

CHAPTER II

CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES

Criterion 1. The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.

While the University is responsible for developing its own mission statement, that mission is subject to a number of other specified directions. As one of the campuses of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Moorhead State University has a number of externally-defined purposes. This chapter describes these external mandates and then presents our mission statement and aims. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways in which our mission and aims are understood by our constituencies. (All of the documents referred to in this chapter are available in GD-103.)

External Mandates

Legislative Charge

The Minnesota legislature, by statute, has defined missions for each of Minnesota's public higher education systems. "The state university system shall offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree, including specialist certificates, in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education" [Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 248, section 10, subdivision 1(3)]. In contrast, the legislature dictates that the University of Minnesota is the primary state-supported academic agency for research and extension services and for granting doctoral degrees.

Mission of the Minnesota State University System

MSU's mission statement was revised during the 1993-94 academic year. At that time, the institutional mission was subject to the mission of the now-defunct Minnesota State University System (MSUS), which was

to provide high quality, accessible education, which will enrich individual lives, increase economic opportunity, and contribute to the community. The System is committed to exploration and dissemination of knowledge; development of cultural, intellectual, and humane sensitivities; improvement of professional, scientific, and technological competence; and enhancement of values and purpose. The System will also offer extended education and public service programs and assist in economic and community development in all regions of Minnesota (memo from Chancellor Robert L. Carothers, 9/27/86).

In elaboration of this mission, specific MSUS goals directed the state universities to:

- Give priority to the highest quality undergraduate teaching and learning by
 - a. reaffirming the liberal arts as the foundation for all degree programs,
 - b. offering baccalaureate programs in arts, humanities, and sciences,
 - c. offering baccalaureate programs in career and professional fields;
- Offer selected graduate degree programs which respond to the special, demonstrated needs of the people of Minnesota;
- Offer vocational programs only in cooperation with area vocational technical institutes;
- Maintain a commitment to those with special needs--minority, disadvantaged, physically handicapped and non-traditional students;
- Meet the personal development needs of students through effective academic advising, counseling and cultural, recreational and extracurricular programs;
- Support scholarly and creative activity to enhance instructional programs and teaching excellence;
- Conduct applied research and provide technical assistance in support of the economic and community development of the region;
- Provide public service to regions and serve as cultural and resource centers (Carothers memo, 9/27/86).

Purposes of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

The Board of Trustees of the newly-merged Minnesota State Colleges and Universities has yet to adopt a mission statement; however, it has discussed a draft Statement of Purpose, which is:

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system is the state's primary provider of public higher education at the undergraduate level, offering two- and four-year academic and occupational education programs and select master's degrees. These educational opportunities help prepare students for work, life, and additional education. All MnSCU institutions place major emphasis on service to Minnesota, providing access to quality education to all citizens throughout the state (Board of Trustees Statement of Purpose, 2/21/96).

At the May 16, 1995, Board meeting, the trustees adopted a set of 32 objectives for the 1995-1997 biennium. These were adopted prior to selection of Dr. Judith Eaton as Chancellor, but she continues to emphasize many of the objectives. Prominent themes include collaboration

among campuses, restructuring some campuses, developing incentive funding, expanding distance learning opportunities, and establishing new management systems. These objectives hold many implications for Moorhead State University; the following are especially significant for us:

- Establish a systemwide budget set-aside, amounting to at least 5% of total budget, for allocation to campuses on specific quality and outcome competitive measures. (Objective 1)
- Implement a new MnSCU budget allocation model for the 1998-99 biennium which includes outcome, quality and productivity incentives for colleges and universities. (Objective 3)
- Implement comprehensive competencies assessment for all students addressing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other outcome measures relevant to the students' educational emphases. (Objective 6)
- Forge major expansion of college/university collaboration with business/industry, including provision of consultative and other educational services by campuses, and contribution of business/industry expertise to the students' educational experiences. (Objective 11)
- Require plans from all campuses for collaboration, efficiency and quality enhancement in the first year of the biennium and implement changes soon thereafter. (Objective 14)
- Inventory and evaluate all 1,952 degree and diploma educational programs in the first two years and intensively evaluate those candidates for elimination, consolidation or enhancement due to excellence and/or specialization, and implement a new Strategic Comprehensive Program Enhancement (SCOPE) approach to higher education. (Objective 16)
- Expand distance learning by at least 10% to increase efficiency of delivery of current courses. (Objective 19)
- Develop time to completion guarantees for associate degree, baccalaureate degree, and associate to baccalaureate degree programs through contractual agreements between students and colleges/universities. (Objective 25)

Anticipated Changes in Mission

At this time, our mission is consistent with the mission and goals of the former MSUS. As the mission and vision of MnSCU become clearer, we will need to review our mission and aims. This will likely be a major review, given current MnSCU objectives; however, those new goals are not yet sufficiently clear for such a review to be undertaken as part of this NCA self-study process.

Development of MSU's Mission and Aims

The latest Moorhead State University mission statement was approved in 1994 under the Dille administration. Two task forces, appointed in 1992 by then-Vice President Barden, initiated review of the mission statement. The Task Force on Academic Planning and the Task Force on Assessment both were aware of the need for appropriate mission and goal statements to aid planning and assessment. They established a joint subcommittee to begin the process of revising the mission and aims.

Following work by the joint subcommittee, the Assessment Task Force proposed further revisions. The document was then shared with the Academic Affairs Council (AAC)--consisting of the Academic Vice President, Associate Academic Vice President, and deans--during summer planning in 1993. Copies were sent to departments and other units of the University, and comments were invited. The subcommittee solicited feedback through focus groups of faculty, staff, and students. Additional revisions were made. The Academic Policy Advisory Council (APAC), Moorhead State's closest equivalent to a faculty senate, devoted one meeting to a hearing in May and a second meeting for hearing and adoption, after slight revisions, in October 1993. Finally, the document was taken to appropriate Meet and Confer sessions, approved by the President, and submitted to the MSUS Board of Directors for approval. The Board approved the mission statement on March 30, 1994.

Moorhead State University Mission Statement and Aims

Moorhead State University's mission statement and aims is as follows:

Introduction

Moorhead State University is one of seven comprehensive Minnesota State Universities established to provide the citizens of Minnesota access to quality educational programs at moderate cost. Moorhead State University's primary responsibility is to provide baccalaureate programs to residents of northwest and west central Minnesota. Through tuition reciprocity agreements, the University also provides educational services to residents of several regional states and one province.

Mission

The mission of Moorhead State University is to foster excellence in teaching and learning. The University strives to provide an educational environment that supports intellectual development, that welcomes diversity and that develops the skills and talents of women and men so that they have the capacity to live usefully, act responsibly and be learners all their lives. The academic programs at the University are founded upon a common liberal studies experience and emphasize developing the unique talents of each person. The University provides baccalaureate-level programs in the liberal arts, natural and social sciences, teacher education, business and technology, the fine arts, and professional areas. It provides selected graduate programs in response to regional needs.

The University encourages scholarly and creative endeavors that promote a commitment by faculty and students to their disciplines, to continuing professional development, and to excellence in learning.

The University enhances the quality of life of the region with the professional, cultural, and recreational services offered by its students, faculty and staff.

Aims

1. To give the highest priority to continuous improvement in learning and teaching.
2. To provide instruction at all levels that stimulates and promotes commitment to life-long learning and to open inquiry, that promotes development of higher order thinking skills and of multicultural, global and international perspectives. Further, to provide instruction that encourages and empowers students to contribute as educated, compassionate, and responsible citizens within their communities, states, nations and the world.
3. To provide a strong liberal studies foundation for all undergraduate programs.
4. To incorporate instruction in all majors that provides breadth and depth in the discipline as well as recognition of the ethical bases of that discipline.
5. To provide instruction in graduate level programs that promotes increased depth in disciplinary or interdisciplinary studies and professional specialization.
6. To ensure that academic programs are accessible to our diverse constituencies at moderate cost.

7. To ensure a campus climate that embraces diversity and bases relationships on civility and tolerance and that acknowledges the perspectives of women, minorities and non-western cultures.
8. To provide higher education opportunities with appropriate support and encouragement for all students including international, nontraditional and traditionally under-represented groups.
9. To provide support and encouragement for faculty development including scholarship, creative activity, research and public service that enriches the individual and the institution, and that promotes the educational and economic development of the service region.
10. To provide support personnel, facilities, and resources that enhance and complement the academic experience.
11. To provide students a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as opportunities related to community service and leadership as a means of developing social awareness and enhancing the quality of their lives and developing their potential to thrive in a changing world.
12. To provide service to the region in the form of professional, academic and recreational activities, and, especially, to be a center of cultural activity for the region.

Features of the MSU Mission and Aims

Our mission, while general, describes some specific characteristics of Moorhead State University. Our primary responsibility is to provide baccalaureate education. Graduate opportunities focus on the needs of residents in our service region. We emphasize that our undergraduate programs are founded on a common liberal studies experience, not on curricula more broadly described as general education.

We encourage scholarly and creative endeavors to promote a commitment by faculty and students to their disciplines, insofar as it provides for continuing professional development and excellence in teaching and learning. The legislature has not charged us with, nor will it fund us for, pure research. Nevertheless, we are proud of the accomplishments of our faculty and students in undergraduate and graduate research, creative activity, and performance.

Our service mission is similarly tied to sharing our expertise and activities, as opposed to a service component based on an extension program. Some of the services we provide to the region are (1) theater and music performances and art shows by our faculty, students, and staff, (2) programming for K-12 schools at our Regional Science Center and campus planetarium, (3) services provided by our Small Business Development Center, and (4) community access to our library.

Our mission affirms the value of an educational environment that supports intellectual development and affirms the value of open inquiry. Open inquiry is supported through the guarantee of academic freedom for our faculty. The negotiated agreement states:

It shall be the policy of the MnSCU to maintain and encourage full freedom, within the law, of inquiry, teaching, and research. The Employer shall not discriminate against a faculty member for engaging in political activities or holding or voicing political views, so long as the exercise of this right does not interfere with responsibilities as a faculty member (GD-66, Article 4).

When circumstances warrant, we have changed portions of our mission statement. For example, in recent years, the legislature increased the portion of the costs that students are expected to pay for their college education from 19% to approximately 34%. In response, we changed the wording of the mission statement to describe MSU as providing an education at “moderate cost” rather than the previous claim that we offered a “low cost” educational opportunity (Introduction and Aim 6).

Understanding and Communicating Our Purposes

Communication of Our Mission

The mission statement is published in the undergraduate and graduate Bulletins (GD-69, GD-70). In addition to these documents, there are many formal and informal ways in which purposes are communicated.

Within the University, the leadership has regularly communicated and advanced our sense of vision and mission. During his 26 years as President, Roland Dille made clear his vision of Moorhead State as a liberal arts institution of high quality. This was achieved by admitting capable students and maintaining an excellent faculty. President Dille was an ardent spokesperson for the liberal arts and was a strong supporter of the creative arts. He often publicly reaffirmed his belief in the value of a liberal education.

Given his national reputation, President Dille used various platforms to effectively emphasize the quality of education provided by MSU and its commitment to the liberal ideal. Some have thought that his emphasis on the liberal arts was misleading, since the majority of our graduates are in teacher education and business. However, the strong liberal arts base has long been common for all MSU students, regardless of major.

With the change in state governing boards and in the campus administration, the publicly-stated mission of the institution has shifted somewhat. President Roland Barden has placed an increasing emphasis on MSU as a regional comprehensive university. In his 1994 inaugural address (GD-85) and in other public statements, President Barden has emphasized that Moorhead State will work to retain and increase its reputation in the arts and will maintain a strong liberal arts base for all programs; but, as a comprehensive university, MSU

will strive equally to promote our strong professional programs in teacher education (given our origins as a normal school), business, and the sciences.

Concurrent with this shift in focus, the merged state-wide system has led to uncertainty about the separate missions of the universities, community colleges, and technical colleges. The legislature and the MnSCU Board have reaffirmed those missions. However, there continues to be pressure to consolidate campuses, share resources, and collaborate on degree programs. As a result of these modifications in the public presentation of MSU's mission, we have lost clarity about our common vision and charge. While the underlying mission and values of the University have not changed, as demonstrated in the next sections, there is an undercurrent of uncertainty on campus and among our supporters that is disquieting to some.

Common Understanding of Our Mission

We began making a concerted effort in 1994 to determine whether the campus community and our external constituencies have a shared understanding of our mission and purposes. One impetus for these assessments was the change in administration coupled with a significant decrease in the number of students attending MSU. We used several sources of information in the analysis, including external consultant reports, surveys, and focus groups.

Noel-Levitz Student Survey. Subsequent to a major drop in enrollment, MSU hired Noel-Levitz Centers, Inc. to analyze Moorhead State with respect to academic market positioning and student perceptions. They presented the results of their study in the summer and fall of 1995. They found that MSU has a strong academic history and tradition and a strong nucleus of faculty dedicated to the mission of teaching and student intellectual growth. While Noel-Levitz found MSU to be a fundamentally sound institution, it suggested that we aggressively define our public image and unify that image as it is presented in recruitment literature (GD-32, 33). During the 1995-1996 academic year, we focused on modifying recruitment materials and processes in response to recommendations from Noel-Levitz. The institution's marketing plan continues to evolve.

Institutional Surveys. A brief survey to probe understanding of our mission was developed and distributed to a sample of the University community in the spring of 1996. The survey was sent to 620 people, 183 of whom completed and returned it. This represents a return rate of approximately 30%. Almost two-thirds of the faculty returned the survey, while only 9% of the staff did. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Mission Survey Results

Respondent Profile

| Group | Percent of Group Returning Survey | Number |
|--------------|--|---------------|
| Alumni | 35% | 34 |
| Students | 28% | 42 |
| Faculty | 62% | 93 |
| Staff | 9% | 14 |

Rate the level of importance Moorhead State University places on the following.

| | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Important |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Excellence in teaching and learning | 81% | 18% | 1% |
| Scholarly/creative research | 27% | 61% | 13% |
| Service to community | 26% | 57% | 17% |
| Co-curricular student programs | 18% | 62% | 20% |

Rate how important you think the following should be at Moorhead State University.

| | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Important |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Excellence in teaching and learning | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| Scholarly/creative research | 46% | 52% | 2% |
| Service to community | 47% | 52% | 1% |
| Co-curricular student programs | 39% | 55% | 6% |

A second series of questions asked if the following are or should be a part of the mission of Moorhead State University. If neither was selected, then the respondent felt the item was not and should not be a part of the mission.

| | Are part of Mission | Should be part of Mission | Both items blank |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Programs founded on common liberal studies experience | 85% | 38% | 4% |
| Selected graduate programs | 57% | 64% | 2% |
| Cultural activities for region | 55% | 56% | 5% |
| Education to develop individual unique talents | 54% | 54% | 9% |
| Recreational services for the region | 22% | 35% | 44% |
| Professional services for the region | 40% | 54% | 20% |

The most striking result of the survey was strong agreement among all audiences that excellence in teaching and learning is and should be very important at Moorhead State.

While 85% of respondents agreed that offering programs founded on a common liberal studies experience is part of our mission, only 38% felt that it should be part of our mission. This discrepancy must be heeded in future discussions of university values. The Focus Group discussions held in 1996 (GD-68) pointed to some misunderstanding of the terms “liberal arts” and “liberal studies.” A number of individuals suggested that our saying we are a liberal arts institution means that our students graduate with degrees in liberal arts fields. This same misunderstanding may be at least partially responsible for the mission survey result suggesting that a common liberal studies foundation should not be part of our mission. (This issue is discussed further in Chapter VII.)

An annual survey of graduating seniors is completed each May. Approximately 80% of those completing the 1995 survey indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with the amount of contact they had with faculty members, and almost 74% were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of the academic atmosphere (GD-4). These results support our contention that MSU values effective teaching. (The graduating senior survey results are described more fully in Chapter IV.)

Focus Group Discussions. As noted in Chapter I of this self-study, focus group discussions were held during 1996 to identify the commonly-held values of the University. The following were articulated by all, or nearly all, groups: (1) we value the liberal arts, (2) we value career preparation, and (3) we value good teaching and the provision of a quality education. While many groups noted that we claim to value students, research, and the professional development of faculty, not everyone agreed that we live up to our common expectations in these areas. In addition, there is a perceived lack of campus-wide collegiality or sense of common community on the MSU campus (GD-68).

Challenges and Opportunities

Moorhead State has a set of clear and publicly-stated purposes which are appropriate to an institution of higher education and operates in a manner consistent with these purposes. As this document demonstrates, we are comfortable with our mission statement and are generally agreed that it reflects our shared understanding of who we are and what we value. The mission statement accurately reflects our primary teaching function and our secondary missions to conduct research, engage in professional development activities, and provide service to our regional community.

Throughout this self-study, it is evident that the University is in the midst of change. With the inauguration of President Barden, a period of reinvention of the University began. President Barden has begun to articulate a vision that combines our traditional strengths in professional programs with a grounding in the liberal arts. The more his public statements reflect both of these values and the more discussion that takes place around campus and within the external community, the more secure we all become in our shared understanding of the mission of Moorhead State University.

Moorhead State will have to work hard in the future to implement President Barden's leadership objectives and to solidify our understanding of our common purposes as we make the necessary shifts to meet new needs. As this chapter has documented, however, additional challenges remain:

1. Our mission and aims state that we value excellence in teaching and learning above all. As the 1986 NCA team report noted, however, we do not systematically evaluate our faculty; and as is noted in Chapter IV of this self-study, we are just beginning to assess student learning outcomes. Focus group discussions suggest that, while we say we value excellent teaching, we do not always make decisions that support that value. The University must find better ways to assess teaching and learning and then demonstrate our sincere commitment to the value of excellence.
2. We must continue to evaluate our public messages to assure that they accurately reflect our campus values. We have started this process by modifying our recruitment messages and Viewbook, but such efforts must continue. In addition, our public relations and public information messages must repeatedly and clearly convey our internally-determined sense of purpose.
3. Informal feedback from the focus group discussions suggested that participants valued these discussions as opportunities to better understand one another and to clarify a sense of common purpose. We will need to continue to find ways to build a sense of community and shared mission to strengthen the commitment of faculty, administrators, staff, students, and friends to the University.
4. Perhaps our biggest challenge is to survive as a unique institution within a massive state system of colleges and universities. As the MnSCU Board of Trustees and the chancellor's office struggle with the impact of the merger, our mission may well have to change.

