

Much discussion about the nature of the partnership and extent of shared administration ensued throughout 1993 and much of 1994.

and ultimately transferring to sister institution Moorhead State. The Moorhead State program was full in those years, leaving substantial unmet demand for elementary education in Fargo-Moorhead. Through an innovative approach, VCSU began to offer its elementary education program on the campus of NDSU. The program grew quickly and has now stabilized at its capacity of about 110 students.

When the State Board of Higher Education decided in December 1992 that VCSU would share administrators with Mayville State, the Board was already aware that President Charles House would retire at the end of the academic year. Soon after the Board’s decision, academic vice president Judy Kemp accepted a position in Maine. President House appointed business division chair Ray Brown as acting vice president for the Spring of 1993, and the Board appointed him acting president for the month of July, while the search for a shared president with Mayville State concluded. The Board appointed Ellen Chaffee as president of both institutions, starting August 1, 1993.

Much discussion about the nature of the partnership and extent of shared administration took place throughout 1993 and much of 1994. With the appointment of the president, the universities were in a position to begin shaping the very general mandate of the Board into a reality.

Also during this period, VCSU received state funding to restore much of the main corridor of its main building, McFarland Hall, to its historic look. The project provided a much-needed improvement in appearance, the first major renovation of an old building in several decades.

The University had established fund-raising groups for scholarships in the early 1970s and had a periodic newsletter and Homecoming activities for alumni. Each activity was separate from the others, administered by 1.5 staff members funded by the University. During this period, VCSU received its first two significant bequests, both in the form of endowed scholarships. No one on campus had known these were coming, since the University had no major gifts or planned giving initiatives.

**Act II – Major Changes (c. 1993-1998)
Risk, institutional differentiation**

By refusing to allow the 1989 tax increase, North Dakotans set the stage for what has become a decade of financial squeeze. The mid-1990s were characterized by low salary increases, failure to fund inflation, and accelerating deferred maintenance. The campuses began to know the full meaning of the word “reallocation,” both in order to seize such opportunities for improvement as they could and to comply with various unfunded mandates. Through reallocation, the university system made significant efforts to increase salaries of continuing personnel with salary levels being the top priority.

During this period, the impact of farm closures and out-migration that began in the 1980s appeared in K-12 enrollment projections. Everyone within higher

education and many in the general public became aware that the number of high school seniors would wobble a bit for the rest of the decade and then, during the 2000-2010 decade, decline precipitously to a total of about 25 percent fewer seniors. Every institution in the state began to step up its efforts at differentiation, outreach, and marketing. Sometimes these initiatives enhanced the evolution of the fledgling university system; sometimes they were inconsistent with its emphasis on collaboration over competition.

The State Board increased its efforts to create a unified budget proposal for each biennial legislative session, replacing largely unrestrained institutional requests and lobbying with a coordinated set of guidelines and parameters that allowed campuses to define their own uses within budget categories and limits, but did not allow for requests beyond what the Board authorized. In a sense, the Board shifted some competitive politicking that had earlier taken place in the Capitol to its own arena. In doing so, the Board defined each biennium a set of parameters that, in its view, represented a reasonable approximation of equity among the campuses within a reasonable overall budget increase. Capital projects were placed in statewide priority order. Campus presidents were expected to support the Board's budget and capital proposals.

The shift in budget approach was timely, in that Governor Schafer (1992-2000) expected substantial reallocation in all state budgets as a first – and sometimes last – step in the budget process. Twice he mandated starting the budget process with reductions to a new base (95 percent and 97 percent) and twice the base was “hold even,” without inflation. The Board's stronger hand on the rudder may have pre-empted what otherwise could have been major disputes among the campuses.

In 1996-97, the State Board hired a consulting team to review the entire state system from a strategic perspective. Widely known as “the second Bush panel,” (funded by the Bush Foundation) the effort engaged nationally known higher education experts to review progress made since a similar group reported in 1986. The themes of the report were quality, access, and partnerships. It endorsed greater efforts to serve adults and part-time students and more engagement with workforce training. It also implied that the state needed to come to grips with its ambivalence about the number of public campuses.

This report, plus the increasingly difficult budgets, made for a louder chorus decrying “too many campuses.” People held varying views on whether Valley City State University was in jeopardy. Some felt that three smaller campuses would go first, and perhaps that would be enough. Some felt that VCSU had established its value beyond question and would be retained regardless of size. In the minds of many, though, there was no telling how far the state would go once it began any closings at all. It was no secret that the smaller campuses made up only a tiny fraction of the total higher education budget. Once people realized how many would have to go in order to make a real difference financially, the appetite for closure might have become enormous.

In previous sessions over a period of many years, legislators had repeatedly defeated resolutions to take higher education's section of the state constitution to a vote of

In 1996-97, the State Board hired a consulting team to review the entire state system from a strategic perspective. The themes of the report were quality, access, and partnerships. It endorsed greater efforts to serve adults and part-time students and more engagement with workforce training.

INTRODUCTION

The primary partnering activities between VCSU and MSU were: shared library science minor, collaborative library collection development, exchange of selected courses over the interactive video network, and the initial strategic planning exercise.

With special initiative funding from the legislature, the University built an adventure learning course at the former Kathryn School, 17 miles south of Valley City.

the people, aiming to remove some or all institutional names, locations, and missions as a necessary if not sufficient condition for closure. Finally, the 1997 legislative session passed such a resolution. In the statewide vote in November 1998, the people soundly rejected the idea, with 64 percent voting to leave the Constitution as it was.

The Board's seven-year strategic plan of the early 1990s evolved through legislative action into a six-year plan with mandated collaboration among the Board, legislators, governor, and public instruction in developing the plan. In this phase, campuses were required to report annually on their contributions to achieving the statewide plan.

And at Valley City State University in 1993-1998 . . .

The beginning of the 1993-1998 period focused on launching a new president and a new administrative structure in conjunction with developing a new strategic plan. Planning activities were frequent, extensive, and intense throughout 1993-94, both on campus and with colleagues from Mayville State. Ray Brown continued as acting academic officer while applying for the shared provost position with Mayville State. The joint search committee recommended others, instead. Dr. Brown left the University and the appointed individual began work in April 1994, but serious problems arose from both campuses before the end of that semester. Extensive attempts at resolution were unsuccessful, and the president terminated the provost in December. Meanwhile, all academic leadership came from the division chairs and faculty. Dr. Brown reapplied for the shared position and served from 1995-1998. Since the president aimed to have either herself or the academic vice president on campus at all times, those two officers rotated, each at VCSU for a week at a time.

Other positions shared with Mayville State at the outset included the vice president for business and the comptroller. Through the remainder of the 1990s, shared positions fluctuated, numbering as many as nine at one point, including human resources director, facilities services director, financial aid director, grants officer, and director of cooperative education. Analyses during the period showed that each institution saved over \$500,000 per year in salaries and benefits during peak sharing periods, over \$300,000 otherwise. All such funds were reinvested in the University, primarily in additional salary increases to continuing personnel.

The primary partnering activities that took place between the two universities in this period were: shared library science minor, collaborative library collection development, exchange of selected courses over the interactive video network, and the initial strategic planning exercise.

Continuing the University's interest in Total Quality, VCSU hosted expert David Langford as a consultant. He described a "ropes" or "adventure learning" course at his school, and the notion appealed strongly to VCSU leaders. With special initiative funding from the legislature, the University built an adventure learning course at the former Kathryn School, 17 miles south of Valley City. The course includes

various activities that help people develop leadership, teamwork, communication, risk-taking, and other personal and interpersonal skills. Deciding to establish the course was a far greater risk than it now appears. No such facility was remotely familiar to virtually anyone in North Dakota, and it was sometimes perceived as a very expensive toy or a ridiculous psychological game. Fortunately, both students and leading businesses throughout the region saw it otherwise.

All faculty and most staff members were first to participate when the course opened in 1994, helping build their skills for more changes to come. The course is part of the orientation process for all new students, quickly giving them a sense of belonging. It is a key component in the corporate training minor established in 1996. Through the course, the University serves many diverse corporate clients for their training needs. The course has also allowed the University to offer valuable collegueship and economic support for the tiny community of Kathryn.

The University had a pre-existing freshman seminar program, but the adventure learning course helped support efforts to increase its scope and effectiveness over the years. The program was retitled Learning to Live, Living to Learn. As of 2000-01, the program incorporates a substantial leadership development component and it continues throughout the freshman year instead of just fall semester.

In 1993, nearby University of Minnesota – Crookston provided all faculty and students with notebook computers. Members of the Committee for Innovation and Technology in Education (CITE) at VCSU paid attention to this development, and soon individuals and small groups were visiting Crookston, supported by the Bush Foundation faculty development grant. The more familiar people became with the notebook campus idea, the more appealing it became as a logical next step for VCSU's instructional technology leadership position. CITE members recommended that VCSU should have a technology plan and submitted a written proposal to the administration in the Fall of 1994. The proposal called for a committee structure (implemented and called the Technology Advisory Committee) and a planning process developed by the Center for Innovation in Instruction. TAC began work in January 1995, ultimately leading to the notebook initiative.

CITE members and other volunteers participated in writing VCSU's share of a collaborative Title III federal grant in 1994-95, focusing on faculty development and student portfolios with instructional technology. Their proposed development process complemented two other major efforts. First, the staff of the Center for Innovation in Instruction led a campus team through a comprehensive technology planning process. Second, the Executive Team led an extensive set of structured interactions through which faculty, staff, and students considered the possibility of providing universal access to computer technologies. Consensus was to proceed with that initiative. The University appointed a chief information officer (CIO), the first such position in the state university system. The technology planning team became a permanent Technology Advisory Committee, and the CIO's staff group became the Information Technology Center.

Fortunately, the Title III proposal was funded in 1995-2000. The grant provided faculty development and key equipment in support of the notebook initiative.

The more familiar people became with the notebook campus idea, the more appealing it became as a logical next step for VCSU's instructional technology leadership position.

INTRODUCTION

The driving vision behind the Title III grant was aimed at eventually requiring all graduating students to have produced a digital portfolio of their best work in college.

*Another innovative approach to institutional assessment began in 1995 with the university's first **Report to Investors**. The annual report details multi-year trend lines and key facts about the university on dimensions about which the public, boards, and legislators typically want information.*

Grants from the Bush Foundation supported other essential faculty development opportunities. The University gained authority from the State Board to levy a notebook technology fee of \$850 per student per year to pay the direct cost of the student computer, software, and key support. This represented a tuition/fee increase to students of nearly 50 percent in a single year – arguably suicidal for a small campus with adverse demographics and keen competition. This was a second major risk for this time period following the risk of shared administration, but it generated essentially no dissension on campus. People believed that this was the right thing to do, period. Enrollment was steady that first year and has been ever since.

The University reallocated to cover all remaining costs of the notebook initiative – the state provided no additional funds. Costs included completing the campus network, purchasing extensive equipment beyond what was covered in the grant, paying the new CIO and limited additional technical staff, and renovating nearly all classrooms for 100 percent technology use.

The driving vision behind the Title III grant was not the notebook initiative, however. Rather, the grant was aimed at eventually requiring all graduating students to have produced a digital portfolio of their best work in college. This requirement takes effect for all graduating seniors starting in Spring 2002. During the early years of the grant, the portfolio's purpose was seen variously as a way of assessing and documenting student academic achievement or as a dossier for prospective employers. Pursuing and sorting through this and related issues represent a major portion of the university's attention to assessment during this period.

All faculty received notebook computers in Winter 1995; all students received them in Fall 1996. During 1995-96, extensive classroom renovations, infrastructure development, and equipment purchases took place along with considerable training. Curriculum changes were made to ensure student competency with the computers from the beginning. Decisions about software, image, help desk, and peripherals took place along with decisions about training topics and methods.

The Board and the University were eager to conduct research about the impact of technology on learning, but time and resources did not permit a comprehensive approach. Several professors led specific projects to identify changes in faculty practice and student perceptions of impact. Limited as they are, those initiatives are remarkable in several respects. They were done voluntarily, with only minimal support from Bush Foundation grant funds; they represent high quality research methods; they encompass nearly all aspects of teaching and learning; and they document both massive classroom changes and strong student support for those changes.

Another innovative approach to institutional assessment began in 1995 with the university's first *Report to Investors*. Produced annually through the vice president for student affairs, the report details multi-year trend lines and key facts about the University on dimensions about which the public, boards, and legislators typically want information. The report is a major contribution to address public expectations of accountability. In addition, it serves as a set of key indicators for those who set priorities for University improvement.

Another major initiative of this period capitalized on several years of development by Spanish professor Kay Kringlie, who had been visiting UABCS, a college in La Paz, Mexico, every year. As her relationships there evolved, she made it possible for the two universities to implement a partnership agreement for the exchange of students and faculty. The first such agreement was signed in 1994. In an effort to reflect the ideals put forth in the North American Free Trade Act, Dr. Ray Brown also built a relationship with Brandon University in Manitoba to expand the opportunity for international exchange. VCSU also assisted Brandon University in developing a relationship with UABCS, resulting in a tri-lateral agreement in 1998. In 1999, the University entered a partnership with URSE, a University in Oaxaca, Mexico.

As these changes developed, faculty and staff felt the need for a revised mission statement. Through extensive consultation, they developed the current mission, approved by the State Board in February 1998:

Valley City State University is a learner centered community dedicated to continuing improvement in meeting student needs. Preparing individuals to serve in a changing world, the institution provides a quality educational experience in an innovative culture and a technologically enhanced environment.

A leader in the effective use of instructional technologies, Valley City State University is a member of the North Dakota University System and offers baccalaureate degrees in education, business, and the liberal arts.

The new mission statement confirms the significance of learner-centered instruction, innovation, and instruction technology as hallmarks of VCSU's efforts to prepare individuals to serve in a changing world.

The relentless search for new frontiers and better ways that has come to characterize Valley City State University soon produced another major grant proposal. The University won another \$1.7 million in federal Title III funds, this time as a single institution, for the period 1998-2003. The purpose was to take major steps toward the concept of customized learning. This concept evolved from the notion that technology is only a tool, a means to the end of better learning. The question then became, "Better in what ways?" Faculty immediately used technology to improve standard classroom experiences, which was one vitally important answer to that question. But technology opened so many doors – distance delivery, for example, as so many other campuses were beginning to pursue. VCSU took a different approach.

Customized learning comes from the university's commitment to learner-centered education. The best way to be fully learner-centered would be to do all those things, and only those things, that help the learner achieve his or her educational and professional goals, and to do them in ways that best fit the learners' time, pace, and learning style. In other words, distance from a campus is only one of many dimensions on which learners differ. VCSU focused on the other dimensions in defining and pursuing customized learning. Through the grant, VCSU is developing

As these changes developed, faculty and staff felt the need for a revised mission statement. Through extensive consultation, they developed the current mission, approved by the State Board in February 1998.

The new mission statement confirms the significance of learner-centered instruction, innovation, and instruction technology as hallmarks of VCSU's efforts to prepare individuals to serve in a changing world.

a customized technology education program and student services to help implement it.

A different kind of customizing came from conversations with personnel at Great Plains Software, a highly successful Fargo firm. At the University's invitation, they defined their entry level knowledge and skill requirements and VCSU customized its curriculum to address those expectations. The company provides an exceptional internship period as part of the program.

During this period, the University also established and grew the Community School of the Arts to provide community service and to enhance several aspects of the arts program. In addition, the music program sought and received full accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education conducted a review of that program and cited it as exemplary. The North Central Association conducted an interim review, including a site visit, and was satisfied with its findings.

Clearly, Valley City State University was a center for productive change in the mid-1990s. Reviews during that period by NCA, NCATE, and NASM all confirmed that change was not coming at the expense of quality direct services to current students.

Some key factors probably contributed to maintaining a sense of order and progress in the midst of change:

First, the University had a simple, dynamic strategic plan with annual revisions, published for annual distribution in the fall in conjunction with a presidential State of the University address that focused each year on the accomplishments of the last year and the themes for the year ahead.

Second, the University placed a heavy emphasis on communication of all kinds. During the period, both voice mail and email capabilities became available to all and were used to good effect. The Executive Team held periodic town hall meetings; the faculty held weekly LCE discussions (learner-centered education) and periodic brown bag sessions on various topics of interest.

Third, the leadership structure placed considerable responsibility on division chairs and other faculty leaders, since designated academic leadership was part-time or non-existent throughout the period. This is hardly a recipe for success on every campus, but the people of VCSU were demonstrably up to the challenge. The atmosphere at VCSU is open, yet people respect governance and procedures, creating a climate within which much decentralized initiative could take place without trampling on others.

The dominant changes to physical facilities during this period related to technology – completing the campus network to every building, classroom, office, and residence hall room; creating the Help Desk and the Instructional Media Center; and

Clearly, Valley City State University was a center for productive change in the mid-1990s. Reviews during that period by NCA, NCATE, and NASM all confirmed that change was not coming at the expense of quality direct services to current students.

renovating nearly all classrooms for power and network at each student seat and presentation equipment at the front of the room. In addition, the state supported continued restoration of the main floor of McFarland Hall, with a dramatic improvement in the student services facilities.

During this time, VCSU sought and found private funding for facilities projects for the first time in its history. Projects funded partially or entirely with private dollars include the electronic sign at the entrance to campus, the track, football stadium seating, and the playing floor in the field house.

The University's relationship with the community took on new dimensions, too. For the first time ever, anywhere in North Dakota, the city allocated economic development funds to market the University to prospective students. The total amount over three years exceeded \$160,000. The economic development corporation created an ex officio board position for the VCSU president, a role in which she has been actively involved. The University is also deeply involved with the local Chamber of Commerce. The Kathryn Center for Lifelong Learning, a unit of VCSU, has become an active member of the Fargo-Moorhead Chamber of Commerce.

Finally during this period, the University worked with key volunteers to define and create a unifying VCSU Foundation to serve as an umbrella group for its scholarship and alumni groups. Professional staffing was improved and fund-raising efforts became more coordinated and diverse. The Foundation also established a new group for major giving called the Board of Regents.

**Act III – Maturation and Development (c. 1998-present)
Payoff**

Early in 1999, the legislature established a study committee on higher education to function during 1999-2001. Senator David Nething chaired the group and conducted it in a most unusual way. Working with the State Board, he named two consultants to facilitate a planning process and expanded his committee of 21 legislators to include 40 business and government leaders and representatives of key constituencies inside higher education. The expanded group, the Roundtable on Higher Education, met periodically throughout one year and produced a report with numerous recommendations for change on the part of all players related to higher education. The primary themes of the report are to make higher education the engine for economic growth in North Dakota and to provide flexibility with accountability for campus operations.

The State Board adopted the report and constructed a new strategic plan for itself from its Roundtable action agenda. The Board revised the structure of its meeting agenda to correspond to its strategic plan. It required all campuses to submit their Roundtable plans within four months. It structured the system budget request in accordance with the Roundtable recommendations. In short, the Board is utterly serious about the Roundtable report, and the evolution from no shared planning to integrated state/campus planning is complete.

For the first time ever, anywhere in North Dakota, the city allocated economic development funds to market the University to prospective students. The economic development corporation created an ex officio board position for the VCSU president. The University is also deeply involved with the local Chamber of Commerce.

The primary themes of the Roundtable report are to make higher education the engine for economic growth in North Dakota and to provide flexibility with accountability for campus operations.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the structure of the budget are expected to be significant. For the first time, the budget is based on a single line item (operations) and tuition revenues are exempt from the appropriation process.

The University's Roundtable plan has become its new strategic plan, using the state-specified format.

Around the state, campus reactions to the Roundtable ranged from “what’s new?” to outrage at the perceived lack of attention to liberal arts, students, and learning for life rather than for work. The former response seems to have dominated at VCSU.

The state’s economy and demography continue to place extraordinary pressures on the state budget. The general fund appropriation for 2001-03 will not fully fund inflation. Salary increases are pegged at three percent in 2001 and two percent in 2002, likely to firmly ensconce the state in its typical 50th place for faculty salaries.

Changes in the structure of the budget are significant. For the first time, the budget is based on a single line item (operations) and tuition revenues are exempt from the appropriation process. Each campus has been provided with a set of nine peer institutions from other states. The Board is in the process of defining a long term financing plan for each campus based in part on how it compares with its peer institutions. The state had not been fully funding its enrollment formulas for years; this new approach moves the process even farther from enrollment as a driver for state general fund appropriations, and it increases the potential benefit of increased enrollment and tuition revenue.

In June 2001, the Board granted each campus unlimited authority to grant tuition waivers. In light of North Dakota demographics, VCSU wishes to consider approaches that will support efforts to recruit out-of-state and international students who have good prospects for success in college.

One of the three premises of the Roundtable was that it aimed to support a positive future for all of North Dakota, not just the urban areas. The state is entering a period of dramatic reduction in the expected number of high school seniors from one year to the next. All campuses are doing their best to recruit in state and elsewhere, and the two research universities have both announced major enrollment increase goals.

The state has hired a chief information officer and his leadership is resulting in major improvements in networking the state, especially rural areas. The vision calls for digital capacities that would allow extensive, sophisticated distance delivery among schools at all levels and with business and industry. The state has a fledgling Information Technology Council, of which the president of VCSU is a founding board member. The state chamber of commerce is in the midst of a highly participative New Economy Initiative that is designed to define new pillars for a successful economy in North Dakota and build a base of understanding and support for those pillars. One of them is information technology.

And at Valley City State University in 1998-present . . .

The University’s Roundtable plan has become its new strategic plan, using the state-specified format. Most of the state focus is on economic development, education excellence, and access. To provide a more complete plan to address the university’s needs, the new strategic plan adds a number of objectives designed specifically to

increase enrollment, with a priority for full-time on-campus students. The University will participate in distance delivery as feasible, but under current conditions its priority must be to ensure a stable base on campus.

When Ray Brown left the academic vice presidency in 1998, the chair of the business division served as acting vice president for a year, as did his counterpart at Mayville State. The president authorized a search for an academic vice president for VCSU only and named the acting vice president at Mayville to the permanent position there. The current academic vice president, Les Wong, began the position in 1999. Dr. Wong found that some routine office functions had not been tended during the preceding years of a shared vice president and exceptional academic change. Tending to these, including gathering updated faculty vitae, and completing program reviews, has been a top priority.

With this change and on-going questions about the nature of the partnership with Mayville State, the president appointed a task force in Fall 2000 to study and make recommendations about the relationship between the two institutions. At the end of that process, the president announced the following decisions:

- To recognize that sharing of administrators will continue unless and until the State Board of Higher Education decides otherwise.
- To refer to the arrangement between MSU and VCSU as “shared administration.”
- To encourage collaborations between the two institutions that would (a) provide more time for professional development, (b) assist in addressing low-enrollment classes or programs, (c) enrich the learning opportunities for students, or (d) provide opportunities for both campuses to increase enrollment.
- To request consideration of the costs of shared administrators in the budget allocations for 2001-2003.

The new Title III grant continues, with development of online courses in technology education. Efforts to move to online student services have been frustrated by lack of an adequate state information system and lack of authority to acquire an independent system. The position of director of instructional technology, originally funded in the earlier Title III grant, is now funded by the institution.

VCSU faculty and staff are developing an unprecedented number of grant proposals. The Bush Foundation continues to provide strong support for faculty development, with the current grant focusing on assessment. Two science professors have won applied research contracts, an education professor has a curriculum grant, and the Education Division has a PT3 (Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology) grant in partnership with local K-12 schools. Several others are outstanding, including one that would support a partnership with a tribal college.

Many courses have become hybrid in their integration of technology, in which class meetings and distance delivery are blended and some students may participate almost entirely online. The integration of technology into core teaching and learning processes has become so complete as to be almost invisible to participants any

Many courses have become hybrid in their integration of technology, in which class meetings and distance delivery are blended and some students may participate almost entirely online.

Students are well into the process of developing their digital portfolios, with the model being documentation of performance on the university's required Abilities, hence focusing on assessment rather than prospective employment.

more, except when people come to visit or when the media produces a story. In addition to visits from state and regional colleagues, VCSU has hosted national and international visitors. A list of these may be found in Chapter 4, page 57. Such visits and stories are becoming a much-appreciated part of normal life on campus as well.

Students are well into the process of developing their digital portfolios, with the model being documentation of performance on the University's required Abilities, hence focusing on assessment rather than prospective employment. Faculty are developing refined definitions and assessment strategies for the Abilities, and an Abilities booklet was published in 2000 for faculty orientation. In addition, all faculty applying for tenure and promotion in 2000-01 did so through submission of their own digital portfolios.

Academic divisions are experiencing some reorganization. Computer Information Systems has joined the business division and technology education has joined education. The CIS program has been revised significantly. In 1999, the general education program was revised to incorporate the Abilities students must demonstrate for graduation.

The major state-funded capital projects now are in the ADA, life safety, and basic infrastructure categories. These categories are consistent with projects funded by the state on nearly all other campuses due to a severe backlog of deferred maintenance projects.

The county economic development agency has decided to focus on VCSU graduates as the key local resource. The agency and the University worked together to design and fund a 20,000 square foot building known as the Regional Technology Center. The Center for Innovation in Instruction rents one-fourth of the space and provides building management services. The University rents one-fourth of the space for the new technology education program. The remaining space is to incubate technology-based businesses. The building's grand opening was May 1, 2001, and several business tenants are preparing to occupy space in it. The University will continue to work closely with the project to provide expertise as needed.

A number of VCSU faculty members have also become active participants in programs at the Barnes County Historical Museum, which moved into spacious downtown quarters and hired a director in 1998.

The VCSU Foundation has emphasized building relationships with prospective major donors, including distant alumni, in recent years. The goals are to increase membership in the Board of Regents and to increase planned giving. During the 1990s, University support for the Foundation has dwindled to almost no funding due in part to ambiguous messages from the state about the appropriateness of state funding for such activities and partly as a means of coping with on-going reductions in state funding over the years.

Similarly, the Kathryn Center for Lifelong Learning has been weaned from state support far sooner than anticipated. Administrators have been exploring alternative structures that, they hope, will preserve all the functions of the center at less cost.

Epilogue

Common lore has it that smaller organizations are more nimble and threatened organizations are more motivated to change than others. While VCSU is among the smallest public baccalaureates in the nation and the changes it has made in the last ten years stretch the imagination, there is nothing small about its ambitions, nothing desperate about its culture, nothing ill-conceived among its moves. One cannot fairly write off the changes at VCSU as driven by sheer necessity. The institution had legitimate choices at every step of the way, and it consistently chose the boldest possible move that would strengthen the teaching and learning processes.

University leaders believe that Valley City State University is well positioned to meet the challenges of the coming decade and beyond. The integration of technology in teaching and learning represents a substantial asset both for recruiting traditional students to campus and for enabling the faculty to reach out with relative ease to distant students. It also helps the University attract exceptional new faculty and staff.

The new strategic plan shows a strong emphasis on enrollment development both through substantive changes such as new majors and through increased emphasis on marketing. Some consultants and visitors in recent years have cautioned the University not to rest on its laurels – especially, not to relax after one or two years of implementing the notebook initiative. Events of the last ten years clearly demonstrate that the University has repeatedly sought the edge of the cliff, the frontier of best practice. The University will now find ways to maintain that culture and momentum while paying greater attention to its public image and market development opportunities.

The Self Study Process

The 1994 report on documenting academic achievement and the self study required for the focused visit in 1996 have necessarily assisted in laying the groundwork for the 2001-2002 self study process. The parallel preparations for an NCATE continuation visit in Fall 2001 have also assisted the process of thoughtful, thorough review.

In 1999, the president appointed two self study co-coordinators, who attended the NCA convention in Chicago in April of that year and began the early planning of the self study process. Additionally, the Institutional Improvement Committee, comprised of faculty members from each academic division, students, members of the Executive Team, and staff representatives, was charged with the task of serving as the Steering Committee for the self study.

The Steering Committee developed a timeline, a working outline of the study, and created six task groups, one for each of the five criteria, and one to review VCSU's

Common lore has it that smaller organizations are more nimble and threatened organizations are more motivated to change than others. There is nothing small about VCSU's ambitions, nothing desperate about its culture, nothing ill-conceived among its moves.

entities and partnerships. Two members of the Steering Committee chaired each of these groups. These task groups collected and analyzed data and wrote preliminary drafts relating to their assigned sections. Committee report sheets for both the GIRs and Criterion reports, as well as copies of minutes, are available in the resource room.

Under the direction of the new VPAA in 1999-2000, all departments updated or completed new program reviews. In Fall 2001, divisions were asked to use these program reviews to provide division narratives that summarized pertinent information for the task groups. These narratives are available in the resource room. The Steering Committee met weekly during the Winter and Spring of 2000-2001, reviewing drafts and identifying further additional study. Final drafts were reviewed and refined in Summer 2001, and the Report was completed in August 2001.

The Self Study Report Organization

The report that follows first examines the significant innovations of the past decade, as they have developed from serious, thoughtful implementation of the mission. The next section outlines the University's responses to the concerns of the 1992 and Focused Visit (1996) team reports, followed by sections presenting patterns of evidence for each of the five Criteria of Accreditation. The General Institutional Requirements and the Basic Institutional Data forms are located in appendices. See the Table of Contents for the detailed organization of the Report.

The report that follows first examines the significant innovations of the past decade, as they have developed from serious, thoughtful implementation of the mission.