Chapter 3: Concerns from the 1992 Comprehensive Evaluation Visit and the 1996 Focused Visit Reports

The team reports from the comprehensive evaluation visit of 1992 and the Focused Visit of 1996 emphasize the cooperative spirit, camaraderie, dedication, and responsiveness of students, faculty, and staff at Valley City State University. Some of the points identified as particular strengths include

- Effective participatory governance.
- A cooperative learning environment that includes faculty, staff, and students working side by side.
- Exemplary cooperative relationships with the city, the region, and the public schools.
- Extraordinary support of the mission statement from faculty, staff, students, constituent groups, the chancellor’s office, and the State Board of Higher Education.
- Strong, responsive service-oriented support services for faculty, students, and staff.

The concerns identified by the two teams are discussed below. Since the 1996 focused visit self study responded thoroughly to each concern from the 1992 report, the information below provides a similar format—background information about the concern, status at the focused visit in 1996, and an update, describing the current situation. The last section of this chapter discusses the three concerns mentioned in the focused visit team report.

Concerns from the 1992 Comprehensive Evaluation Visit Report

Concern 1

The mission statement of the institution has been in a state of flux since 1989 and still awaits approval by the North Dakota University System. The uncertainty of the institution’s mission adversely influences the ability of the faculty and staff to focus their energies or to direct planning efforts.

Background:

The State Board of Higher Education enacted in 1991 a new policy requiring Board approval for campus mission statements. The VCSU mission statement was ready for approval then, along with those of other campuses in the system. The new statement incorporated the 1990 State Board charge to VCSU to assume a leadership role in instructional innovation and technology. A new chancellor requested that the Board delay all approvals until he had had an opportunity to become familiar with the campuses throughout the state. The mission statement, as proposed by the University and reviewed during the 1991 NCA visit, was approved by the Board in 1992. Chapter 4 (page 51) discusses the changes in the mission over the past decade and current strategic planning processes.
1996 Focused Visit Status:
In April 1996, the visiting team indicated that this concern has been alleviated: “Having an approved mission statement has removed many of the uncertainties about the future of Valley City State University and has permitted the faculty and staff to focus their energies on the implementation of the various components of the mission statement” (Team Report of a Focused Visit, 1996, page 20).

Current Status:
The notebook initiative and the partnership with MSU, in their early stages at the time of the focused visit and described thoroughly in the team report of 1996, have been fully implemented. During the 2000-2001 academic year, the University System has directed campuses to respond to the Roundtable report of May 2000 (see discussion in Chapter 1, page 13, and Chapter 4, page 54). At VCSU, the Institutional Improvement Committee (IIC) and Executive Team have developed a strategic plan that is based on the six cornerstones identified by the Roundtable report and adopted by the SBHE in Fall 2000. Copies of the NDUS and VCSU strategic plans are available in the resource room.

Concern 2
The proposed mission statement for Valley City State University reflects a leadership role in technology innovation. Budgetary support which provides appropriate resources and professional development opportunities for the faculty is essential for the institution to successfully assume a leadership position in this role.

Background:
The 1992 self-study report rated VCSU’s computing and special technology facilities “superior to those in most institutions of its size and resources.” The 1991 special mission assignment by the SBHE demonstrated concurrence in this assessment.

1996 Focused Visit Status:
Three funding sources provided budgetary support for technology innovation on campus.

- State Funding. Beginning in 1993-1994, campus instructional equipment funds have been pooled to provide for campus technology equipment needs. In January 1995, a long range technology planning committee was formed to provide direction and leadership in meeting future campus needs. A vision statement was formulated which dovetailed with the University’s mission statement. After many hours of gathering information, and with the encouragement of president Ellen Chaffee, the idea to explore the feasibility of requiring students to have notebook computers emerged. The North Dakota State Board of Higher Education subsequently approved a notebook computer fee and a technology fee in November 1995. The VCSU administration has committed a significant percentage of resources to complete the campus backbone and support the notebook initiative.
In 1996, a NDUS revenue bond funded staffing for a help desk and the remainder of the campus networking. The student technology fee will pay for the revenue bond over a ten-year period. In addition, all campus equipment dollars were reallocated by the administration to remodel sixteen classrooms in eight different buildings in time for Fall 1996 classes. These classrooms are equipped with multimedia presentation equipment and student tables with electrical and network connections for the notebook computers.

- **Special Appropriations.** VCSU was the only institution in the state to receive “special initiative” funding from the legislature, amounting to $250,000 in 1993-95 and $200,000 in 1995-97. One-half of the funds is invested in the Center for Innovation in Instruction, with its mission of improving teaching with technology. The other half provided start-up funding for the Kathryn Center for Lifelong Learning, consisting of an adventure learning course on a leased site 17 miles south of Valley City in Kathryn, North Dakota, as well as other programs to develop leadership, teamwork, communication, and quality management skills.

- **Grant Funding.** In 1992-95, VCSU received faculty development funding from the Bush Foundation, totaling $180,000 over the three-year period. The grant supported faculty development in instructional technology at the individual, divisional, and institutional levels; every division and 72 percent of the faculty received grants.

VCSU received grants for instructional innovation from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), totaling $101,200 for 1993-94, $85,300 for 1994-95, and $70,000 for 1995-96. The focus of these grants was to establish an organizational climate for instructional innovation. Project activities included start-up funding for the Kathryn Center and the development of an ability-based assessment model to more clearly define outcome expectations for students.

VCSU was a partner in a $287,000 grant awarded in 1995 by the U.S. West Foundation to North Dakota State University. Members of the Division of Education and Psychology were active participants in the development and implementation of multimedia instructional modules to help K-12 teachers and teacher educators integrate multimedia education tools into their teaching.

Together, Valley City State University and Mayville State University received a 1995 grant of $29,180 from the U.S. West Foundation, to pay for a local area network server at each school. In addition, VCSU and Mayville State University won a 1995-2000 federal Title III grant for $1,700,000 to transform the teaching-learning process. The project, Improving Learning with Technologies, primarily funded faculty development and equipment, emphasizing movement toward the day when all graduates will have a personal portfolio on a CD-ROM disk each has made to document what they know and are able to do as a result of their college education.
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Current Status:
The technology initiative has become the focus of the Information Technology Center, a new organization on the campus since 1995. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) maintains the budget and has established the planning process for the campus. The resources for the initiative, although not totally adequate, have kept pace with the technology growth on the campus. A fourth source of technology funding, student fees, grew substantially starting in 1996. The notebook initiative is primarily funded by an annual student technology fee of $997.75 per student. In addition, a second Title III grant (1998-2003) and Bush Foundation grants for 1996-1999 and 2000-2003 have provided additional resources for professional development.

Concern 3
Professional development opportunities are minimal for the faculty and staff to develop the skills required for scholarly activities.

Background:
State funding for faculty development results in an allocation of $200 for each full-time faculty member annually. This remains unchanged from the situation in 1992. At the time of the last comprehensive visit, a Bush Foundation planning grant was assisting faculty in exploring the potential for funding faculty development through other sources.

1996 Focused Visit Status:
The Bush Foundation (1992-95) and FIPSE (1994-96) provided much needed faculty development funding, especially in the areas of assessment, multimedia technology, and technological applications in instruction.

Current Status:
While professional development opportunities for the faculty and staff to develop the skills required for scholarly activities are still poorly funded, continued grant-writing efforts have maintained a higher level of funding than faculty had in 1992.

- The Bush Foundation has granted funds for faculty development over the past eight years. A one-year planning grant in 1998-99 resulted in a new Bush Foundation grant for the campus in 2000. These new funds have a more scholarly focus.
- The first Title III grant with Mayville State University (1995-2000) provided faculty development moneys, and technology training (funded by TitleIII) has been a regular part of the campus. Lists of faculty development activities can be found in the yearly Title III formative reports from 1996-2000 (located in the resource room).
- The education division received a three-year PT3 (Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology) grant in 2000. This national teacher preparation reform initiative is to ensure that all future teachers are technology-proficient educators who are well prepared to teach 21st century students.
• The campus Faculty Development Committee is charged with looking for faculty moneys from other sources that would allow for faculty development in academic pursuits in all disciplines.

While the 1999-2000 campus climate survey indicates overall satisfaction with professional development activities at VCSU (3.66 on a five point scale, assessing “adequate training to complete job responsibilities”), faculty and staff alike indicate a strong interest in increased opportunities for training and education (4.17 on a five point scale).

**Concern 4**

_The draft memorandum of understanding with North Dakota State University to provide professional coursework in elementary education has not been formalized._

**Background:**

In the late 1980s, the State Board began urging all higher education institutions to seek ways to share resources and collaborate in program planning in order to achieve improvements and reduce expenditures. One result of this directive was the VCSU-NDSU elementary education program.

NDSU had never offered a major in elementary education, but many of its students enrolled in the major, which could be completed through the Tri-College system in Fargo-Moorhead. When the Moorhead State University elementary education program enrollment began to reach its maximum level, fewer of the NDSU students were accepted into its professional fourth-year program.

To resolve this problem, the presidents of NDSU and VCSU, with approval of the State Board, decided upon a trial cooperative program. By 1992, the Division of Education and Psychology had delivered courses in elementary education to students at North Dakota State University in Fargo by authorization of the State Board of Higher Education for two years. Although course delivery was occurring, long-term plans for degree completion had not been developed, and North Dakota State University had not made a formal commitment to provide resources, including library, equipment, and classroom space. The team was also concerned about faculty time spent in traveling between the Valley City State University and North Dakota State University campuses.

**1996 Focused Visit Status:**

The VCSU/NDSU Memorandum agreement was signed April 2, 1996, and describes the following arrangements: VCSU teaches all of the courses of the elementary education major on the NDSU campus. Students complete the general studies (with modifications to meet VCSU requirements) and a minor in the NDSU curriculum. Graduates attend the NDSU graduation ceremonies but their diplomas are issued by VCSU. Registration fees are retained by NDSU but VCSU counts the student enrollment in its FTE numbers. North Dakota State University has committed to provide the necessary resources, equipment, and classroom space needed to run the program successfully. Some course sessions of the elementary
education program offered on the NDSU campus are conducted from VCSU over the Interactive Video Network (IVN).

**Current Status:**
The elementary education program at NDSU has grown to a head count of 110 students and remains a vibrant part of VCSU’s education program. The formal agreement with NDSU was revisited and revised in 2000-2001, and is currently under negotiation. While IVN use has diminished (due largely to the difficulties in scheduling mentioned in the 1996 focused visit report), increased computer use on both campuses has allowed some delivery of courses via Blackboard. In response to growing demands on faculty time, VCSU made a strategic commitment to add a new faculty line in elementary education for 2001-2002. See Chapter 6, page 117, for a discussion of this program and the current working arrangement with NDSU.

**Concern 5**
*While the assessment plan has been conceptually developed and has received University wide recognition, several essential outcomes measures need to be developed.*

**Background:**
Valley City State University's preparations for the 1992 comprehensive evaluation included development of a plan in response to NCA’s relatively new directive to document student academic achievement. The assessment plan had broad faculty and staff involvement and acceptance and flowed naturally from the ten institutional purposes. The self-study indicated that a number of assessment output measures had yet to be developed; the NCA evaluation team requested a June 1, 1994 report on the continuing development of the program to document student academic achievement. The report described the evolution of the university's Total Quality philosophy into Continuous Improvement in Teaching and Learning; grant funding awarded by FIPSE to serve as the foundation on which to build a system-wide laboratory for the reform of undergraduate education; and the various assessment initiatives undertaken since the comprehensive visit. It was accepted by NCA.

**1996 Focused Visit Status:**
The 1995-96 Assessment Plan updated the 1994 report to NCA and identified the ways the FIPSE grant was guiding the University toward an ability-based assessment model. One of the most significant developments was the identification of the relationship between courses in Foundation Studies and the 17 Foundation Studies objectives (see pages 37-8 in the Focused Visit Report). The 17 Foundation Studies Objectives were reworded as Abilities, and then ultimately transformed into eight Abilities (see chart, “Coming into Focus,” after page 41 in the Focused Visit Report).

**Current Status:**
Since the last comprehensive evaluation visit, VCSU has experienced frequent changes in academic leadership—over the past ten years, five individuals have filled the position of vice-president of academic affairs, two of them in a shared VPAA/Provost position with MSU. For seven months in 1993-1994, and six months in 1995,
both campuses were without academic leadership. Given this turnover, faculty have been responsible for guiding many of the changes on campus, and it is not surprising that progress in campus-wide assessment has been somewhat slow until recently.

- **Program Review**: The State Board of Higher Education requires a regular, seven year rotation of program evaluations. In 1999 the VPAA required all programs to complete (or update) a program review, since the self study process required up to date information about all programs, and some programs had missed being reviewed. A new rotation and process of review has been set up by the VPAA and APAC (see 2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan in resource room).

- **General Education**: The general education program (formerly Foundation Studies) is reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. The transformation of the Foundation Studies objectives into the eight Abilities in 1995 formed the basis of an ability-based assessment model. General education courses were assigned Abilities, based as closely as possible on the relationship of the course to the original Foundation Studies objectives (the Focused Visit Self Study Report identifies the relationship between specific courses and the 17 objectives on pages 37-8; the Bulletin indicates the relationship between specific general education courses and Ability areas on page 30).

  Faculty committees assigned to each Ability described the expected outcomes and assigned levels of development within each skill. A compilation of this faculty effort was published in May 2000 (see Abilities and Skills Booklet, available in the resource room) and beginning in Fall 2000, all courses in the general education program include a project tied to the course Ability. The Curriculum Committee has been active in gathering syllabi and project descriptions to monitor the progress of implementation.

- **The Abilities and the Senior Portfolio**: The Abilities also provide a strong link between the general education program and the majors. Each division and major has identified the three to five Abilities significant to high achievement in its area. Students are expected to demonstrate these particular Abilities in their digital portfolio at graduation. Interested students have been developing digital portfolios since 1997, and faculty participation has been encouraged through Title III funding. The commitment of the faculty to this assessment measure may be seen in the addition of the digital portfolio as a graduation requirement in the 1998-2000 Bulletin. The first graduating seniors affected by this requirement will graduate in Spring 2002. To prepare for the needs of these students, faculty have been developing coursework to assist students conceptually, as well as designing evaluation tools and processes to assure that the digital portfolios demonstrate that students are meeting the requirements of their major field of study.
• **Institution-Wide Abilities Assessment:** Since the Abilities provide the framework for study in both the general education program and the majors, the *2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan* (available in the resource room) outlines an institution-wide assessment process of the Abilities at entry, midpoint, and graduation. Initial data has been collected this summer for one Ability, and faculty will begin reviewing and refining the process in Fall 2001.

• **Updated Assessment Plan:** The Assessment Plan of 1995-96 anticipated the development of Ability-based assessment at VCSU, although the timeline assumes a faster implementation. As the University began its self study process in 1999, it became clear that the 1995-96 plan no longer described current assessment processes nor the University’s anticipated directions. The relationship between assessment and change—in curriculum, faculty development, and finances—was also not detailed in ways that would inform decision making on the University campus. After considerable discussion, and with the assistance of an outside consultant in assessment, an updated assessment plan draft was prepared in Spring 2001 and is in the initial stages of implementation. Copies of the *2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan* are available in the resource room.

(no Concern 6 due to misnumbering in the Team Visit Report)

**Concern 7**

Compensation and working conditions (access to computers, professional development) adversely impacts the ability of the institution to recruit and retain high quality faculty and staff involved in informed scholarly activities.

**Background:**

In 1991, the average faculty salary at VCSU was $33,909; by 1993 the University System salaries lagged both regional and national salaries by 14-30 percent and North Dakota ranked 49th in the nation in salaries of full-time public university faculty. It should be noted, however, that fringe benefits for faculty, and the cost of living in North Dakota are comparable to those in other Midwestern states. Further, there is a perception that the quality of life is good (*Fedgazette*, Oct. 1995, p. 4).

**1996 Focused Visit Status:**

In 1992-93, faculty received an across-the-board raise of $40 per month, or $480, and in 1993-94, a raise of $60 per month, or $720. In 1994-95, all faculty received a 3 percent increase. All salary increases were mandated and defined by the state legislature for all state employees, except that the increase of 3 percent in 1994 was authorized by the legislature with no appropriation to cover the expense. VCSU granted that increase, using savings from the administrative reductions in the partnership with MSU.
Faculty response to a March 1995, campus climate survey indicated that compensation is still considered inadequate to recruit well-qualified individuals:

**Current Status:**
Compensation for University personnel is an especially challenging task that has adversely impacted the ability of the institution to recruit and retain high quality faculty and staff. Recognizing this problem, the Roundtable for the North Dakota Legislative Council Interim Committee on Higher Education (Report: May 25, 2000) recommended the following options:

1. Remove tuition from the appropriations process which would allow universities to retain revenue earned by them from increased enrollment;
2. Create and support an entrepreneurial environment where the talent of university personnel can be matched with private sector investment to commercialize intellectual capital in the form of products or services. The faculty and staff would receive financial rewards for their innovations; and
3. Provide opportunities for faculty and staff to serve as consultants to the public and private sectors to increase earning power.

The compensation issue is important in all areas; however, information technology positions are extremely difficult to recruit and retain high quality personnel. According to the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) report *Bridging the Gap*, April 2000, over 840,000 vacant information technology positions will go unfilled. VCSU has responded in part to this challenge with a “grow your own” philosophy, providing training opportunities and on-the-job development for talented, interested faculty and staff. The problem, of course, with this approach is that, once trained and experienced, these people may move on to higher paying positions in information technology. Faculty and staff currently employed at the University are in high demand given the high level of technical skills they possess.

**Concern 8**
*With the newly organized North Dakota University System, there seems to exist a sense of ambiguity regarding the functions of the system office and the university administration.*

**Background:**
In 1990, the State Board of Higher Education announced the establishment of the North Dakota University System, largely in response to a statewide election that rescinded a tax increase and cut budgets. The Board’s intent was to reduce duplication and promote collaboration among the eleven campuses in the system. The Board made only two substantive changes in 1990: it changed the system chief executive’s title from commissioner to chancellor, and it called on campus presidents to report to the chancellor and the Board, instead of only to the Board.

The ambiguity sensed by the site visit team was due largely to the Board’s inference that this was to be a major change with the broad goals, yet the actual change associated with the announcement was minimal. In 1991, the Board hired a new chancellor, Doug Treadway, who left in 1993. His leadership direction was not clear at the time of the last full accreditation review.
**1996 Focused Visit Status:**
Chancellor Treadway charted a course that clearly emphasized campus-based leadership with system coordination, subject to priorities and plans established by the Board. Treadway reduced the size of the central staff and assigned system-wide leadership roles to various campuses for various functions, creating a number of interdependencies. This was a new model without precedent in other states. It evolved with some confusion but without substantial difficulties.

Chancellor Isaak, appointed in 1993, has tended to continue this path, but to greatly increase his emphasis on the collective leadership responsibilities of the chancellor’s cabinet (all campus chief executive officers, plus the vice chancellors). Chancellor Isaak and the Board have studied the “policy governance” approach developed by author John Carver, in which a board specifies the ends it expects the campuses and the system to achieve and defines the parameters of acceptable action, while leaving the determination of specific means toward those ends with the chancellor and the campuses. Though not formally adopted, policy governance is evident in many changes of policy and practice since 1993.

These changes relate almost entirely to statewide issues rather than to campus governance and autonomy. All campuses, however, have become subject to increasing initiatives to meet state needs in various ways. Since 1990, all campuses have moved to the semester calendar, certain expectations about general education requirements have been adopted, and programs that involve more than one campus are systematically encouraged.

**Current Status:**
The NDUS system has made strong efforts to integrate processes system-wide, for efficiency and student success. Most significant developments include:
- common calendar
- common course numbering
- broadbanding for staff positions
- new finance plan based on peer institutions
- Council of College Faculties

The NDUS system has made strong efforts to integrate processes system-wide, for efficiency and student success. A common calendar and common course numbering of all 100 and 200 level courses, have resulted in simplifying transfer and improving communication among the state schools. NDUS implemented broadbanding for staff positions, and developed a new finance plan based on peer institutions. The Council of College Faculties (CCF) was developed to strengthen system-wide faculty ties in every discipline. A representative of CCF attends State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) meetings (ex officio), improving direct communication between the Board and the faculty.

In 1999-2000, a legislative committee expanded to include leaders from higher education, business, and government. Through a series of meetings, they developed a new consensus on goals for the NDUS, published in a Roundtable report in May 2000. These goals ("cornerstones") were adopted by SBHE in Fall 2000 and are required elements in every campus strategic plan. VCSU has recently revised its strategic plan to incorporate the six cornerstones of the Roundtable report (see Chapter 4, page 54, for further discussion of the report and its impact on VCSU). Most recently, in response to these cornerstones, the legislature has identified a set of institutional accountability measures that will help each University in the state track and report its activities.
Concerns from the 1996 Focused Visit Report

Concern 1
While Valley City State University has developed multiple measures of academic quality, further attention needs to be given to integrating the various outcomes assessments of foundation courses [general education] with various outcomes assessments of majors in order to consider and use the results of assessment for programmatic improvement.

Background:
In 1996, VCSU was beginning to develop the eight Abilities as measurable, behavioral outcomes of the Foundation Studies objectives. The process of this development is described in Chapter 2, page 26. The Assessment Plan of 1995-96 accurately describes the multiple measures being used in 1996 by the various programs and the vision being pursued of eventually using the Abilities as a framework for assessment.

Current Status:
Outcome assessments for general education are now integrated with those for majors. The Abilities framework now in place, which provides concrete terms for understanding the relationship between general education courses and the majors, is illustrated in the VCSU Abilities and Skills booklet and program-based Ability maps, as described in further detail in Chapter 5, page 123.

The 2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan (available in the resource room) describes the various kinds of assessment of student learning, including Ability assessment, classroom, and program assessment, and illustrates the feedback loops that inform improvements in teaching, curriculum, and institutional review. Implementation of the assessment plan, including the development of those assessment measures not already in place and the initial gathering of data for Ability assessment, began in 2001.

Concern 2
Clarification of the chain of responsibility for decision-making regarding the usage of assessment findings for programmatic improvement is needed.

Background:
The team noted that the Curriculum Committee and the Academic Policy and Affairs Council deferred decision-making for programmatic improvement to each other (page 21 of the 1996 team report), and determined that, “while a mechanism for using assessment data to lead to programmatic improvement may exist, it was obviously not common knowledge to campus leaders.”

Current Status:
The University now has a full time VPAA, and, under the vice president’s direction, faculty have completed program reviews and have started working on classroom
and Ability assessment and research. The 2001 Assessment of Student Learning Plan illustrates the feedback loops and the relationships between assessment data and decision-making in the classroom, for the program, for general education, and for the University as a whole.

In 1997 the Program Planning and Evaluation Committee was reshaped as the Institutional Improvement Committee, whose responsibilities include strategic planning and institutional review, while the Academic Policy and Affairs Council focuses on academic policy and efficient operation of the academic divisions, and the Curriculum Committee deals with the results of program review—the proposed program changes—and with related curricular issues, including decisions regarding general education courses and the Abilities.

Concern 3

As innovative approaches to education are implemented, there is a need for new initiatives and careful planning to continue to place the University in a leadership position.

Background:

At the time of the 1996 focused visit, the team witnessed the initial stage of implementation for the notebook initiative. In addition, the Kathryn Center, the partnership with Mayville State, and CII were new. The energy and optimism levels on campus were high and the visiting team seems to have concluded that University personnel (a) should continue to innovate and (b) might be tempted to rest on their laurels.

Current Status:

Some of the major developments since 1996 are: the definition of customized learning as the University’s long-term instructional goal; development of the eight Abilities as a campus-wide framework for assessment; development of the senior digital portfolio as a process of demonstrating competencies; conversion of faculty promotion documentation to the digital portfolio format; development of hybrid courses to blend technologies appropriately into the instructional process and move toward customized learning; delivery of selected courses online; and a $1.7 million grant to create a world class technology education program in cooperation with the International Technology Education Association. The University has received three consecutive “best colleges” citations from U.S. News, high ranking in the Yahoo Most Wired study, and designation by Computerworld as a Premier 100 IT Leader.