



**Minnesota**  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

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**DRAFT**

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Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to invite you to join all of your MnSCU faculty colleagues to discuss the next steps we should collectively take to ensure an extraordinary education for our students – a goal to which we are all deeply committed.

### **The Strategic Framework for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**

Over the past fall, I worked with our presidents and system leaders to develop the “Strategic Framework for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.” The Framework, endorsed by the Board of Trustees, entails three commitments:

1. Ensure access to an extraordinary education for all Minnesotans.
2. Be the partner of choice to meet Minnesota’s workforce and community needs.
3. Deliver to students, employers, communities, and taxpayers the best value/most affordable option.

### **Faculty Forums**

Projects are beginning on each of these fronts, but it goes without saying that you, our faculty, are core to the framework and to our ability to make good on these three commitments. In particular, ensuring access to an extraordinary education for all Minnesotans depends entirely upon your work. Our faculty must lead this initiative.

As a first step then, I am asking each and every one of you to set aside time during spring 2012 to engage your own department or program in conversations about the future of the educational experience. (Local campus governance structures should be that place where the logistics for the discussions are worked out.) I ask that you discuss several topics you have certainly thought about deeply: What are we doing to help students to realize their full creative potential? What else can every one of our academic programs do to prepare graduates who are stunningly creative and innovative? I ask you to take time to brainstorm or, if you will, dream together about the future. This spring’s discussions are meant to provide an opportunity to begin a dialogue. They are meant as a time to reflect, imagine, and challenge one another about the next steps we should take to

ensure an extraordinary education for all students. I ask that you get the best ideas on the table and identify the steps your department/program will take in the next academic year to move these ideas forward or to build upon current practices.

I haven't been on board long, but I know there are already many great programs across our system. Now is the time to take the bold steps to ensure that *every program is indeed extraordinary*. We must sustain those that are already strong and enhance those programs that require focused attention.

These conversations are critical to the future of our colleges or universities, critical to serving students, and critical to the role we play in advancing the economic vitality of communities across Minnesota. More than ever, Minnesota needs a well-educated, highly skilled and engaged citizenry to grow our economy, lead our communities, and maintain our high quality of life.

### **Challenges Facing Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**

We must act now because the challenges that our colleges and universities face are greater than at any time in their history. We have faced dramatic cuts in state support which have led to substantial tuition increases that cannot be sustained in the future. Our students have become even more diverse and tech-savvy, demanding more flexibility in how and when they learn. The workforce of the future will require graduates with more advanced skills and capacities as well as greater range and depth of knowledge. We face increasing costs of technology, facilities, and competitive compensation. We are working in a much more competitive higher education environment than ever before. Over the years ahead, a greater and greater share of our revenue is going to depend on how well we serve students and meet the needs of our business and community partners.

*In short, we are facing tectonic changes and challenges. These changes are permanent, not short-term fluctuations.*

If we do not meet the challenges in new and decisive ways, our ability to serve students, businesses, and communities across Minnesota will greatly diminish. Quality will most assuredly slide and our colleges, universities, and the state of Minnesota itself will be in great jeopardy.

Faculty and staff across our system have already made tough, painful choices to meet these challenges head on. Simply continuing to find efficiencies and grow revenue is important, but not sufficient. Don't get me wrong, I think there are opportunities to garner new revenue and cut costs—and we are aggressively pursuing them—but we need to do much more.

Rather than prepare for yet another round of tough budget choices, it is time to focus on the steps we can take together to enhance comprehensively the quality of the education that we provide across our system to our students. Please join your colleagues across the state in this endeavor.

## **Thinking Differently**

The challenges we face demand nothing less than a paradigm reset of our academic, financial, and organizational strategies for the future. We need to be willing to *redesign* the ways we do things. Think differently, and be willing to question the ways things are traditionally done. Be courageous. Consider new and maybe even unconventional bold solutions. Design within available resources and focus on outcomes.

## **What do we mean by an extraordinary education?**

An extraordinary education is one that prepares graduates for work, life, and citizenship. It creates graduates who are creative, innovative, and able to respond with agility to new ideas, new technologies, and new global relationships.

An extraordinary education is assessed not by looking at the quality of our incoming students, but by looking at the quality of our graduates: their capacities and skills, the rate at which they pass accreditation exams, secure employment, or are prepared for advanced degree programs. Graduates must have more than the skills needed to begin work; they must have the ability to adapt to the four or more careers that they are likely to have over their lifetimes, including careers that don't even exist today.

*How do we do it?* That's the conversation. Some of the ideas to consider include:

- Rethink the classroom experience and the role of faculty as facilitators of learning.
- Infuse learning with project-based, or problem-based, active learning.
- Bring learning closer to the world of practice and in deeper partnership with employers.
- Develop thoughtful measures of learning outcomes and deliver programs that enable graduates to meet those standards.
- Increase collaboration among faculty across our colleges and universities to create the best possible learning experiences that can be shared across the system.
- Redesign our use of technology in both purely online and blended courses to produce the highest quality learning experiences that can be shared across the system to serve more students, better, and more cost-effectively.
- Develop regional academic plans that will meet workforce needs and enrollment demand, but reduce unnecessary duplication and use existing infrastructure more efficiently.

These are just a few ideas to get the conversation started. You and your colleagues will undoubtedly have many more ideas as the discussion unfolds.

## **Conversation and Then What?**

There is always a fair amount of skepticism about these kinds of discussions. Will the discussion lead to anything? Beyond the rhetoric, will there ever be resources to invest in good ideas? Some ideas that surface will not require new resources, just new ways of doing things. Some ideas will

generate new resources because they will make our programs stronger and more competitive. Some ideas will be bold and inspiring and will enable us to garner new public and private support. Some ideas can be seeded with one-time funds available at the campus level. In short, I am very optimistic that powerful ideas will get traction over the months and years ahead.

I will ask each department/program to share at the end of the semester a brief summary of its discussion and brief descriptions of the projects planned for 2012-13. I want to make visible the powerful and imaginative work that you are doing. I want every college and university to be known for the talent and commitment of its faculty and the extraordinary education the faculty deliver to our students.

There is no doubt in my mind that we can provide an extraordinary education—the best education available in our state and in the nation. Indeed, many of you already deliver an extraordinary education, and now we need to ensure that every aspect of our learning enterprise is extraordinary. I am completely confident that our faculty can make this goal a reality. Your passion and commitment to students is unparalleled.

The challenges are daunting, and the landscape of higher education is changing. We can really only be sure that higher education will be different—perhaps dramatically different—in the years ahead. It is true that many of the challenges we are facing are outside of our direct control, and it might be tempting to let events unfold and deal with things as they come. After all, we've been through a lot already.

But there is another possibility. The one thing we cherish most and which only we can reimagine is the education we provide our students. This experience is at the heart of what we do, and it is the energy behind the transformational power of learning in the lives of our students.

Thank you for participating in the faculty forums. I look forward to being inspired by ideas that will surface.

Best wishes,

Steven

c: College and University Presidents  
Chief Academic Officers



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## **Strategic Framework for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**

**Minnesota State Colleges and Universities play an essential role in growing Minnesota's economy and opening the doors of educational opportunity to all Minnesotans. To that end, we will:**

### **1. Ensure access to an extraordinary education for all Minnesotans**

- Our faculty and staff will provide the best education available in Minnesota, preparing graduates to lead in every sector of Minnesota's economy.
- We will continue to be the place of opportunity, making education accessible to all Minnesotans who seek a college, technical or university education; those who want to update their skills; and those who need to prepare for new careers.

### **2. Be the partner of choice to meet Minnesota's workforce and community needs**

- Our colleges and universities will be the partner of choice for businesses and communities across Minnesota to help them solve real-world problems and keep Minnesotans at the leading edge of their professions.
- Our faculty and staff will enable Minnesota to meet its need for a substantially better educated workforce by increasing the number of Minnesotans who complete certificates, diplomas and degrees.

### **3. Deliver to students, employers, communities and taxpayers the highest value / most affordable option**

- Our colleges and universities will deliver the highest value to students, employers, communities and taxpayers.
- We will be the highest value / most affordable higher education option.

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