

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

**CHAPTER FIVE
PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND GOVERNING
A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Strengths:

1. The University's participatory strategic planning process relates clearly to the mission and goals, establishes priorities for resource allocation, and supports efficient management of human, physical, and fiscal resources.
2. Strategic planning takes into account the University's role in and relationship to the system's mission, goals, and planning processes.
3. Surveys of faculty, staff, and administration show confidence in and support of the new administration.
4. The University's organizational structure has stabilized and is suited to the size and nature of the institution.

Recommendations:

1. Strategic planning should continue to be an integral and ongoing part of the University's operations.
2. Cooperation among administration, faculty, staff, and students is essential to the University's future progress.

**CHAPTER SIX
ORGANIZING HUMAN RESOURCES
FOR AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Strengths:

1. Assessment of procedures used by the Office of Human Resources has been helpful in developing appropriate personnel-related procedures on campus.
2. The University integrates faculty evaluation and assessment of student learning practices to provide evidence that faculty are achieving their goals, fulfilling the mission of the University and individual departments, and involved in assessment in their primary work assignments.
3. Job satisfaction and employee morale are rated highly in employee surveys distributed during the self-study process.
4. Committed and resourceful staff rallied after the disastrous January 2002 fire to minimize negative effects on student services.
5. The mentor program and other admission-related programs have established stronger connections between academic areas and recruiting practices.
6. Online payment services are an improvement of service to students.
7. Campus facilities and academic programs and services are accessible to students with disabilities.
8. Wiring of the residence halls for Internet service is advantageous for students living on campus, who can access the Library from the residence halls and use their computers in their rooms.
9. With current student life and residence hall personnel, cooperation with academic areas has improved significantly.
10. The University Community Expectations Program deals more quickly with code of conduct issues since procedural changes were implemented.
11. Assessment practices are common among student service areas and provide impetus for improvement of services.

Concerns:

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

1. Early closing of the Business Services area is inconvenient for students needing cashier service; however, changing the hours is made difficult by demands of the accounting system.
2. The complexities of the ISRS still cause problems and create extra work for student service and student records offices.
3. Retention rates are below national averages for similar institutions.

Recommendations:

1. The University should continue efforts to attract and retain a diverse faculty and staff as well as a diverse student population.
2. Retention planning and programming should remain a priority, with a goal of reaching the national average or higher.
3. Integration of student services and Library services should be encouraged and expanded wherever possible.
4. Consideration should be given to the UCEP coordinator's recommendation that mental health services be brought into the process when mental health is involved.
5. The University should consider distributing parent surveys on a regular basis.

**CHAPTER SEVEN
ORGANIZING PHYSICAL RESOURCES
FOR THE LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Strengths:

1. With well thought out planning, the new student center complex presents opportunities for enhancing the campus atmosphere for students as well as for the public.
2. The remodeled Library facility will be more accessible and welcoming to students and the public.
3. The Library's liaison efforts with departments have been visible and successful in coordinating student use and understanding of Library resources and access.
4. The computer leasing program has made more up-to-date computer resources available to students, faculty, and staff.
5. Learning Resources is a valuable asset to the University, with services appropriate for the student population.
6. Funding of the instructional technology initiative will provide several additional smart classrooms.
7. SHOT partially fulfills the need for telecommunication and technology training for faculty and staff.
8. The Center for rural and Regional Studies is highly visible in the region and contributes to the region's understanding and perception of its history, achievements, and environment.
9. The Office of Research and Institutional Grants provides the campus community with valuable data and information for use in planning and assessment.
10. Contracting with Barnes and Noble College Stores will benefit both students and the community.
11. Moving Business Services, Financial Aid, and Registration and Records to a common location after the fire has made services easier for students to access and for prospective students to visit.
12. Addition of a female counselor has been advantageous to students.

Concerns:

1. The physical appearance of the campus, which is important to students, parents, and campus morale, has deteriorated after previous budget and personnel cuts.
2. Complexities of the ISRS have created extra work for student service and records offices.
3. Valuable historical materials are being lost to history without adequately maintained archives.

Recommendations:

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

1. Campus beautification and maintenance of the physical appearance of the campus should be a priority.
2. The University should continue to improve signage around the campus for the convenience of visitors and persons attending campus events.
3. The Library's acquisitions budget should be maintained at the highest level possible.
4. Additional means should be developed to provide technology-related training for faculty and staff.
5. Student and parent concerns about effective advisement should be further investigated to identify and address issues.

CHAPTER EIGHT
ORGANIZING FISCAL RESOURCES
IN SUPPORT OF AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Strengths:

1. Growth in enrollment at both undergraduate and graduate levels has provided increased funding and greater financial stability in recent years.
2. The president's approach to the budget crisis has been straightforward and informative, has increased confidence that the University will withstand budget constraints, and has avoided the stress and fear generated by previous budget crises.
3. The August 2003 appointment of the permanent vice president for Advancement will strengthen the University's fundraising efforts and ability to plan its financial future.
4. The externally funded Executive in Residence program provides a valuable link to the business and government community.
5. Audits show that the University manages its fiscal resources effectively and within accepted practice.

Concerns:

1. The state's budget crisis and permanent cuts in higher education funding will continue to have significant effects on resources of the University.
2. Decreases in percentages of the state's general fund balance appropriated for higher education are likely to continue, with corresponding increases in tuition and fees needed to compensate partially.
3. Changes in the system's allocation formula, over which the University has little influence, often affect the University negatively and make effective budget planning difficult.
4. Department/program budgets have not been maintained adequately through internal budget processes.

Recommendations:

1. Budget processes should be reviewed and made more accessible to faculty and staff, with budget information more widely available.
2. Review of department/program budgets should occur during budget processes.
3. Exploration of alternative funding sources should be continued and expanded.

CHAPTER NINE
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS

Strengths:

1. The University's degrees and major programs are designed for and suited to the region and the state.

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

2. The Liberal Arts Curriculum supports the mission along with the University's tradition of a broad-based curriculum and the University's own unique character and location.

3. A program review cycle has been reinstated for all departments, with a full cycle to be completed in 2007-08.

4. Graduate programs have expanded since the last NCA visit, increased dramatically in enrollment, and provided valuable service to the region.

5. The Challenge program, 2 + 2 programs, and other cooperative arrangements demonstrate the University's commitment to partnerships with other institutions and the community.

6. Senior College has proven to be an attractive feature for senior citizens in the region as part of the University's outreach programs in the region.

7. The Global Studies program is the University's first success story in quality initiatives and assessment.

Concerns:

1. The current department structure resulted largely from budget constraints rather than from affinities of academic areas.

2. Discontinuation of cooperative programs with the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, as a consequence of state budget cuts will negatively affect collaboration efforts.

3. A higher level of assessment of the Challenge program itself should be planned and implemented.

Recommendations:

1. Other creative solutions for the drawbacks of loose collections of programs in a single department should be sought.

2. The University should continue exploring ways to fund and offer its own degree program in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, since the program is ideally suited to the region given the presence of the Schwan Food Company

3. The University should continue to look for connections with other institutions and should pursue other avenues for collaborative programming.

**CHAPTER TEN
ASSESSMENT: STRUCTURE, PRACTICES,
AND STUDENT LEARNING**

Strengths:

1. Faculty and staff are aware of and involved in assessment activities in departments, programs, and units.

2. Assessment practices are robust and continuous across the campus, with varying techniques and instruments tailored to disciplines and programs.

3. Assessment practices continue to support effective teaching and learning and lead to significant and productive changes in classes, courses, and curricula.

4. The redesigned Professional Development and Service Network will be available to provide in-house assistance and expertise on assessment and service learning.

5. Development of capstone courses is a consistent practice throughout the University, arising from the Q-7 initiative begun by the Minnesota State University System over ten years ago.

6. Every academic department is deeply involved in service to students and the community.

7. Faculty in many departments actively involve students in competitive activities such as preparing for and presenting at professional meetings related to subject matter areas.

Concerns:

1. The robust and effective assessment climate must be sustained in the future.

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

2. Distribution and use of the “Datum” publication and other institutional data has not been as productive as it could be, but access will become easier with availability of “Datum” on the Web site in 2003.

Recommendations:

1. Integration of assessment and strategic planning should continue.
2. The University should continue to commit resources to assessment, including reassigned time and funding.
3. The president’s cabinet should develop directions/suggestions for reviewing and responding to “Datum” information.
4. The University should continue to provide development opportunities to assist individual departments and units/areas in making increasingly sophisticated use of assessment.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN
INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY**

Strengths:

1. To make employees more aware of purchasing and contracting guidelines, the procedures have recently been added to the Web site.
2. The institution provides numerous training opportunities related to policies and procedures for residence hall students, faculty, and staff, and to new employees through the new employee orientation process.
3. Shared governance via meet and confer processes insures that all campus constituents have an opportunity to provide input.
4. The University has established procedures for addressing complaints of harassment and discrimination.
5. The University makes every attempt to insure accuracy, timeliness, and integrity in its publications and public access media.
6. The University’s intercollegiate athletic programs adhere to the good practices expected of an NCAA Division II institution.
7. The University maintains clear and effective articulation agreements and relationships with its collegiate partners.

Concerns:

1. The University has allowed policies and procedures to become outdated and inaccessible and has not encouraged faculty, staff, and student awareness of policies and procedures.
2. Policies have not been located in a central source or readily accessible to employees and the community.
3. Some research proposals and projects have not been made available to the IRB for review.
4. Employee evaluation procedures for administrative and classified employees are not consistently followed by some supervisory personnel.
5. Meet and confer notes have not been routinely kept.
6. The Student Handbook is not readily accessible to all students.
7. The University does not maintain a single log of general written student complaints and their disposition.

Recommendations:

1. The University should develop a consistent process for developing and codifying policies and procedures, include logging from meet and confer processes through sign-off by the president.
2. A standard method of disseminating new and revised University policies and procedures should be developed.

Southwest Minnesota State University
Strengths, Concerns, and Recommendations
from Self-Study Report
10/23/03

3. Policies should be readily accessible to employees and the community. The University should continue to post all policies on the Web site.
4. Meet and confer minutes should be kept and should be available to campus constituencies.
5. Evaluations of administrative and classified staff should be completed by all supervisors in accordance with Board of Trustees and University policies.
6. The Student Handbook should be posted on the Web site to make it accessible to all students.
7. Formal procedures for grant directors should be developed to insure compliance with grant procedures.
8. Information about IRB review policy and procedure should be more widely distributed, and all relevant research proposals should undergo IRB review.
9. The University should add questions to student surveys to identify concerns about course syllabi or outlines.
10. University Relations or Admission should have responsibility for coordinating and publishing the Student Handbook.
11. Publications should be posted on the University's Web site to facilitate distribution to a wider audience without additional cost. University Relations should be responsible for posting.
12. The president's cabinet should develop a procedure to log or account for general student complaints and their disposition.

**CHAPTER TWELVE
FUTURE EFFECTIVENESS**

Strengths:

1. The University's ranking as the number one public liberal arts institution in the Midwest region by U. S. News and World Report for seven years in a row provides valuable publicity for the University and recognition of its strengths and support.
2. The University has experienced steady increases in enrollment and in funding associated with enrollment increases.
3. The University's facilities, enhanced by recent building and remodeling and by plans for the student center complex and the Library renovation, are open to and used by community schools, businesses, and organizations.
4. The University's strategic planning process provides strong direction for meeting the mission and goals.
5. Assessment has been built into the campus structure and is supported by faculty, staff, and administration.

Concerns:

1. Financial support of public higher education by the state of Minnesota continues to decline.
2. Technological resources and training for faculty and staff are limited by funding declines.
3. The number of high school graduates in the region and in the state is projected to decline in the future.

Recommendations:

1. The vice president for Advancement along with the Executive in Residence and the Foundation should continue to develop the capital funding campaign and related strategies.
2. Technology resources and training for faculty and staff should be a high priority.
3. The University should establish a structured means of distributing and responding to data from student satisfaction surveys and the senior survey.
4. Additional collaboration between the University and organizations, agencies, businesses, and educational institutions in the region should be a priority.