

## Chapter 7: The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness

Valley City State University continues to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness, in part, because of the planning and assessment processes that guide the decision-making, improvements, and changes on the campus. The mission of the University provides the foundation for all decisions within the University while financial and support services are allocated appropriately based on planning and changed based on assessment.

### NDUS Planning

The president and vice presidents are members of chancellor’s cabinet and NDUS councils, respectively. These individuals advance campus initiatives through their respective state-level organization to the State Board of Higher Education.

For the last decade, the North Dakota University System has engaged in formal long-range planning. The form and process have varied slightly over the years. Generally, the Board has consulted the campuses, legislators, the governor, and others. The plan has taken a rolling six- or seven-year time horizon. Campuses have produced annual progress reports regarding their efforts to implement the NDUS plan.

During the 1999-2001 legislative interim, the legislature sponsored a study committee on higher education, chaired by Senator David Nething of Jamestown. Working with the Chancellor, Senator Nething defined a process new to North Dakota that has led to a new NDUS plan.

The committee added 40 members from the executive branch, business, K-12 education, higher education, and other sectors to its 21 legislator members, calling the expanded group the Higher Education Roundtable. They hired two consultants with national experience in higher education planning to facilitate a series of meetings during the 1999-2000 academic year. The resulting document, *A North Dakota University System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, was published on May 25, 1999 and is widely referred to as the Roundtable Report. The report emphasizes access, economic development, and flexibility with accountability. It contains recommendations for action from all relevant sectors. It defines a set of accountability measures for the higher education system.

Based on consensus, the report had strong momentum for implementation. In July 2000, the State Board of Higher Education adopted the report as the blueprint for its own priorities. The Board has action plans for all of its recommendations, and it has restructured its meeting agenda accordingly. It required the campuses to submit their plans, to implement campus Roundtable recommendations by December 2000. Annual reports on the accountability measures are expected to begin in December 2001.

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## University Planning Processes

VCSU has established a framework for an active, encompassing process to formulate strategic planning on the campus. The president and Executive Team meet regularly to plan, improve, and advance all areas of the campus community through visioning and strategic planning. The Institutional Improvement Committee (IIC), with representation from administration, faculty, staff, and student organizations, and the community is charged with leading the university through the planning process. The committee is charged to

review progress toward the realization of broad institutional goals, recommend policies on matters of concern to more than one of the areas of University community, oversee and implement the ongoing evaluation of the institutional assessment and improvement plan, recommend procedures aimed at integrating the various aspects of the total University program to the University administration, participate in institutional strategic planning, oversee the development of self-studies for accreditation or other purposes, and advise the president of the University.

In keeping with this charge, the IIC is the leadership group in revising the mission, revising the strategic plan, and ensuring integration with the assessment plan. In the Spring of 1999 the IIC was charged by the president as the steering committee for the NCA Self Study.

The decision-making processes at VCSU include (1) the campus administration, which includes the president, Executive Team members, and division and nonacademic department directors, and (2) faculty, staff and student governance. Based on the mission and strategic plan, academic affairs, student affairs, business affairs and division and nonacademic department directors continue to plan, and to advance programs to meet the needs of the student body, faculty and staff, and prospective students. Faculty, staff and student governance, through the faculty association/senate, SPAC and student senate, meet regularly to plan, discuss, and implement changes in their areas of campus.

Other campus committees make more specific decisions concerning the entities they represent. A table of all committees is published annually in *Baselines* for all faculty and staff. These committees meet on a regular basis to plan and make decisions on academic and administrative issues, budgets, staffing, and other matters that are pertinent to their duties and authority. For example, the Technology Advisory Committee advises on budget and makes decisions on technology issues while the Curriculum Committee considers curricular changes and oversees the general education core courses. These committees and most others have a broad representation including faculty, staff, student and administrative representation. Each of these decision-making bodies is open to input from its constituency, and all disseminate information throughout the campus through their membership and by regularly publishing meeting minutes.

The decision-making process and the integration of campus-wide assessment into the planning process are illustrated in the strategic planning chart in the Appendix. The chart shows the relationships among the various committees and the Executive Team for purposes of institutional planning, implementation, and assessment.

The university uses a wealth of data and information services to guide planning and decision making. Such data often is specialized to suit the needs of the unit. However, governance structures and a university wide commitment to collaboration promote the use of data and information across the university. The university is wedded to and obligated to use an archaic MIS/SIS in use by the NDUS. However, recent legislative action has solicited bids from major vendors to replace this system. The bid is now in its final selection processes. The enrollment/SIS module is expected to be the first deployed to facilitate the tracking of students within the system (currently not available to campuses).

The NDUS MIS system is supplemented by a host of locally generated reports. While these are tedious and time consuming processes, the university recognizes the limitations of the NDUS MIS system and plans accordingly. That is, local effort fills in where system reporting either fails, does not exist or is slow in coming. The university has tried to minimize local data production to the extent that service to students is not compromised. Its small size and extensive knowledge of students allows the university to identify the “footprint” students leave as they matriculate. The university’s goal is to begin collecting these footprints into more aggregate studies to more crystallize its knowledge of student experiences in their major and throughout the VCSU experience.

**Stability of Resources**

Resources at Valley City State University are stable, although they are certainly not plentiful.

**Financial Resources**

Valley City State University receives a biennial funding appropriation for campus operations and capital improvements from the North Dakota legislature. The appropriation process also involves the State Board of Higher Education and the Office of Management and Budget, which is the fiscal agent for the Governor. Annually, an operating budget is prepared as a plan for spending the state funding received from the legislature, grants and other income anticipated by the campus for the year.

In 2001-2002 the NDUS will implement a new finance model (see resource room). The transition to this model will encompass the following changes. The Enrollment year will become Summer-Fall-Spring rather than Fall-Spring-Summer. While the basic appropriation will be a function of enrollment, tuition collections will now remain with the campus. This is a significant change to provide campuses more flexibility in spending. The state will implement an accountability measure merit

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system to gauge institutional effort relative to a new group of peer institutions. This is also a significant change in resource allocation. However, there is no expected change in appropriation dollars for VCSU through 2003.

Students also voted in 2000-2001 to implement an \$45 increase in the technology fee beginning Fall 2001. The fee will now total \$995 per year per full-time student and will be prorated on a per-credit schedule for part-time students. This will allow further upgrades of the campus networks and support the two-year roll over schedule to new notebooks in 2002. This roll over has been historically supported by a generous lease and price agreement with IBM. The University has every reason to believe that this relationship will continue.

According to the FY2000 financial audit, Valley City State University received \$12,479,213 to finance campus programs and facilities operations for the fiscal year. The state of North Dakota provided \$5,497,853 (44 percent) from the state treasury.

The remainder of the operations of the University are self-supporting through: tuition and fees, \$2,916,878 (23 percent); research grants and contracts, \$1,340,444 (11 percent); auxiliary enterprise and education sales and service revenues, \$2,159,426 (17 percent); and private gifts, grants and endowment income, \$564,612 (5 percent).

The adoption and implementation of a new state financing model for higher education will require considerable review. Emanating from the Roundtable Report and Senate Bill 2003 in the 2001 legislative session, the new model incorporates system and individual campus performance indicators (accountability measures), peer institution comparison, and different legislative expectations with regard to private fundraising.

The 2001 legislative session provided start-up funding for a state Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that would serve all state entities, including higher education. The ERP proposal, once completed and funded, will require the University to review its budgeting and business processes. Alignment to the central system will require changes in campus processes. Until a vendor is selected and the system deployed, Valley City State University continues to use system, campus, and local unit data mechanisms to guide decision-making processes.

**Physical Facilities**

Valley City State University has prepared a forward-looking document that outlines future development for campus facilities. The Master Plan was prepared in-house with significant contribution by Michael J. Burns, Architects. The March 2000 plan is built upon an extensive interview process involving many campus personnel in 1994 and updated in 1998. The initial review and update were completed by Foss Associates, and remain an integral part of the overall facility development plan.

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The Master Plan is the basis for major capital improvement funding requests to the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) and the state legislature. A number of modifications and facility improvements have been made to provide an up-to-date and safe learning and work environment for students and employees. More significant improvements include:

- networking campus classrooms and residence hall rooms;
- installing passenger elevators in McFarland Hall, McCarthy Hall and Allen Memorial Library;
- re-roofing classroom and residence hall buildings;
- remodeling to enhance functionality and safety in McFarland Hall, Vangstad Auditorium, and McCarthy Hall; and
- replacing the field house floor and the athletic track.

These improvements reflect annual expenditures for plant improvements that have ranged from \$700,000 to \$1,400,000 each biennium since 1996.

The March 2000 Master Plan includes an itemization of \$2,910,500 in extraordinary projects, primarily deferred maintenance projects for state funded facilities at Valley City State University. The 2001-03 budget request included \$265,000 in funding to be applied toward these projects. At this rate of funding, it will take more than 100 years to address the deferred maintenance issues that are present on the university’s campus today. Deterioration in facilities will impact the health and safety of student, faculty and staff and certainly affect the recruitment and retention of students.

**Human Resources**

Valley City State University permanent employees are either faculty or staff. Staff includes administrators and other support personnel. Employees are also categorized by funding sources into state-funded positions, or grant and local positions. In addition to permanent employees, Valley City State University has adjunct faculty, temporary employees, and student employees. VCSU employs a total of 350-360 people including faculty, staff, administrators, adjunct faculty, part-time employees, and students. The permanent full-time equivalent employee statistics included in the 1999-2000 annual budget indicate 149.96 employee positions, which is an increase of 10.91 FTE when compared with the 1996-1997 annual budget.

The entire NDUS, including Valley City State University, is losing the competitive edge to recruit and retain skilled employees. General salary increases for system employees have exceeded the rate of inflation in only nine of the last 24 years. North Dakota faculty salaries annually are near the bottom of all 50 states. Recent efforts to increase salary levels relative to market surveys through internal reallocation have provided some, but not nearly enough, relief. These efforts included an attempt to bring all employees to 80 percent of market surveys and to provide disproportionate faculty raises to those faculty with 20 + years of tenure and/or the rank of full professor. Continued effort is needed.

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State demographics show that the declining population of college-aged individuals require the University to seek other student audiences. Because the focus of the University's strategic plan is residential full-time enrollment, the University must seek an increasing number of out of state and international students. In Summer 2001, the SBHE delegated to each campus president unlimited authority to grant tuition waivers. This change may provide sufficient campus autonomy to leverage enrollment opportunities in ways not available in the past. Obviously, waivers must be used to stimulate additional enrollments, not to undermine overall University revenues. University leaders are conferring with experts to assess the best options. Being a small campus in North Dakota means finding appropriate marketing, recruitment and retention strategies. The university's successes in the national media in recent years must be continued. Senate Bill 2003 also mandates a system enrollment management plan and that could have considerable bearing on how the system campuses respond to enrollment pressures. However, the plan may not be completed until December 2002.

### Strengthening Educational Effectiveness

The University uses a wide range of tactics to assess current functions and future challenges. A coordinated strategic planning process from the president to divisional units ensures integration of the mission and purposes of the university into individual work plans and goals (see individual goals of the Executive Team in the resource room). The self study has confirmed that an integrated planning process facilitates productive work patterns. Such integration of purpose, coupled with a ubiquitous computing environment facilitates communication processes. The University's effectiveness is predicated on its ability to assess and communicate in ways that afford strategic and timely decision-making.

Appropriate communication and integration of purpose have enabled constructive responses to the ever-demanding changes before small universities in general and specifically to the unique demands before a small, rural, public liberal arts university in North Dakota. The "Decade of Transformation" section in chapter one aptly depicts the versatility and effectiveness of the University through the last decade. The University is well positioned to seek the next level of excellence because the campus culture that allowed VCSU to respond so well in a turbulent decade continues to make the campus vital and responsive.

Other parts of this self study clearly identify how assessment process are woven into governance, planning, and decision-making within units and across the University. The new *2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan* articulates the interaction of various academic assessment processes, while identifying the need for an assessment director or office to assure the stability and continuity of the assessment processes. Further implementation of the assessment plan requires gathering Ability assessment data and defining the ways that data is used to make decisions, especially at the program and institution-wide levels. Most programs are slowly integrating the use of Ability assessment with other measures as they work towards fully functioning assessment processes that use multiple measures and appropriate

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feedback loops. Energy and interest in assessment remain strong, because of the faculty's abiding concern to improve student learning at VCSU.

## Characteristics that Ensure Continued Success

The University's strengths are best represented by first examining the culture in which these strengths thrive, since it is through collective respect and support for these values and attitudes that the University can continue to improve its service to students and the disciplines. Clear planning and open communication are fundamental tenets of this culture. Without such essential processes in place, the culture is bereft of any means of action. The faculty, administration, staff, and students all demonstrate a strong understanding of the University mission and the focus on student learning. The consensus process used to develop the Abilities assessment program has maintained the sense of shared values among campus groups.

**Learner centered.** The commitment to customized learning is reflected in what students and alumni say about the personal attention students receive at VCSU. Academically, faculty and staff respond to the unique needs of their students in a variety of ways. For example, the faculty provide individualized "special topics" courses via email and the web. Faculty receive no compensation for these efforts. Personally, students know that faculty members know them and use that knowledge to ensure a college experience of high value. The University's small size lends itself to this intimacy. Socially, students engage the University on many levels. Efforts to diversify the campus will help students gain confidence in dealing with others who are different from themselves.

**Faculty initiative.** The faculty initiative within the context of the strategic plan has led to considerable innovation and experimentation. The history of the notebook initiative, the current development of hybrid courses, the exploitation of the web, the Abilities that drive the digital portfolio requirement all have widespread faculty support. Within that consensus is a wide array of unique faculty effort to tailor that commitment to suit their teaching/learning styles and that of their students. In another context, the faculty's growing interest and success in grant writing is considerable. The University realizes now that its extensive knowledge in a ubiquitous computing environment can lead to funding in support of pedagogical innovations.

**The "can do" mentality.** One is hard pressed to understand how such limited state funding can lead to the major accomplishments attained by faculty and staff. This "can do" mentality permeates every level of the campus. Facilities services staff are ingenious in their efforts to make a big difference with only a little money. Faculty have found effective ways to exploit available resources, and not just because they have to. Good ideas attract them and good ideas lead to new practices. The Center for Innovation in Instruction (CII), the Regional Technology Center, Medicine Wheel Park, the Kathryn Center for Lifelong Learning, and the Community School for the Arts represent the translation of good ideas into realities

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beneficial to VCSU, the city, region, and state. Risk-taking is encouraged and often rewarded.

**“Grow your own” philosophy.** VCSU recognizes the ever-present challenge of its location and funding/salary history. For example, there is no way to attract information technology (IT) professionals on salary alone. The IT staff’s reputation among state IT leaders is excellent. The University has taken bright, young graduates and invested in their training and job opportunity with great success. Retaining them will be a challenge. The same philosophy holds true for faculty. At least a half dozen faculty on tenure track are pursuing doctoral degrees as a part of their tenure process. Retention of the lower rank faculty, as their credentials and experience mature, will be a challenge.

A series of outcome measures result from such a culture.

- Major grant proposals funded. Two Title III grants, a major U.S. Department of Education grant to prepare teachers to teach with technology, and a growing number of research grants. This represents a 57 percent growth in grant funding compared to 1996.
- Continued private foundation support through the Bush Foundation of Minneapolis to support faculty development.
- In 2001-2002 faculty salary increases ranged from 3 percent to 7 percent.
- The legislature provided special initiative funding for 1993-95, 1995-97 and 1997-99 bienniums of up to \$200,000 to \$250,000 for CII and Kathryn Center operations.
- Valley City State University has had a capital improvement project funded by the legislature in each of the past four legislative sessions.
- Community support since 1995 has resulted in over \$300,148 to supplement \$206,854 in state funding for improvements to the outdoor track, the field house, and football stadium.
- 10.91 FTE employees have been added since 1996. 7.36 FTE positions are funded by grant and local funds and the balance are state-funded.
- One new faculty position has been added in 2000-2001, and another in 2001-2002.

**Strengths**

- Changing economic and legislative patterns during the 1990’s compelled VCSU to develop strong and effective habits.
- VCSU has a strong committee structure, which results in effective University planning processes
- The past decade shows the University’s continuing ability to attract funding from external sources, including grants, private foundations, Valley City community, and gifts.

- Faculty initiatives within an innovative culture at VCSU have led to new, effective practices (i.e., the notebook initiative, the development of hybrid courses, the Abilities, and the senior portfolio).
- Widespread faculty support has made campus-wide, integrated adoption of new practices possible.

**Challenges**

- The declining population of college age individuals in North Dakota will require the University to seek other audiences. VCSU must identify appropriate marketing and recruitment and retention strategies that will attract out of state and international students.
- North Dakota salaries continue to rank low among the 50 states. To recruit and retain skilled employees, VCSU must make continued efforts to raise salary levels to at least 80 percent of market levels.
- Deferred maintenance projects for state-funded facilities at Valley City State University remain a serious concern.
- Implementation of the new state financing model for higher education will require considerable review and adaptation.
- When the new NDUS online administrative system (ERP) is available, implementation will require adjustments in campus processes and offer new opportunities for data retrieval.

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