

CHAPTER V

CRITERION FOUR: PLANNING

Criterion 4. The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

This chapter examines institutional practices that indicate that Moorhead State University can continue to accomplish its purposes while strengthening its educational effectiveness. The main emphasis of this chapter is to demonstrate the capacity of the institution to respond effectively to changing circumstances. As described in the Introduction to this self-study, Moorhead State has recently experienced significant changes that pose challenges to the institution's ability to accomplish its mission. Moorhead State has responded by moving to accommodate, adapt to, or compensate for each of these challenges.

Prior to 1994, MSU's planning activities tended to be in response to specific concerns; as such, they were neither coordinated nor global. Perhaps the most serious consequence of this lack of planning was that the institution did not anticipate its significant enrollment decline of the past six years and was not prepared to respond quickly or effectively to the subsequent drastic changes in the financial base.

We believe that our planning mechanisms have evolved in recent years, and we are better prepared than in the past to respond in the future. Because of the changes in planning that have accompanied changes in the administrative team, this chapter contrasts the planning efforts of 1986-1994 with those that have emerged since 1994, when President Barden assumed office. The chapter begins with a description of MSU's pre-1994 planning practices, then describes the past and current practices of each of the University's major divisions, and concludes with a description and analysis of current planning practices.

MSU Planning Practices, 1986 Through 1994

As noted in our 1986 Institutional Self-Study, all decision-making processes ended in the President's Office (GD-10, p. 39). An idea or proposal might originate at any level (e.g., individual, program, department) and be reviewed by appropriate committees, the Academic Affairs Council, and the Cabinet, but it could not be acted upon until the President made the decision.

While this process insured careful review of new initiatives, it was accompanied by serious drawbacks. First, there was little coordination of initiatives, and initiatives were seldom tied to general institutional goals. Second, there was little coordination of initiatives with budget processes. The President, with input from the Vice President for Administrative Affairs, retained tight control over all budgeting decisions. Third, institutional data necessary for effective planning were not available or, if available, were not shared with most of the

institution. Fourth, the concentration of decision making in the person of the President tended to slow the institution's response to new or changing circumstances.

It might be supposed that some institutional planning, including budgeting, would have taken place at the behest of the Minnesota State University System (MSUS) Board Office. However, this was not required by that system. While various data and reports were forwarded to the Chancellor's office each year, budgets or other formal plans were not required. Like the other Minnesota State Universities, Moorhead State was subject to oversight that did not encourage sound planning practices.

Moorhead State University's planning practices also were, and continue to be, affected by its position as a public institution, which is subject to a variety of external controls, and by the presence of multiple bargaining units on campus. These factors are perceived by some to slow the institution's implementation of responses to internal or external changes, since both place additional layers of review on major academic or budgetary change. For example, implementation of new programs sometimes was delayed by slow action on the part of the MSUS Board of Trustees and the requirement that new programs also be approved by the legislatively-appointed Higher Education Coordinating Board. Some of the mandates and processes have changed since MnSCU was created, but the institution has been, and will continue to be, subject to a number of constraints that hamper quick response to changing circumstances.

Prior to 1994 any coordinated institutional planning that did take place was undertaken by the President's Cabinet. However, this process was not open to the university community, nor were its deliberations, processes, or decisions reported to the entire university community. In short, most constituencies were effectively non-participants in planning. Planning was essentially left to each of the four vice presidents: academic affairs, student affairs, public affairs, and administrative affairs; the first two undertook the beginnings of sound planning practices, while the latter two failed to engage in significant processes prior to 1994. While there are now planning processes that cross divisions, much planning continues to take place within the divisions. The past and current efforts undertaken in each of the four divisions are described in the following sections.

Academic Affairs Planning Activities

Direct responsibility for academic planning, including the coordination of planning by departments and programs, belongs to the Academic Affairs Council (AAC), comprised of divisional deans and the Associate Academic Vice President and chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The AAC meets weekly but undertakes its most significant academic planning for the institution at an annual summer retreat.

The foundation of academic planning is a five-year planning cycle with annual updates. Academic Affairs employs a five-year program review cycle for all departments and programs, consistent with a mandate outlined in an MSUS Chancellor's Procedure of 1988.

(The five-year review guidelines include the Chancellor's process as an appendix. Guidelines for both five-year reviews and departmental annual progress reports are in GD-94.) During its five-year review, each program conducts a self-study, sets five-year goals, and brings in an external consultant to evaluate the program and its goals. Each department subsequently sets annual goals consistent with the five-year goals; then documents progress toward one- and five-year goals in the annual progress report.

Academic Affairs frequently uses task forces and ad hoc planning groups to explore ways to improve educational effectiveness and to respond to changing instructional needs. Employing representation from appropriate constituencies, these groups have played an important role on campus. Examples of several task forces are described below.

Committee on Committees

Many important operations of the institution have been guided by standing committees, as described in Chapter III. Faculty play a major role on each of these committees. In the fall of 1992, an ad hoc committee was formed to evaluate the charge and workload of each University committee. A major initiative was to have each standing committee evaluate and suggest changes in its own membership and direction. As a result, several committees with modest workloads were merged, and there were numerous changes in the organization of other committees. The report of the Committee on Committees can be found in the "committee" file (GD-90).

Task Force on Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century

Working to preserve and strengthen the institution's reputation for excellence in teacher preparation programs, MSU reviewed current teacher education standards, such as those proposed by the Holmes Group, reports such as A Nation at Risk, and research literature. The task force issued a report (see GD-1) that included 16 recommendations, nine of which were curricular in nature. As a result of this task force's work, several significant changes have been made in Moorhead State's undergraduate teacher education core. Some core courses (e.g., Philosophy of Education and Multicultural Education) are now taught by faculty in humanities departments rather than by education faculty. Field experiences have been expanded, and a senior seminar has been added as a capstone experience. The Division of Education and Human Services prepares a yearly update of its progress in responding to the task force recommendations.

Q-7 (Building on Quality Initiatives) Task Force

As described in Chapter I of this self-study, the MSUS Board of Directors formed a Blue Ribbon Commission on Access and Quality in 1990. An institutional task force was created to respond to the Q-7 initiatives, and it proposed that Moorhead State give special emphasis to the area of higher order thinking. Mini-grants were awarded to faculty with projects related to the Q-7 indicators.

Q-7 funds have provided a major budgetary supplement to the University, allowing for a number of trial projects, such as a three-year trial of an integrative core curricular program within the Liberal Studies program, the creation of capstone courses in majors, development and staffing of the First Year Experience course, staffing for the Volunteer Visions program, staffing of the supplemental instruction program, and a new faculty position in Earth Science. Q-7 funds also were used during 1995-96 and 1996-97 to fund several consultants who helped the education faculty redesign the teacher education curriculum. (Q-7 reports are available in GD-3).

Assessment Task Force

Formed in 1991, this group developed an institutional plan for Assessment of Student Learning that was submitted to, and approved by, the North Central Association (GD-6). The task force also recommended the creation of the assessment coordinator position and two new standing committees: Liberal Studies Assessment and Institutional Assessment. (These were described in Chapter IV.)

Academic Planning Task Force

Also established in 1991, the Academic Planning Task Force was comprised of faculty and chaired by the Dean of Business and Industry. The task force was charged with developing a process for academic planning. The group studied the topic of strategic planning, worked with an external consultant, and conducted a series of "field tests" to identify the institution's equipment needs. The work of the task force lapsed when its chair retired from the University.

Strategic planning was revived by President Barden when he took office. In fall 1994, he appointed a Budgeting and Planning Task Force which was divided into two subcommittees. The Budgeting Subcommittee piloted a collaborative budget process, while the Planning Subcommittee proposed a planning process for MSU. Both of these subcommittees have taken the appropriate steps to become regular standing committees of the University. As discussed in a later section of this chapter, the Strategic Planning Committee and Strategic Budgeting Committee will play major roles in the institution's future strategic planning.

Steering Committee for the Bush Grant for Faculty Development

The MSUS received two three-year rounds of grants from the Bush Foundation; the second round expired in 1995. The goals of the system-wide grant were to improve general education, critical thinking, and cultural diversity with an emphasis on professional development through classroom assessment. During the six year grant period, MSU received over \$100,000 as its share of the Bush Grants. Use of the local Bush Grant was overseen by a local steering committee.

Competitive mini-grants were also available from the state-wide Bush Grants in amounts of \$500-\$1,000 for individual faculty. Moorhead State faculty received 34 of the 126 grants (27%) awarded. The Bush Grants directly affected at least an additional 123 individuals at the institution--including some administrators and non-instructional staff--through their involvement in presentations, teaching conferences, and other structured activities (see GD-30).

Semester Conversion Committee

A task force with broad representation from diverse constituencies, the Semester Conversion Committee was directed by Academic Affairs. Despite the complexity of the process and of many of the issues faced, the semester conversion process took place in the relatively short period from December, 1993, to late August, 1995. The rapid but successful conversion to semesters provides strong evidence that the institution can adapt as necessary to changing situations. As a result, Moorhead State faculty and staff are now serving as expert consultants to other institutions undertaking conversion to semesters, particularly those within the newly merged Minnesota system. (Semester conversion is discussed more fully in Chapter VI. Documents related to conversion are available in GD-115.)

Analysis of Academic Planning Activities

For most of the past decade, Academic Affairs has engaged in continuous, ongoing planning. This division has provided institutional leadership in developing processes and initiatives through which the institution can anticipate changing circumstances and plan for future excellence. However, two weaknesses of the academic planning process should be noted.

First, very few departments show evidence that their planning efforts or budget requests are directly connected to their ongoing planning processes or assessment measures. Most departments engage in goal-setting and assessment, yet an analysis of the 1994-95 departmental annual progress reports, found that none of the academic departments cited their own assessment measures as justification for proposed changes. The majority of departments use the five-year self-study and annual report processes as forums for requesting increases in personnel and departmental budgets. Although departments may be taking steps to improve their educational effectiveness, these steps are not tied to ongoing assessment measures or to other means of documenting deficiencies or opportunities.

A second weakness is that departments plan autonomously; there has been very little coordination within divisions or with the University's actual resources. Again, the result is that departments engage in self-promotion but relatively little self-criticism. As a consequence, the departmental information available to deans and to the Vice President for Academic Affairs is not entirely reliable for institutional planning. If there is a recommendation to be made in the area of Academic Affairs, it is to better coordinate planning with assessment and budgeting and to better coordinate planning across departments and divisions. The Academic Vice President has taken steps to address this problem by

decentralizing authority to the deans, adding a divisional meeting each semester to the university calendar, and restructuring the AAC summer planning session.

Student Affairs Planning

Student Affairs directors have been meeting regularly and planning as a division since the mid 1970s. Through the 1980s and 1990s a number of recommendations made by this group were forwarded to the Cabinet, and several were ultimately approved by the President. The Division also adopted a system of formal annual reports from directors and updated its Five Year Strategic Plan in 1991 (GD-98). The plan identified emerging trends and challenges, set seven basic divisional goals, reported mission statements for each of its seven offices, and provided analyses and recommendations.

As a result of these planning efforts, two successive vice presidents recommended several changes in the Division's structure and services, which were approved by the President. For example, staff were added to help meet diversity goals of the University; the Counseling Center mission was modified to focus more on student support services, rather than simply on traditional counseling functions; the student development and student union staffs were reorganized; the student union staff developed the Emerging Leadership Program (an 18-week course that teaches leadership skills to freshmen and encourages them to become involved in University organizations); and a Title IX Committee was formed to evaluate compliance status and anticipate changes required in our athletic program. (Several of these activities are described elsewhere in the self-study.)

Fortunately, the Division's clarification of its processes placed it in a position to respond to new institutional priorities set by President Barden at the end of his first year as president (AY94-95). Student Affairs quickly revised its own goals and forwarded modifications of its strategic plan, with modified goals, in fall 1995 (GD-99).

The Division's modifications were largely in response to the reports of the Noel-Levitz Centers (GD 32 and 33). The reports concentrated on MSU's efforts in marketing, recruiting, and admissions, and compared the institution with other four-year public institutions. Noel-Levitz provided an accurate, objective environmental scan and the comparative information necessary for strategic planning. The Noel-Levitz consultation was part of the institution's focus on recruitment and retention as major strategic initiatives. The following section describes the institution's planning efforts in these strategic areas.

The Enrollment Management Committee

The Enrollment Management Task Force was formed in the fall of 1992 to address the University's high enrollments of the preceding years. The goal of the task force was to discuss the problem of the increasing size of the student body and its effect on the institution at large. Due to a myriad of internal and external circumstances, that problem solved itself, and the opposite problem of decreasing trends in enrollment became the focus of Enrollment

Management. (The ups and downs in enrollment figures are described in Chapters I and III of this document.)

The Task Force met on an irregular basis during its first year. It was given status as a formal committee and began meeting biweekly in 1993-94. Committee membership was drawn primarily from Student Affairs staff but also included students, faculty, and representatives of other divisions.

The committee's focus was initially on bringing the declining enrollment trends to the attention of the university community as a whole and, in particular, to the attention of the faculty, who were perceived as being more aware of discipline-specific matters than of problems in the recruitment and retention of students. In addition to "raising the consciousness" of the university community, the Enrollment Management Committee recommended hiring an external consulting firm to address major issues and divided itself into several working groups to address some of the smaller problems. These two responses are described below. Also described are some of the committee's efforts to improve the freshmen to sophomore retention rate.

External Consultants. In the spring of 1995, MSU contracted with the Noel-Levitz Centers to analyze enrollment problems, recommend solutions to those problems, and provide technical expertise in the implementation of solution strategies. Consultants from Noel-Levitz recommended the administration of the Student Satisfaction Inventory (it was completed by more than 500 students); conducted extensive interviews with various groups of students, faculty, staff, and administrators; and examined the university's printed materials and admissions office procedures. (The Noel-Levitz reports are in documents GD-29, -32, and -33.)

Noel-Levitz concentrated its recommendations and technical assistance in two areas: positioning for recruitment (marketing) and Admissions Office procedures. A marketing slogan (MSU: Your connection to a lifetime of success) was agreed upon, and all publications used to recruit new students were to carry this theme. The Viewbook (GD-72) was extensively revised in keeping with the Noel-Levitz suggestions. However, some of the Publication Office's other marketing efforts have not stayed with this theme, which has caused frustration within the Student Affairs Division and the Enrollment Management Committee.

A major new computer system was designed for use in the Admissions Office as a result of Noel-Levitz suggestions. The software allows for tracking the status of all potential recruits and is linked to an extensive telecounseling program, which helps monitor continuing contacts with potential new students. A Noel-Levitz consultant worked closely with Admissions Office staff during the summer and fall of 1995 to analyze office procedures, implement new procedures, and ensure that the computer software was designed to produce the desired results.

Working-Group Projects. During budget reduction planning of 1994-95, President Barden solicited input from the campus community on identification of problem areas and suggestions for addressing budget problems. Many of these suggestions were related to the recruitment and retention of students and were given to the Enrollment Management Committee. The committee categorized these suggestions and formed several subgroups to focus on specific areas that could affect recruitment and retention. In addition to Enrollment Management Committee members, other faculty, staff, and students were included in these subgroups as appropriate to the mission of the subgroup. While many of these subgroups engaged in planning and problem solution, the work of one subgroup is highlighted here, as an example.

Registration Subcommittee. Students had long complained about registration for classes at Moorhead State, and, in fact, the Noel-Levitz report identified dissatisfaction with registration as a major concern of students (see Table 20, Chapter IV). Informal information suggested that the University had developed a reputation as an institution with problems of access to classes. Prior to forming the subgroup on registration, discussions were held between Enrollment Management Committee members and the Registrar. He suggested that access to high demand classes was perceived to be the biggest "registration" problem. For example, some freshman-level classes were typically available only to juniors and seniors, who register before sophomores and freshmen. One department had students beginning to line up for registration permits in the early morning hours of the first day permits were available.

The Registrar identified several departments with perennial problems of course access. The chairs of these departments were invited to be members of the Registration Subcommittee. The group was charged to identify problems and develop ways to solve those problems. The group met twice. During the first meeting, the issues to be addressed were outlined, and the participants were asked to suggest specific ways of solving those. Most of the department chairs in attendance returned to their departments and implemented the changes necessary for addressing concerns specific to their courses. These solutions were shared at the second meeting, and the work of the subgroup was declared to be finished. The following were among the solutions implemented:

1. Some departments increased the number of seats available in each class. Some decided to open only a few seats each day of registration so that space would still be available during freshman registration days. Other departments readjusted teaching assignments to make more sections of popular courses available. One department decided to hold one or two sections of a popular liberal studies course for freshman-only registration.
2. A "problem-solvers" table was added to the ballroom during registration. Deans, the Associate Academic Vice President, and faculty volunteers work at the table and help to solve registration problems on site. These problem solvers call departments to arrange for class access, suggest alternative courses for students to take, maintain waiting lists for popular classes, provide lists of classes which still have space, and listen to the

complaints and concerns of frustrated students. Those who work at the table have an improved understanding of the problems that students encounter and, as a result, have encouraged departments to find ways of being more responsive to student needs. For example, in 1996 deans required departments to re-examine policies regarding use of class registration permits and to provide the dean with a justification for any permit requirements remaining in effect.

3. President Barden has targeted class access and registration as one of the areas for study and planning. He appointed a quality circle team to address the problem. Their work is ongoing.

Retention Efforts Aimed at New Freshmen. In recent years our retention rates for both new entering freshmen and transfer students have decreased. The Noel-Levitz investigations, the NCA focus group results, and informal student feedback suggest that Moorhead State needs to be a responsive institution for students. One of the challenges cited by Noel-Levitz (GD-33) was an apparent discrepancy between faculty expectations for academic performance and student preparation.

The University has addressed the problems of attrition and student under-preparation in a variety of ways. In order to more clearly express our purposes and orient students to college life, a First Year Experience (FYE) was initiated in 1995. It enrolled 200 freshmen in a course that combines academic preparation, self realization, and campus orientation. The program was evaluated and modified and enrolled 325 new freshmen in the fall of 1996.

The New Student Orientation committee totally revised its programs in 1996. For the first time, the 1996 summer advising and registration program (Dragon Days) emphasized academic expectations. The 1996 fall New Student Orientation carried forward the themes of faculty expectations and academic demands while providing the traditional opportunities to meet other new students and become acquainted with the campus. Early indications are that freshmen to sophomore retention is better this year (AY96-97) than it has been in the recent past. Of the freshmen who first enrolled in 1994, 62% returned for a second year. The freshmen to sophomore return rate for 1995 new entering students was 68%.

Summary of Enrollment Management Activities. While the institution was slow to recognize and plan for enrollment declines, this section illustrates that the institution is able to engage in effective short-range planning when a crisis is identified. The University is now better positioned to look at enrollment trends and identify potential problems prior to their becoming crisis situations.

Public Affairs Planning

The Division of Public Affairs, which was formally dissolved as of July 1995, did not have a regular, organized planning process. However, several offices within the division engaged in ongoing planning. The MSU Foundation completed a long-range plan in October 1992 (GD-

100). Among other conclusions, the Foundation recognized the need to develop an institutional marketing plan that responds to a consistent, ongoing measurement survey of important constituencies.

Scholarships, Publications, and the Alumni Association engaged in departmental planning, but there was no effort to coordinate their planning as a Division. A market research study (see GD-120) was completed in 1988-89. It became the basis for some planning and decision making within this Division, as well as by some of the Student Affairs offices.

As a part of the recent institutional downsizing, the Division was dissolved with slightly more than one year's notice. During the transitional year of 1994-95, then-Vice President Robert Badal conducted a series of meetings within the Division to determine appropriate reassignment of resources and duties. The result was that most areas of Public Affairs reported directly to the President during AY95-96, and directors met together weekly with the President. However, this arrangement was not satisfactory, and additional reorganization took place during 1996.

The most significant immediate change was the decision to merge the Alumni Association and the MSU Foundation, a change that was approved by the two external advisory boards in August 1996. A new executive vice president was named, and the offices of Alumni Affairs and Development were merged into the Alumni and Foundation Office. (Other offices within the old Public Affairs Division have been re-assigned to other vice presidents.) This reorganization of the advancement area was first discussed in the 1970s. The idea was revived by President Barden after consultation with key personnel within the Division and the boards of the two organizations.

Administrative Affairs Planning

While the President is ultimately responsible for the use of university resources and the expenditure of all funds, the Vice President for Administrative Affairs is responsible for ensuing proper use of resources and preparing university budgets. The Vice President prepares annual budgets and multi-year revenue and expenditure forecasts as planning tools for the commitment of personnel and non-salary resources.

Budget Planning Processes

The Vice President's planning activities were relatively static in the period following the 1986 Institutional Self-Study. The Vice President personally evaluated proposals for internal allocations of non-salary resources. Hearings were held to discuss proposed budgets, but the policy on budget planning did not seek consensus on any allocation or budget. No official minutes were kept for budget planning. With little oversight from any state entities, no comprehensive or long-range planning was conducted. Personnel costs comprise the lion's share of the budget; insofar as there was limited integration of personnel decisions with

budget planning, the Vice President's de facto role was largely one of adjusting supply and equipment budgets to fit state allocations where they differed from projections.

Since the state allocation is derived from credit-hour production, Moorhead State's recent enrollment instability led to sharp reductions in revenue beginning in FY95. While student numbers had been falling for several years, changes in state funding allocations were made on a two-year delay cycle, such that the real impact of enrollment declines were not clear to the institution until late 1994. In the absence of strategic planning procedures involving Administrative Affairs, President Barden delegated considerable budgetary authority across the vice presidents and developed a plan to accommodate the financial realities. The administration was able to respond effectively to a serious budgetary crisis and is developing a more sensitive model of budgetary forecasts.

An important step in addressing the institution's financial stability was the report of Dr. Thomas K. Anderes, a financial consultant whom President Barden brought to campus during the summer of 1994. Anderes's report, "Review of the Moorhead State University Budget Process: Planning, Development, Control and Evaluation" (GD-48), provided an independent assessment of the budget environment as it existed in 1994. As a consequence, Moorhead State is now working to integrate budgeting with strategic planning and to coordinate fiscal and non-fiscal decision-making.

Facilities Planning

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, as our student numbers were increasing steadily, a number of major building and renovation projects were undertaken. In its oversight of the institution's physical plant, Administrative Affairs engaged in long-range planning that led to expansion of the campus, the addition of badly-needed parking spaces, the addition of the first new classroom building in two decades, and the creation of the Regional Science Center. A major library addition was completed, and important renovations took place in the student union, health center, and several academic facilities.

However, there was generally poor integration of this facility planning with the planning processes of the other divisions. Once established, plans were often modified without consultation with the other vice presidents, and the products of the process often deviated significantly from the plans themselves. Finally, planning in this area is routinely frustrated by unreliable funding from the state legislature. For example, one of the most significant issues identified in 1972 was the University's need to expand land for parking and facilities. Initial funding for this expansion was not approved by the legislature until 1990, and sufficient funding to complete the project still remains to be allocated.

Planning for land acquisition and its subsequent utilization followed an extensive review process, which solicited input from a wide variety of affected groups (GD-84). The result has been the acquisition of five blocks of property adjacent to the north and west of the existing

campus. In 1995, the new Center for Business building, which had been constructed on the expansion land site, opened.

Parking facilities for employees and commuting students have been developed as land has been acquired and structures removed. However, these lots cannot be paved until a new campus surface water drainage system is installed; state funds were allocated for the drainage system in 1996-97. While the funds necessary to buy all remaining properties in the expansion area were allocated for FY97, the funds needed to remove the structures were not provided. The land acquisition will satisfy the institution's basic space needs for the foreseeable future, but the piecemeal nature of state funding makes planning and execution of a coherent land-use plan very difficult.

Moorhead State currently has a five-year Strategic Capital Plan that will take the institution to 2001 (GD-84). The current plan reflects a reconsideration of a plan adopted for 1994-1999. Earlier plans for a new music building and an expansion of the Center for Business have been eliminated. The plan will be updated every two years. Current emphasis is on rehabilitating, reconfiguring, and improving existing facilities instead of constructing new facilities. Development priorities are updating and improving existing academic spaces; adding additional "distance education" capability; improving athletic and parking facilities; increasing building accessibility for persons with disabilities; and updating utilities, equipment, and infrastructure.

Current Planning Practices and Decision Making Processes

The preceding sections of this chapter have established a context for discussing the current status of planning on the MSU campus. Prior to beginning that discussion, however, the reader is reminded of several relevant issues cited by the 1986 review panel. In its Report of a Visit to Moorhead State University (GD-12), the NCA Evaluation Team made several observations concerning decision-making processes at MSU. Commenting on the administrative structure of the University, the team noted two central points: first, that senior administrators (that is, decision-makers), including the president, had held top positions at the University for over 20 years, which inevitably would lead to "major turnover at the top" within a short span of time; and second, that at the deans level, "all but one [of the deans] have offices in the immediate vicinity of the Vice President" for Academic Affairs. This "contributes to coordinated institutional initiatives" but also "isolates the deans from the departments and units for which they are responsible" (pp. 5-6). In analyzing the University's governance structure, including the growing "faculty participation in governance" through the IFO, the team cited further instances of centralized decision-making within the administration, but they noted that these were somewhat ameliorated by "excellent" faculty-administration relations. High morale was especially cited (pp. 21-22).

These background factors--a traditionally centralized administrative structure made up of long-serving individuals, leavened by good relations between the unions and the administration--must be kept in mind when discussing the current flux in decision-making at

MSU, for the decision-making processes at MSU are indeed in flux at this time. The situation is summarized in this section.

Decentralization

Almost immediately upon assuming the presidency of MSU, Dr. Barden decentralized budget and decision-making authority to his vice presidents. They have, to varying degrees, decentralized their authority as well. Perhaps the most notable progress toward decentralization has occurred within Academic Affairs at the deans' level. Within the past few years several steps have been taken to broaden the base of inputs for decision-making. Deans, for example, have been relocated to offices in the immediate vicinity of the departments for which they are responsible. Once the total budget is settled, deans also have greater autonomy in the expenditure of their divisions' allocations. In the fall of 1996, the Vice President for Academic Affairs provided the deans with greater autonomy in managing the divisions' personnel budgets as well.

Other examples of decentralization are the recent changes in procedures for awarding of faculty research/creative activity grants and faculty improvement grants. Previously, faculty seeking funds in these categories submitted a proposal to the divisional dean, who forwarded it to the university's Grants Committee, chaired by the grants coordinator. Prioritized recommendations were forwarded through AAC to the grants officer or the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and finally to the President. Under the new arrangement, each division is allocated a proportional share of total funds, and applications are submitted directly to a divisional peer review committee, with members selected from each department within the division. This committee, with the dean as an ex-officio member, forwards the applications, with a recommendation, to the dean and then to the Vice President who makes final funding decisions. (GD-102 contains relevant materials.)

A significant trial step toward decentralization in budgetary prioritization took place in AY94-95, with a pilot Collaborative Equipment Request project. A modest sum of \$60,000 was set aside for the project, institutional priorities were drafted by the Strategic Planning Committee, a process was defined, and the Strategic Budgeting Committee prioritized and ultimately recommended three requests for full funding. Requests that met the institutional priorities but that were not funded were retained and reconsidered during AY95-96 when a larger pool of funds was available. The pilot project will serve as the basis for future allocation procedures for re-allocated or new funds.

Formalizing Strategic Planning and Budgeting

During spring semester 1996, President Barden moved to formalize the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committees. The two committees are designed to work together while retaining independent charges, and both are advisory committees reporting directly to the president.

The Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, reviews strategic issues deemed critical to the university's mission. The committee will collect and analyze relevant data each year, seek input from the campus community, prepare a broad plan during spring semester noting the institution's current situation and projecting changes up to five years, and recommend a limited set of strategic goals to the President in late April of each year. After consultation with key decision makers, the President will determine which initiatives will guide the development of the next university budget. Departments will know the new target areas when preparing their department annual progress reports in the fall semester.

The Strategic Budget Committee will follow a procedure similar to the one developed in the Collaborative Budget Request trials and will solicit proposals to address the strategic initiatives. The Strategic Budget Committee, chaired by the Vice President for Administrative Affairs, will make prioritized recommendations to the President, consistent with the priority initiatives, in time for the initial budget proposal to MnSCU in March. In AY96-97, this committee will take on the additional charge of assessing the effectiveness of budget changes that arose in the previous year's cycle.

Increased Information for Decisions

Informed decision-making has also been a concern at MSU recently. The Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committees were established to review strategic issues deemed critical to the university's mission, to recommend a set of priority initiatives to the President, and to guide development of a portion of the institution's budget.

Changes in the state's overall higher-education-budget process, through MnSCU, coupled with the significant decrease in enrollment at MSU in the last two years, have made it imperative for the University to rely on more detailed information when making decisions regarding expenditures and student retention. Several initiatives have been taken to obtain the necessary information. The Institutional Assessment Committee and the Institutional Research Office are working together to coordinate the collection of data and to more effectively disseminate data as an aid in planning and decision-making.

The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs drafted guidelines for five-year reviews and departmental annual progress reports that link strategic planning, assessment, and program review. The guidelines were approved and implemented in 1995 (GD-94). The deans and the Academic Vice President are charged with monitoring departmental progress in integrating assessment and planning and with seeing that departmental planning efforts are linked through divisions and to the university processes.

Analysis of Current Practices

It is clear from this selective review that institutional planning and decision making at MSU are currently undergoing major changes. A number of strategies--decentralization, strategic

planning and budgeting, and effective use of data--have been implemented to address the following recommendations of Dr. Anderes (GD-48):

- "The University should move toward decentralization of its budget planning, development, and control process (including supplemental budget approvals)."
- "Administrative policies impacting the university community should be discussed and revised based on user input prior to implementation."
- "Decisions should be made where most appropriate, that is, at the level having necessary management and technical expertise and where impact of the decision is greatest."

At all levels of the administrative structure, there has been a noteworthy commitment to increase both the sources and volume of information that go into the decision-making process. Ultimately, the test of these changes will rest on the institution's major goal of enrollment stabilization and, with it, funding stability. In September 1995, the President set new institutional priorities, the foremost of which was to improve recruitment and retention, stabilizing enrollment at about 7,500 students. Enrollment, then, will undoubtedly become the basis for judgments of how successful any of our strategic initiatives have been.

The primary recommendation of this chapter of the self-study is that the institution continue to expand its current efforts to implement strategic planning and budgeting. Institutional strategic planning will be most effective if it is phased in gradually, integrated with budget decision-making, and linked to existing review, evaluation, and assessment processes.

Mandates that Affect Decisions

While the institution is moving toward better internal decision-making, we remain ever mindful that we are part of a large external system that has a significant impact on our ability to function effectively and plan strategically. The final section of this chapter makes note of some of these external pressures. The formation of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) is so recent that exact effects are still uncertain. However, one significant change is the requirement, effective March 1996, that the institution submit a budget plan each year. It is apparent that MnSCU will expect regular, more effective institutional planning than did the MSUS. Other changes are likely to arise as MnSCU decides how best to deal with the greater number of bargaining units, personnel transfers between schools, and budget allocations; such changes may reduce decision-making powers on individual campuses.

Another influence that is beyond the University's direct control is performance funding, first established by the State Legislature in 1995. These measures, essentially incentives for change at the campus level, are being implemented by the MnSCU office. One example is the Electronic Academy initiative, a plan for expanding student access to technology

education by creating smart classrooms, expanding distance learning through interactive television and other formats, and developing electronic capabilities that will permit students to access virtual libraries, Internet sources, and other new information sources and formats. The legislature has funded this plan, and MnSCU has asked campuses to submit funding proposals. Funding sources, such as this, are controlled by the MnSCU offices and are used to induce individual campuses to effect changes in a variety of areas. Those campuses which are unable or unwilling to change to meet these incentive challenges will be left behind in the funding race.

Other examples could be added because other agencies and programs--including state tuition reciprocity agreements, collective bargaining agreements, and Federal Title IX, ADA, and OSHA guidelines--can impact the University's resources. The point is clear: many matters are beyond the University's immediate control. Such mandates make it necessary for decision-making at MSU to become more flexible and more responsive to changing circumstances. Thus, the University's challenge will be to develop methods to adhere to our basic goals while responding to and anticipating rapidly altering situations.

Conclusions

If this self-study had been written four or five years ago, likely it would have been colored with a false optimism. If it had been written one or two years ago, we would have been aware of the tremendous challenges facing Moorhead State University, and we would have found ourselves, like the Anderes and Noel-Levitz reports, recommending widespread institutional change. Unfortunately, we would not have been in a position to say how the institution would effectively move to meet those challenges.

This year, however, Moorhead State is in the position of having recognized the need for both changes in management style and strategic planning. While we were not prepared for our precipitous enrollment drop of the past five years and concurrent decreases in funding, we effectively marshaled our management resources and took the necessary actions for institutional stabilization. We have put the mechanisms in place to meet the future in planful and strategic ways. While we are looking for new ways of doing business, we have preserved the integrity of our mission. The available evidence strongly favors the conclusion that Moorhead State University has the human, physical, and financial resources for continuing to accomplish its mission. The institution is taking important steps to guarantee that those resources will be used effectively in the future. Our conclusion is that the institution is pursuing the right course. Of course, challenges and opportunities remain.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. The President has established a goal of stabilizing at 7,500 students. However, we have not yet set forth a clear plan for achieving that goal.

2. We will continue to live with a growing number of external constraints--bargaining unit contracts, legislative mandates, funding at levels below those we think we need, MnSCU performance incentives, and others. Our challenge is to utilize a flexible and anticipatory planning system that is responsive to changes beyond our control.
3. Large systems--like universities--are inherently resistant to change and work hard to maintain the status quo. We will have to encourage some employees and students to view the future as an opportunity and not as a threat. For example, our traditional emphasis on the liberal arts creates tensions when comprehensive planning is perceived as a change in mission by some constituencies.
4. Finally, we have had the opportunity in recent years to put a coherent strategic planning program in place. The challenge is to make sure it provides for effective decision making on our campus.