

**An Executive Summary**  
of  
**Employer Survey and Focus Group Research Results**  
for  
**The University of Minnesota Crookston Baccalaureate Level Graduates**

**December 8, 2005**

**Employer Survey Conducted (June 2005 – October 2005)**  
**Focus Group Session Conducted (November 8, 2005)**

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**Background:**

The University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) prides itself in placing a high percentage (92%) of its graduates with reputable organizations throughout the US and the world at large. UMC's last employer survey was completed on January 7, 1997 and they are long overdue for more current assessment data regarding the performance of their graduates in the workplace. UMC is also in the process of completing an institutional self-study in preparation for an upcoming Higher Learning Commission (HLC) visit. The timely results of the research conducted by this committee will enable UMC to provide current assessment information about its graduates for the HLC assessment team visit scheduled for April, 2006.

The Employer Research Committee designed and conducted two studies to gather data about UMC graduates to determine if they are meeting employers' expectations. The data collection methods selected by the Employer Research Committee were a survey questionnaire and a focus group. The data collected was based on the ability of graduates to demonstrate UMC's three Core Competencies in the areas of communication, critical thinking, and working with others. The following is a summary of the results and outcomes taken from a survey of 488 employers; and a focus group consisting of 21 regional employers.

**Research Themes:**

Common themes documented from the employers' responses are that: newly hired UMC graduates who make the most significant contributions to their organizations are those, who during their undergraduate experiences at UMC, had established clear records of active participation and involvement in campus clubs and organizations; and those who had demonstrated both academic and civic responsibility in the university and community respectively.

**Significant findings regarding UMC graduates derived from the employer responses to the survey and focus group questions and categorized by Core Competency:**

**Core Competency 1:**

*Communication (listening, reading, speaking, using technology, and writing)*

- Listening, reading, and speaking skills were identified as strengths in the survey results and by the focus group members
- Employers regard the ability of UMC graduates to use technology (i.e. GIS, Computer applications and maintenance, Microsoft Office Suite) as very important. This was also considered the area of highest competency by the employers.
- The focus group commented that “UMC students are able to hit the ground running and are able to assist and train other employees in the use of technology.”
- Writing skills were identified as important to employers and an area in need of improvement.

**Core Competency 2:**

*Critical Thinking (problem solving and applied learning)*

- Employers stated that UMC graduates demonstrated strong problem-solving skills and that they considered this competency to be critical for their operations.
- Applied learning through internships, service learning, community service, student organizations and study abroad were rated as very important learning experiences for UMC graduates.
- Abilities to adapt to change, be flexible, learn on-the-job, and be trainable, are viewed as positive characteristics displayed by UMC graduates.

**Core Competency 3:**

*Working With Others (teamwork and diversity)*

- Employers considered teamwork skills as positive attributes of UMC graduates. These include interpersonal, consensus building, networking, and negotiating skills.
- Diversity skills were acknowledged as being valuable to employers. They recognized a need for UMC graduates to experience more cultural awareness and to learn the importance of valuing diversity (ethnic, multicultural, intergenerational, gender, and race).

**Employer Recommendations:**

- Employers indicated the importance of changing the image of UMC from solely an Agricultural school to a comprehensive four-year university.
- New academic programs recommended by employers include psychology and criminal justice.
- Employers indicated that multiple internships would enhance student learning and make them more qualified candidates for employment.
- Employers recommended continuing to provide students with learning opportunities for improving job-seeking and career management skills like resume preparation, mock

interviews, proper professional attire, appropriate business etiquette, and effective communication (speech, writing, non-verbal cues).