Campus enhancements vital to the success of Region

By: Steven Shirley, Valley City State University

The North Dakota Legislature recently authorized a $10.3 million general fund appropriation for the expansion and renovation of Rhoades Science Center at Valley City State University.

There is a definite “buzz” in the air among students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, and other friends of the University as this project commences. As the first state-funded major capital project in 40 years at VCSU, this project is creating a kind of excitement that hasn’t been seen in decades.

But it isn’t just the added space that is creating excitement. The Rhoades project is specifically linked to recent campus enrollment and programmatic gains in the Sciences and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Education. These gains include new programs in Fisheries & Wildlife, Health Sciences, Technology Education, Exercise Science, a Nursing collaboration with Dakota College at Bottineau, as well as the addition of a new Great Plains STEM Education Center and the new Prairie Waters Education & Research Center.

On a college campus, the buildings are a vital part of the learning environment. Particularly in subjects related to the sciences that depend on physical characteristics like well-designed and well-equipped labs, current technology, and proper lighting and ventilation, the degree to which the facilities are up-to-date can directly impact the quality of learning.

Of course, a major factor for embarking on this project is to meet the region’s growing demands in critical fields. Like many states, North Dakota must increase the number of graduates in the sciences, engineering, and technology, particularly in rapidly growing areas such as health care, energy, information technology, and nursing. Similarly, math and science teachers are also in short supply, and changes in how these subjects are being taught are creating demands for teachers with new kinds of skills.

By authorizing these types of projects, a Legislative Body sends a powerful signal of its willingness to invest in meeting these demands. The region’s colleges and universities respond by producing graduates with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. The investments required to fund these projects on campuses help transform the educational experience for the region’s students decades into the future. No doubt, these investments will have a direct positive influence on the region’s ability to compete and be successful in the years ahead. PB