Report to
Minnesota State University Moorhead
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About MSUM

Minnesota State University Moorhead is a regional comprehensive university located on the western border of Minnesota. The region is education-rich, with three universities within the Fargo-Moorhead twin cities region: Concordia College, a private liberal arts institution of approximately 2,800 students; North Dakota State University, a public research university of approximately 12,000 students; and Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) with over 7,600 undergraduate and graduate students.

Enrollment at MSUM has remained fairly stable over the past few years; however, the future enrollment picture for this regional university is cause for concern. The demographics of the area suggest an out-migration which, in turn, has led to a more competitive enrollment environment and the need for MSUM to extend its recruiting activities beyond its traditional service region. In addition, full employment is currently a hallmark of the area and there is concern that this fact is one contributing factor to student attrition; they are leaving for full employment. In addition, there is significant demographic complexity in the Fargo-Moorhead area. There remains a significant number of first-generation college students and, particularly for these students, the messages regarding the importance of higher education to their futures is, at best, a mixed one. The recruitment and retention of diverse student and faculty populations continues to be a challenge for MSUM, although there is a significant Native American population in the two adjacent states.

The financial challenges facing MSUM are real. Like almost all public universities, MSUM is increasingly dependent on tuition to cover its operations. The student population is stable now but has declined by approximately 2,000 students over the past decade, and the cost of maintaining faculty and staff contracts and utilities is increasing. State appropriations have remained static. Strategically, there is a limit on the extent to which the university can increase revenues by increasing tuition because of its commitment to financial accessibility. The cost of tuition and fees to attend MSUM is the lowest in the state and the region and often cited by

students as a reason for their decision to attend MSUM. Consequently, the university has little choice but to support new program or recruitment initiatives through reallocation while cutting relatively lower priority programs. In the end, MSUM needs to identify those initiatives that hold the most promise for sustaining institutional enrollments over the long haul, both by attracting new students and by retaining those it recruits.

Even against this backdrop of enrollment and financial concern, MSUM is a university in transition. The general education program, i.e., liberal studies, is currently being revamped to provide greater focus and attention to the scaffolding of abilities that will support student learning. The University has set an implementation date of Fall 2006, which it seems on track to meet. New deans in education and arts and sciences are encouraging review of programs and structures. What has remained stable throughout the last decade at MSUM is its concern for and commitment to students and student learning. This is widely perceived as one of its greatest strengths by the community, its students, and its faculty and staff.

It is this concern and commitment that can become the foundation in efforts to strengthen MSUM. Toward this end, this report makes recommendations that are intended to support student retention and persistence toward graduation at MSUM and that hold promise to fulfill the institutional agenda of long-term sustainability.

Team Observations about MSUM

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Strengths

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To prepare for its campus visit, the AASCU study team reviewed a wide variety of materials provided by the campus, including its background materials for its upcoming accreditation review, its catalog and website, and written records of past planning efforts as well as current work plans. In addition, the AASCU study team met with a broad cross-section of faculty, staff and students as well as with administrators across all vice presidential areas. Meetings with President Barden and the Cabinet as well as with deans and directors provided the team with insights into the interactions among the functional areas as well as with the current policies and programs. The team also had extensive discussions with University staff in both academic affairs and students affairs. Discussions with student leaders and students enrolled in a speech class were particularly helpful in clarifying the University from its students' points of view.

On the basis of these materials and meetings, the Study Team was presented with a reasonably clear and consistent picture of the strengths of MSUM as well as its goals and challenges. Certainly, the institutional strengths of MSUM emerged consistently in materials and in discussions with all campus constituencies.

1. **MSUM is an institution with a rich history and an institution that has survived difficult times.**

This is a critical point. Many employees of MSUM have longevity and thus, a strong sense of institutional history. As is always the case, institutional memories of times past often shape responses to future events. Both faculty and staff recall the difficult decisions that had to be made ten years ago during financial retrenchment. The very strong reactions to these decisions often framed reactions to the need for vigorous recruitment as well as the need to establish the "turf" for various offices in providing services for the University.

In reflecting on the strengths of the University in meeting the challenges of changing regional demographics and shifting student enrollment patterns, institutional memories should be tempered by two observations: 1) under the current leadership, MSUM survived a significant retrenchment and, 2) the current actions toward ensuring enrollment stability is a proactive approach that is much different than the necessarily reactive approach of the past. The current President not only had to make the difficult decisions in retrenchment, he has provided the leadership that brought the University through that crisis. The decisions made then placed MSUM in a better position to rebound and build from a point of financial stress.

Not unlike other institutions around the country, MSUM again finds itself facing financial stress. As is true in states across the country, declining tax levy support for the University has forced it to rely more heavily on tuition and to attempt to raise funds from alumni and other donors. At this point, the institution is trying hard to 'get out in front' by vigorous recruitment and retention. Faculty and staff at all levels of the University organization understand the importance of these efforts clearly. This understanding is reflected in strategic plans and program development.

2. **The campus is an asset to the University. It is attractive, well-maintained, and widely perceived by students as easy to negotiate, welcoming, and accessible.**

Students frequently mentioned the MSUM campus as an attractive reason they chose to attend MSUM. The size of the MSUM campus is such that it is easy for students to navigate, and the design and location are conducive to study as well as socializing. Further, the facilities are well maintained, and campus improvements are continuous in order to 'upgrade' the classrooms, study spaces, recreational areas, and housing. The campus conveys good planning, concern for academic values, and sensitivity to student needs.

While not all buildings have upgraded instructional classroom and laboratory spaces, it is apparent that change on the campus is on-going and that the campus will continue to move forward.

3. **There is an institutional commitment to student success on the part of faculty, staff, and the administration that is shared by all parties and that is translated into activities that are meaningful.**

As Vincent Tinto indicates, retention is really a by-product of students' good educational experiences; and MSUM is clearly committed to providing students with a good educational experience. There is nearly universal agreement at MSUM about the importance of teaching and

learning and the important role that faculty members play in creating supportive contexts for student success.

From the Student Services staff to faculty and to students themselves, we spoke with people at MSUM who could articulate the importance of paying attention to teaching and learning. These consistent messages were reflected by students who repeatedly told us (and gave extensive examples) of the accessibility and inspired teaching of the faculty. Students in the arts said that they had the advantage of more extensive experience in theatre or film production because of smaller classes and the engagement and accessibility of faculty. Students in the sciences reported that they were encouraged to work with faculty on research projects. Faculty were reported to be "there for students" and to be ready to support student efforts to learn.

Evidence of this commitment to student success comes from many sectors of MSUM. Student learning outcomes have been designed for every major, which speaks clearly to the centrality of learning at MSUM. This effort further puts MSUM at the forefront of what is going on nationally with regard to assessment and the move toward standards-based higher education. Staff members in offices from Financial Aid to Admissions and Counseling gave evidence of thoughtful organization of their services and office operations to make information and assistance to students widely available.

There are many initiatives at MSUM that are designed to support student success and increase retention and persistence toward graduation, both within Academic Affairs and within Student Affairs. The important role of consistent and demonstrated commitment to a student-centered environment was clearly and strongly in evidence at MSUM.

4. **There is a shared sense of the positive characteristics of MSUM among faculty, staff, administrators and students.**

The characteristics of MSUM, as enumerated by faculty, staff, administrators, and students were positively consistent. Among the most significant characteristics noted by these groups were:

- MSUM is a friendly, caring, welcoming place. There is a pervasive campus commitment to being friendly and welcoming among ALL faculty and staff.

- MSUM is student centered. Concern for the welfare of students is central to MSUM's mission. Decisions are made with students in mind to ensure that policies and procedures do not impede students' progress to degree.

- MSUM is focused on student learning. As President Barden noted during the first meeting with the AASCU Study Team, "MSUM fosters teaching and learning excellence." No one disagreed that student learning is priority one at MSUM. Attention to the liberal studies curriculum and the abilities it fosters in students as well as the learning outcomes identified for all majors reflect this respect for the importance of student learning.

- MSUM has strong programs that are important to the region and its economic progress. Students especially mentioned programs in business, education, the biosciences, and the arts as important elements in their decisions to attend the University.

- MSUM encourages student engagement, especially through faculty/student collaboration on projects and research.

- MSUM is a campus that values teaching. The evidence for this was clear; faculty members are easily accessible and are known for their teaching excellence. Standards for promotion and tenure reflect the importance of effective teaching. Also, faculty themselves often identified the campus' tradition of the centrality of teaching as an important reason that they came to the campus and stayed to make their careers there.

Perhaps of most significance is that these characteristics were also noted by students and were among the reasons they selected MSUM. When asked to be specific about the reasons they selected MSUM, the students to whom we spoke identified the location and attractiveness of the campus, the cost of an excellent education at MSUM, and the educational enrichment added by the Tri-College arrangement that permits students to take courses at North Dakota State University (in Fargo) and Concordia College (in Moorhead) at MSUM's lower tuition costs.

Challenges and Concerns: General Observations

Like all institutions of higher education, MSUM is not without its challenges. From our campus discussions, the following emerged as significant ones:

- **MSUM students have many competing work and family obligations which interfere with University efforts to improve retention and the time to degree.** In many ways, mirroring contemporary college students nationally, MSUM students work and have families. College student is just one of myriad roles they play. The complexity of students' lives is reflected in the limited extent to which they are engaged and involved with the MSUM community. Many faculty and staff feel that students are not engaged deeply enough or for enough time to reinforce their commitment to completing their educational plan at MSUM.

- **The University's limited scholarship resources impede its recruitment of students, particularly students who will contribute to diversity. A lack of scholarship aid also increases the need for students to work.** Students are feeling the squeeze of rising tuition, declining federal aid, static Minnesota tuition assistance, and the limited availability of scholarship funds. As they work more hours to cover their educational expenses, students fall farther off the pace for a timely graduation. Such students are far more likely to drop out or to stop out.

- **The recruitment environment is increasingly competitive and the projected image of the campus is not sharply focused.** The student population that is a good fit for MSUM

was not clear to the AASCU Team members. While many students with whom we spoke intended to graduate from MSUM, many others suggested that MSUM is known as a place "to get your liberals" and then to transfer, meaning that MSUM is a place to begin college, but not to complete it. While MSUM is clearly identified with the region of Western Minnesota, it is not clearly distinguished from NDSU which offers many of the same programs.

Recruitment in higher education is increasingly competitive. Campuses must work hard to market themselves to incoming students and then to hold them as students continue to weigh alternatives throughout their baccalaureate programs. While faculty and staff were able to articulate the strengths of MSUM, they were generally at a loss to explain why students leave.

- **While there are many initiatives designed to improve retention; there is a lack of coordination among these initiatives and a lack of an overall strategic approach to recruitment and retention.** The campus has clearly worked diligently to identify ways to improve recruitment and to retain students who come. While the number of initiatives is impressive and efforts to follow through are apparent, there are several indicators that the campus efforts are fragmented;

  - *There is no single campus committee or body that is charged with coordinating efforts at recruitment, retention, and graduation.*
  - *Thoughtful efforts to address issues such as advising in different vice presidential areas are not well coordinated through joint committees, overlapping memberships, or explicit joint strategic planning activities.*

- **Collaboration across school/college/division lines does not seem to be an inherent part of the campus culture. For the most part, units operate within their own domains and often in parallel with each other.**

- **Data collection and analysis is not systematic and does not seem to inform decisions about retention initiatives.**

AASCU Team Recommendations

Framing the Recommendations through the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study

From the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study, a number of characteristics emerged as important to the high persistence and graduation rates that the 12 campuses in the study were able to achieve. These characteristics were:

- *Leadership.* On each of the AASCU study campuses, the campus leadership (usually the President) had set a clear mission and tone, using presidential addresses to constituencies, campus events and rituals, publications, the website, and targeted programs to build and sustain the message.

- *Intentionality.* The ways that campuses spent their human and political capital were carefully selected to achieve the goals of recruitment, student success, and retention.

- *Integration.* While programs to promote student success involved campus faculty, administrators, staff, and community constituencies, these efforts were linked to the mission and the leadership. Using crosswalks of diverse memberships, shared leadership, and public exchanges of plans and results, the campuses built a pervasive sense of ownership of student success.

- *Collaboration.* Of necessity, campus progress toward shared goals through integrated structures meant that AASCU campuses built strong working relationships across the usual 'silos' of vice presidential or functional areas as staff at all levels worked together on projects with clearly defined and widely accepted goals.

- *Academic Focus.* Retention and graduation outcomes focus strongly on students' academic success. Achieving an environment in which students move toward graduation and find satisfaction in their college experiences clearly involved all parts of the AASCU campuses and all felt a sense of ownership of the effort; however, the focus was on helping students achieve academic success.

- *Data-Driven Decision Making*. The marriage of a clear sense of mission and a set of definable objectives that came out of the institution's shared mission made the use of data in decision making an imperative. Institutions used data in a variety of ways—modeling admissions, identifying barriers to student success, marking progress toward widely shared goals. In all cases, planning the data elements that would be needed, making sure that data were gathered and analyzed at timely intervals, and sharing data widely for use in decision-making were essential.

These characteristics were shared across all institutions. There was no case in which programs by themselves made a difference. It was the context within which they occurred that contributed to the positive results.

What we learned from the AASCU study is that a shared sense of the college or university, a shared concern for student success, and most importantly—intentional and collaborative programming between academic and student affairs was essential to a campus' efforts to support student success toward graduation. The identification of initiatives for these campuses was made within an environment of data-driven decision-making.

These conclusions provided the lens through which the AASCU Team viewed and considered their observations at MSUM. The result of the Team's reflection is a set of recommendations, these relating directly to the retention and persistence toward graduation initiatives of the campus.

The recommendations of the AASCU Team fall into three categories. The first category is the set of *General* recommendations we have for the campus to develop institutional capacity to support

improvements in retention and persistence toward graduation. The second category is the set of recommendations related to the *specific areas of review* identified by the President in the request for the AASCU Team visit. While these areas are inextricably intertwined with campus initiatives to improve retention and persistence toward graduation, they also have distinct characteristics and, as such, deserve individual consideration and review. Finally, the third category represents a set of related, yet miscellaneous recommendations that we have; these are the result of our own interest to be as helpful as we can to MSUM as it reviews its approach to enrollment management.

General Recommendations

The AASCU Team observed that there are many offices on campus that are planning and executing programs to improve retention and student learning. We believe the collective efforts of those initiatives would be strengthened and the net effect on student retention greatly enhanced if an "organizational crosswalk" were developed to improve communication between and among these initiatives, to integrate them with one another, and to foster cross-campus collaboration. The first recommendation is intended to address the need for such an 'organizational crosswalk' or mechanism to facilitate collaboration. The next three address data collection, sustainability of effort, and how to begin by using the Summer Institute as a springboard for action.

Recommendation #1:

Create/Establish a campus-wide mechanism to address issues related to student success and to coordinate campus efforts with regard to strategic enrollment management broadly defined.

Universities across the country have realized that their student profile goes beyond the number of students coming in their front door and that their enrollment goals must go beyond the overall number of students enrolled at any one time. Thus, enrollment management has become an important institutional activity that usually encompasses:

- clarifying the institution's target student population in light of its mission, history, and strengths
- recruitment of first year, undergraduate transfer, and graduate students
- retention of students at each year (after first year, second year, etc.)
- attention to patterns of academic success, especially in gateway courses (e.g., first semester chemistry for science majors)
- time and pathways to graduation
- overall graduation rates, overall and disaggregated by major or important groups.

Because effective enrollment management involves every aspect of the University, it requires an organizational effort that can span the entire institution. Because of the importance of recruitment and retention, the AASCU Study Team strongly recommends that MSUM undertake

a coordinated enrollment management effort with the expanded perspective above. This effort can take many forms, as a review of the AASCU Graduate Rate Outcomes Study institutions illustrates, but all of them provide ways to share information, planning, and responsibility for enrollment management across all vice presidential areas. One example of how to achieve campus coordination of enrollment management could be the creation of a campus-wide committee co-chaired by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and the Vice-President for Student Affairs. No matter the organizational form, it is especially important that *both* Academic Affairs and Student Affairs see themselves as partners in enrollment management *at every level, from the Vice Presidents to front line personnel in the offices.*

The AASCU Study Team strongly encourages MSUM to create a structure with a presidential mandate to undertake comprehensive enrollment management. Whatever the final organizational form it may take, we believe that it is very important to:
- have representation from individuals with broad perspectives on MSUM
- have representation from across vice presidential areas, especially including individuals knowledgeable about academic affairs, student affairs, and budget
- facilitate the flow of information among members of the enrollment management effort and across vice presidential areas.

Certainly, successful efforts to support and promote student success go beyond the program and everyone needs to see themselves as integral contributors to student success.

It is also important that any Enrollment Management/Student Success initiative be coordinated in its implementation. This means that offices that may now function independently should formulate, implement, and assess their efforts as part of the MSUM team rather than as a part of a single vice presidential area.

Critical to any model identified by the campus as appropriate, is ensuring that enrollment management be more broadly defined on the campus. It is a short step from the student-centered culture that is so evident on the MSUM campus to a culture of collective ownership for the recruitment, retention, and academic success of MSUM students. University organization, the flow of information, and future planning will reflect a continuum of student engagement that begins with recruitment and continues through graduation and alumni connections. All faculty and staff can see where their efforts are critical to success and collaboration will characterize the efforts of individuals and offices. Additional implications of broadly defining enrollment management and observations regarding recruitment, admissions, and leveraging scholarship dollars is considered near the end of this report under the section,

Additional AASCU Team Observations, Comments, and Recommendations.

In the end, form follows function and restructuring alone should not be viewed as a magic bullet. The important work—and the hard work of re-thinking and integrating the services of multiple units--is work that must be done in order to achieve success.

Recommendation #2:

Build capacity for the systematic collection of data designed to drive and support decision-making for student success initiatives.

MSUM has clearly engaged the issues of student recruitment and academic success through strategic planning as well as the North Central Association's reaccrediting process. Program initiatives reflect the efforts of many individuals and offices. Unfortunately, however, limited resources have hampered the institution's efforts to be systematic in identifying both opportunities for initiatives and to assess its current efforts. As a result, there is limited evidence of data-driven decision-making as MSUM makes important choices in enrollment management.

Data needs to be analyzed and presented so as to support a clear understanding of basic patterns of retention and persistence over time, point to possible areas of action, and to assess the effectiveness of efforts to improve. Examples of reports (some of which MSUM already has) that might be helpful in shaping and assessing MSUM's student success initiatives are as follows:

- Basic fall to fall retention, persistence and graduation rate charts for first-time full-time student, part-time, and transfer student cohorts which give a five to ten year history of headcount and associated return-rate and graduation-rate percentages through the sixth year, including disaggregated data for students dropping out in good standing vs. students dropping out in poor standing and counts of students re-entering the cohort after being absent the preceding fall. (An example of such a data presentation is included as an attachment to this report).
- Comparative data for first-year retention and six year graduation rate overall and by gender and ethnicity.
- Five year history of first-year retention rates by department, college, and undeclared.
- Five year history of first-year retention rate comparisons for students by campus residential status, scholarship assistance, ethnicity.
- Analysis and comparison of first-year retention rates by ACT range and by high school grade point average range.

The availability of regular reports to the campus will be especially helpful in supporting an integrated enrollment management initiative.

Recommendation #3:

Ensure appropriate institutional support in order to sustain these efforts.

The observations of the AASCU Team were that the campus community truly wants to engage in efforts that will strengthen and sustain MSUM over the long term. Toward this end, it is critical that support and guidance be provided for these efforts from the highest levels of the organization. It is clear that the President is a person who is held in high regard by the campus community and thus, his leadership and support as well as the leadership and support of his Cabinet will play no small role in MSUM's transformation efforts.

To the extent possible, resources should be available to support:

- data-driven decision making and,
- integrated planning and implementation of broad enrollment management strategies.

Recommendation #4:

Focus the Summer Institute for Student Success as an opportunity to reframe institutional enrollment management efforts and to set the stage for intentional, integrated and academically-focused collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

The Summer Institute poses a unique opportunity for MSUM to reframe its approach to improving student success and persistence toward graduation. In order to do this, the AASCU Team recommends that the current attendance list be reviewed and additions be made to ensure an appropriate and balanced representation from both academic affairs and students affairs and to include other participants from areas such as institutional advancement and budget whose cooperation is essential to effective enrollment management. The Team further recommends, in anticipation of the Institute, that MSUM spend time now focusing on the systematic collection of data as described in *Recommendation #2.*

Specific Areas of Review Recommendations

The invitation to the AASCU Study Team specifically highlighted some areas identified by MSUM as essential to its recruitment, retention, and student success efforts. The AASCU Team concurs that creating effective advising, first year programming, and campus cultures play a critically important role in retaining students and in supporting their success. These emphases are also consistent with the campus emphasis on teaching and learning. The suggestions we offer here are intended to enhance MSUM's campus culture of engagement with students and the foundation laid for programs needed for success.

Academic Advising

Advising is one of the most significant elements in improving retention and time to graduation among undergraduate students. It is through advising that the University transmits messages to students about the choices they need to make in order to be successful, to meet University requirements, and to proceed to graduation. Consistent messages, supported by timely information and supportive personnel, help to shape the campus climate and the choices of students.

Academic advising at MSUM utilizes a decentralized approach to delivery. Students who have not yet declared a major are advised through the Advising Center and students with a declared major are advised by faculty advisors within major departments. The technical assignment of

advisors is made by the Advising Center; departments submit their recommendations to the Center for data input; for undeclared students, the Advising Center director makes the assignments. Staffing is such in the Advising Center that the director, while responsible for undeclared students, often assigns students to faculty members within departments based on a general understanding of what the students' areas of interest happen to be. This approach connects students with faculty members and provides some balance to the advising load of the director.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has a number of resources that MSUM could consult as the campus reviews its academic advising program. Of particular interest might be the CAS Standards for Academic Advising, the NACADA Core Values, and the draft Statement on the Concept of Academic Advising. These resources are available through the NACADA Clearinghouse at www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Standards.htm.

Discussions with those involved with academic advising revealed that academic advising remains fairly tethered to the registration process and, in general, contact with students is not intentionally-focused. Because of the emphasis on registration for courses, advising seems to be detached from discussions with students about progress to graduation, achievement of academic and career goals, and strategies for improving or enriching a student's experience. Faculty advisors in departments with large numbers of majors reported being overwhelmed at registration time. They also reported being hampered by a lack of historical information about student performance, choices, and previous discussions with advisors. There is a statement of purpose for academic advising on the Advising Center's webpage; however, this purpose/mission does not appear to be widely shared on campus.

The primary recommendation for MSUM's academic advising program is for the campus to:

- ***Identify where or with whom the responsibility for campus-wide coordination of academic advising rests and initiate a review of MSUM's academic advising program using the CAS Standards for guidance.***

It is not unusual for institutions like MSUM to approach academic advising in a decentralized manner, that is, having undeclared students advised primarily by professional advisors in a centralized advising center and, once a student declares a major, having them advised by faculty members within departments. Within a decentralized model, like the one that currently exists at MSUM, there is a strong need to centralize the responsibility for coordinating the academic advising program. Coordination is essential to facilitate the collaboration, communication, and integration that is important to consistency in advising across campus. The "how" of coordination can be accomplished in several different ways--what is most important is that the coordination function be legitimized and supported. For example, if the director of the advising center is charged with the responsibility for coordinating academic advising, in order to have more broad-based involvement, she might identify a university-wide academic advising council to assist and provide input into the process. Such a committee, with membership from academic and student affairs, can be a powerful agent of change on a campus. This type of committee can be instrumental in building strong relational and communication pathways and linkages; ensure that 'operational silos' are not created that would interfere with advising services for students,

and by using a model that includes the curriculum and co-curriculum, such a committee can maximize the unique opportunities that might exist on campus to support student learning. An example of this would be the use of the residence halls and residence hall programming to extend and enrich academic advising. Other potential avenues exist within the FYE courses and the revision of the liberal studies program at MSUM.

As MSUM begins to review its academic advising program, particular attention should be given to:

- o ***Articulating a university-wide philosophy, vision, and mission statement for academic advising that recognizes it as an essential part of the student experience and as an intrusive and proactive process rather than a passive and reactive one.*** MSUM is a complex institution. The nature of this complexity and the nature of the institutional culture may call for an approach to academic advising that depends less on the organizational structure of advising delivery and more on the shared beliefs and understandings about what academic advising is. The Advising Center's webpage does identify a mission/purpose for academic advising. It does not appear, however, that this mission/purpose is widely understood or widely shared across the institution. Having a shared philosophy and concept of academic advising provides the framework through which MSUM can develop and support its organizational delivery system for academic advising. Providing access to advising without developing and sharing a solid philosophical and conceptual underpinning that is reflected in the vision, mission, and goals for the program is inviting inconsistency within the academic advising program.

- o ***Reviewing and restructuring the process of connecting with students for academic advising and monitoring their progress.*** The relationship and importance of academic advising to student transitions to MSUM would be strengthened through initiatives that intentionally facilitate early and frequent student contact. In addition, the use of technology can be helpful with regard to monitoring student progress toward graduation. MSUM has just implemented DARS, the degree audit reporting system that draws from the student information system. DARS can be a powerful tool in the academic advising process.

- o ***Providing resources and programs to support faculty and professional advisor training/ development initiative as well as recognition and reward structures.*** Advisor development as well as recognition and reward structures are important parts of any academic advising program. In order to advisors to be motivated to participate in advisor training and development, the role and function of advisors needs to be demonstrably valued within the institution, particularly for faculty. Consideration should be given to supporting attendance at state, regional, and national conferences and institutes designed to support academic advising; NACADA is a good resource for this.

First Year Experience Course

The current first year experience course is in need of review. It is not a course that is required of all students and, feedback from some students who have taken it, suggest that it is not a particularly challenging or meaningful course. The AASCU Recommendation is that the FYE Course be reviewed within the context of all first year programming and that such a review be guided by the Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College guidelines for the development of sound, first year experience programs.

Specific areas to be included and initiatives to consider include:

- Clarification of the purpose of the FYE course. Is it orientation to college? Should it provide an overview of the liberal education component of the degree? Should it emphasize basic abilities needed for success in college?

- The review of the current FYE course. What is working? What is not? Review the curriculum to incorporate topics related to transition to higher education and academic self-management. Consider making it mandatory.

- Consider whether there is need for a similar course or experience for transfer students. While the emphasis in "first year programming" is on entering first year students, the reality is that MSUM, like most universities, has an increasing percentage of transfer students

- Consider implementing new ways of registering and fostering identity among first year students. In particular, explore opportunities with First Year Interest Groups, Learning Communities and block scheduling to facilitate the development of cohort groups. Given the large number of commuter students, First Year Interest Groups and block scheduling may be a good place to begin. The development of learning communities necessitates a strong collaboration between residential life staff and faculty members.

Multicultural Affairs, International Programs, and TOCAR

Comments from both students and staff suggest that there is definitely an interest in addressing issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion at MSUM. This is rooted in pride in MSUM as a welcoming, friendly campus. Noted in a number of discussions, however, was a level of frustration on several fronts. First, there is an interest in increasing the ethnic, racial, and international diversity of the campus, both in faculty/staff and student profiles, Most of the frustration stems from the difficulty of recruiting diverse faculty and students to come to a distinctively "majority" campus. It was generally agreed that current efforts to project interest in and sensitivity to a variety of cultures will be necessary for success.

In general, the efforts of the offices of Multicultural Affairs and International Students are well-received on campus. There is a belief that more could be done in recruitment and retention of international and minority students but that the current staffing limits outreach. The diversity of

the student population was viewed by many as due to the international student population and not domestic persons of color.

The TOCAR initiative is considered a strength of MSUM and ought to be used to support/facilitate a campus climate that embraces difference and responds appropriately when issues related to racism emerge. Questions were raised, however, about the priority that these efforts have on the campus. The goal of improving the campus climate and diversifying the campus by 2013 was viewed as too timid, especially when more immediate concerns (limiting the use and abuse of alcohol, for example) seem to push TOCAR to one side.

Particular actions for consideration include:

- Developing a strategic recruitment plan for students of color while simultaneously creating support services that will address their particular needs and ensure their success. This requires a close collaboration between Admissions, Multicultural Affairs, and International Programs. Mention was made by several of the opportunities that exist within the Native American communities as well as the local Refugee Resettlement Program.

- Implementing an affirmative action campaign to increase the number of faculty and staff from underrepresented groups. Efforts such as mentoring networks and support services for these faculty and staff are critically important in both recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and student body.

Dragon Days and Orientation

These two programs need to be reviewed in the context of an overarching enrollment management plan. Both are important in setting a tone with incoming students and in helping students formulate a plan for success and graduation at MSUM. What is the purpose of each of these? How do they reflect the distinctive mission and climate of MSUM? How do they relate to other institutional initiatives?

As the first registration for newly admitted students, Dragon Days is also the first opportunity for students to be formally connected with the institution and, more importantly, the advisors (faculty and professional) with whom students will continue to work. Having Peer Advisors serve as the primary contacts for students during these days does not foster these important campus connections. This is not to say that peer advisors should not be involved in Dragon Days, indeed, peer advisors are important role models and support systems for students. It does say that student connections to faculty are extremely important for long term retention and success. It also suggests careful examination of the ways in which peer advisors are trained and ways their efforts are integrated with an overall advising strategy. The AASCU Team recommendation is that Dragon Days and Orientation be reviewed in concert with the MSUM academic advising program.

Learning Communities and Residence Hall Programming

University housing plays an important role in enrollment management. Attractive, clean and well-maintained facilities can and often do affect a student's enrollment decision. This is especially important as the number of students from the Twin Cities increases. As is the case nationally, students and families are becoming more savvy consumers as they make college choices. Students and their parents expect a certain level of quality and service within residence halls; more than recruitment, the quality of accommodations and service can further affect students' decisions to remain in the residence halls for a second or third year. The residence halls at MSUM currently have excess capacity. This situation seems to warrant an exploration, through a program review, as to why this is the case, particularly since residence halls add to the vitality of a campus community.

Retention Beyond the First Year

While retention of students from the first to the second year is a critical transition, MSUM's retention data suggest that attention should be paid to retention throughout a student's undergraduate experience. Data analysis can help to clarify not only the points at which students may drop out or stop out, it can also help to identify the warning signs that students are about to do so. National studies suggest that:

- full time students are less likely to drop out than part time students
- students who drop courses or who fail courses are more likely to drop out or to stop out than those who do not
- students who declare a major in a timely fashion are more likely to proceed to graduation.

This is not to say that students who encounter academic difficulties or who must attend school on a part time basis will not graduate from the institution. It does suggest, however, that students who are part time, who have academic difficulties, or who seem to drift without a definite academic focus may require more intensive interventions in order to support their academic success and to retain them as students.

As a part of its comprehensive enrollment management and student success strategy, MSUM is encouraged to look carefully at its patterns of student progress and the ways in which focused and integrated academic support services can be utilized to meet its goals.

<p align="center">Additional AASCU Team Observations, Comments, and Recommendations</p>

In addition to the specific foci identified by President Barden for the Team's attention, the AASCU Study Team identified some additional areas that could contribute to MSUM's goals to improve recruitment, retention, and academic success of its students.

- **Recruitment, Athletics, Financial Aid**

Recruitment. As noted in the Team's observations, the recruitment environment is becoming increasingly competitive for MSUM. This is complicated by the fact that the projected image of the campus is not clear. The need for a clear and concise identity in this competitive environment is important. The AASCU Team thus recommends that MSUM articulate its distinctive identity and identify strategic marketing initiatives to attract students who will succeed at MSUM. It is important that representatives from a wide range of campus offices are involved in this process and perhaps consideration should be given to contracting with a marketing firm to assist in this process.

Financial Aid. While the AASCU Team understands the nature of MSUM's financial concerns, we encourage expanding the scholarship pool beyond the current levels. Scholarship expenditures can have a dramatic and instant effect on admission yields - as well as retention percentages - when used strategically and effectively. The recommendation is for MSUM to review its use of scholarships and their use as recruitment and retention tools. These will be important particularly as MSUM considers expanding its recruitment range and increases its efforts to recruit students from underrepresented groups. The same review is recommended for the use of student employment dollars. Given the nature of MSUM's student body, increasing campus employment opportunities may provide a vehicle through which the campus can improve student involvement with the university.

Athletics. There appears to be a need for the Office of Admission, the Athletic department and the Financial Aid office to improve communication and collaboration in order to utilize, as efficiently and strategically as possible, limited scholarship dollars. Consideration should be given to conducting yield studies to determine where scholarship dollars should be applied in order to be most effective. The relationship between the decision-making behavior of student athletes and the timing of scholarship awards ought to be an important part of these studies.

- **Career Services**

Much of the current service offered by this office, much like academic advising, seems reactive rather than proactive. The Team recommends that activities of Career Services be reviewed and opportunities for expansion be explored. Potential exists to expand internship opportunities and to develop programming for undeclared students to explore careers as an avenue to choosing a major. Programs and services that provide opportunities for first year students to look ahead toward graduation can help students focus on academic planning and can improve both retention and time to graduation. The Team also recommends examination of ways to better integrate the work of Career Services and the academic departments in creating internships, developing career-oriented programming, and bringing majors to the attention of students.

- **Alternative Delivery of Courses and Programs**

The AASCU team observed that students have myriad external commitments and responsibilities that negatively affect their affiliation with MSUM. This challenge extends to

both recruitment and retention. Non-traditional students may choose not to attend MSUM because the challenge of attending classes on campus scheduled at traditional times (from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M) is simply too daunting. Students may drop out because of conflicts with work when they might rather remain connected with the University if they could earn credits toward their degree at times and places that are more easily coordinated with their work schedules. Evening and weekend courses and delivery of courses at alternative sites are one response to this challenge. Another effective method is asynchronous delivery of online courses. MUSM has made some progress in this area and is already offering nursing courses and an instructional technology certification program on line. The infrastructure to offer online courses is in place, supported by a committed instructional resources staff. Furthermore, some faculty members are leading the way, primarily at their own initiative, in developing a growing number of on line courses. While progress has been made in this area, an institutional vision of its importance within a total strategic enrollment management plan and an individual of sufficient authority to articulate and implement the vision seem to be lacking. We recommend that MSUM consider the potential role of online learning as one component of a strategic enrollment management plan as it relates both to recruitment and retention of students.

Concluding Remarks

The report began by noting the deep institutional commitment to student success and the consistent willingness of faculty and staff to articulate the centrality of student learning at MSUM. Combined with its attractive campus and its financial accessibility for students, MSUM has established a solid basis for contributing to the success of its students. Much of this report has suggested two essential ingredients that should be added to capitalize on this foundation. First, the Team believes that it is essential that collaboration and integrated planning replace a more disaggregated model. The analogy of "silos" is often used to describe the lack of integration in complex organizations. Perhaps at MSUM the more appropriate analogy would be "islands". At MSUM, the attention to student needs and student learning consistently guides the efforts of functional units. These units are aware of what others are doing. The "islands" are close enough that people can wave and nod to one another. Like those islands without bridges, however, little effective collaboration can take place. We strongly encourage building those bridges.

The second ingredient missing in a successful effort to raise recruitment levels and retention and graduation of students is a compelling definition of the distinctive mission and vision of MSUM. There is no mistaking the level of commitment of faculty, staff, and administrators to the success of its students. Not only is there agreement on the rhetoric; faculty and staff have "put their time and money where their mouths are". Students left no doubt in the minds of the Team that MSUM faculty are "there for them". MSUM is a place where faculty members care about teaching and about how and what their students learn. What is needed is a way to reach out and to connect with those students who can best learn and prosper at MSUM.

Attachment
Example of Data Presentation from Southeast Missouri State University
(attached with permission)

Fall 2004

Fall 2004	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	559		388	64.6%
Graduated			3	0.5%
Dropout in Poor Standing			51	8.5%
Dropout in Good Standing			99	16.5%
Dropout - No Basis			18	3.0%
Rejoined Cohort				
Continuously Enrolled			388	64.6%

Fall 2003

Fall 2003	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	601		415	69.1%	263	43.8%
Graduated			4	0.7%	105	17.5%
Dropout in Poor Standing			57	9.5%	12	2.0%
Dropout in Good Standing			106	17.6%	39	6.5%
Dropout - No Basis			19	3.2%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					20	
Continuously Enrolled			415	69.1%	263	43.8%

Fall 2002

Fall 2002	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	570		402	70.5%	249	43.7%	110	19.3%
Graduated			4	0.7%	95	16.7%	226	39.6%
Dropout in Poor Standing			51	8.9%	18	4.5%	15	3.7%
Dropout in Good Standing			95	16.7%	43	10.7%	6	1.5%
Dropout - No Basis			18	3.2%	1	0.2%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					13		11	
Continuously Enrolled	570		402	70.5%	249	43.7%	103	18.1%

Fall 2001

Fall 2001	Fall 2001 n	Fall 2001 %	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	534		388	72.7%	257	48.1%	109	20.4%	33	6.2%
Graduated			2	0.4%	76	14.2%	203	38.0%	264	49.4%
Dropout in Poor Standing			50	9.4%	6	1.5%	14	5.4%	2	0.8%
Dropout in Good Standing			83	15.5%	47	12.1%	19	7.4%	23	8.9%
Dropout - No Basis			11	2.1%	4	1.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					12		10		7	
Continuously Enrolled	534		388	72.7%	257	48.1%	102	19.1%	28	5.2%

Fall 2000

Fall 2000	Fall 2000 n	Fall 2000 %	Fall 2001 n	Fall 2001 %	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	610		424	69.5%	264	43.3%	121	19.8%	44	7.2%	15	2.5%
Graduated			5	0.8%	91	14.9%	211	34.6%	288	47.2%	315	51.6%
Dropout in Poor Standing			57	9.3%	19	4.5%	7	2.7%	3	2.5%	2	1.7%
Dropout in Good Standing			107	17.5%	54	12.7%	30	11.4%	11	9.1%	11	9.1%
Dropout - No Basis			17	2.8%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					14		14		11		10	
Continuously Enrolled	610		424	69.5%	264	43.3%	111	18.2%	36	5.9%	10	1.6%

Fall 1999

Fall 1999	Fall 1999 n	Fall 1999 %	Fall 2000 n	Fall 2000 %	Fall 2001 n	Fall 2001 %	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %	Fall 2005 n	Fall 2005 %
Enrolled	482		338	70.1%	204	42.3%	91	18.9%	28	5.8%	18	3.7%	8	1.7%
Graduated			1	0.2%	70	14.5%	165	34.2%	227	47.1%	247	51.2%	258	53.5%
Dropout in Poor Standing			47	9.8%	22	6.5%	12	5.9%	1	1.1%	2	7.1%	1	3.6%
Dropout in Good Standing			73	15.1%	43	12.7%	25	12.3%	11	12.1%	5	17.9%	3	10.7%
Dropout - No Basis			23	4.8%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					19		11		17		5		5	
Continuously Enrolled	482		338	70.1%	204	42.3%	79	16.4%	16	3.3%	4	0.8%	1	0.2%

Fall 1998

Fall 1998	Fall 1998 n	Fall 1998 %	Fall 1999 n	Fall 1999 %	Fall 2000 n	Fall 2000 %	Fall 2001 n	Fall 2001 %	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %	Fall 2004 n	Fall 2004 %
Enrolled	573		406	70.9%	237	41.4%	113	19.7%	36	6.3%	12	2.1%	5	0.9%
Graduated			0	0.0%	95	16.6%	197	34.4%	269	46.9%	292	51.0%	296	51.7%
Dropout in Poor Standing			43	7.5%	14	3.4%	7	3.0%	7	6.2%	2	5.6%	1	8.3%
Dropout in Good Standing			107	18.7%	60	14.8%	38	16.0%	13	11.5%	10	27.8%	2	16.7%
Dropout - No Basis			17	3.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					23		15		11		0			
Continuously Enrolled	573		406	70.9%	237	41.4%	99	17.3%	24	4.2%	6	1.0%	2	0.3%

Fall 1997

Fall 1997	Fall 1997 n	Fall 1997 %	Fall 1998 n	Fall 1998 %	Fall 1999 n	Fall 1999 %	Fall 2000 n	Fall 2000 %	Fall 2001 n	Fall 2001 %	Fall 2002 n	Fall 2002 %	Fall 2003 n	Fall 2003 %
Enrolled	640		457	71.4%	264	41.3%	125	19.5%	44	6.9%	20	3.1%	10	1.6%
Graduated			3	0.5%	123	19.2%	242	37.8%	317	49.5%	337	52.7%	341	53.3%
Dropout in Poor Standing			56	8.8%	33	7.2%	13	4.9%	3	2.4%	7	15.9%	5	25.0%
Dropout in Good Standing			106	16.6%	40	8.8%	23	8.7%	21	16.8%	10	22.7%	7	35.0%
Dropout - No Basis			18	2.8%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Rejoined Cohort					16		18		13		6		0	
Continuously Enrolled	640		457	71.4%	264	41.3%	118	18.4%	33	5.2%	9	1.4%	3	0.5%

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