

CONCLUSION

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This self-study report documents the fulfillment of Higher Learning Commission criteria for continued accreditation and demonstrates the University of Minnesota, Crookston commitment to the concepts and protocols of continuous improvement. This report is the result of comprehensive evaluation, critical discussion, and extensive review, as well as the strategic coordination and organization of human talent, physical assets, and financial resources. This is a full treatment of Crookston campus strengths, challenges, and opportunities, woven into a coherent narrative and powerful reference for informing mission-driven decisions.

The assessments in the preceding chapters are observably important individually and potentially transformational collectively. Striking similarities exist between the four cross-cutting themes of the Higher Learning Commission – future oriented, learning focused, connected, and distinctive – and the expectations of the unprecedented Strategic Positioning process of the University of Minnesota (University). As a result, the significance and usefulness of this self-study extends far beyond what might be more typically expected. For the Crookston campus, this is another important step in its journey serving northwest Minnesota and beyond as a campus of the University.

Mission and Integrity

The land grant mission pervades the entire University of Minnesota system. As a partner in that mission, the Crookston campus is uniquely focused on applied, career-oriented education; the utilization of technology in teaching and learning; and service to northwest Minnesota. The governance structures of the Crookston campus and University ensure fulfillment of the mission and respect for institutional integrity and values, while final decision making authority on all University matters rests with the Board of Regents.

The goal set by the University President and approved by the Board is to become one of the top three public research universities in the world within ten years. The strategic positioning process is creating a roadmap to that goal. As a result, it is clearer than ever that the greatest strengths and most significant opportunities for the campus are linked to close alignment with and effective leveraging of system-wide resources for the benefit of the people, programs, and constituencies of UMC. The campus will draw upon its 100 year heritage to build distinctiveness and comparative advantage, enhance quality, and create new value for the state and University.

Preparing for the Future

The campus has a record of sound fiscal management. It has been a good steward of its resources: worked within its means to fulfill its mission, improved the quality of education provided, and prepared for the future. The campus and University have a comprehensive data gathering system for institutional research that provides reliable evidence to inform continuous improvement processes.

Several constraints in the external environment present challenges for UMC:

- ◆ **Demographic:** The number of high school graduates in the traditional service area is declining. UMC must expand its reach in new student recruitment.
- ◆ **Financial:** The University allocation of legislative funding to UMC is assumed to be flat, or even negative. More revenue for reinvestment must be earned.
- ◆ **Enrollment and Retention:** UMC has not met its enrollment goals in recent years, and retention and graduation rates are below other University campuses.
- ◆ **Programs:** Academic and co-curricular program budgets are modest, at best. Investments in programs that enhance the student experience are needed.

Given these constraints, the Crookston campus has been re-evaluating how it can expand and change to better serve the region and state. Among opportunities are the following:

- ◆ Strengthen and diversify existing programs, and identify new programs that are relevant to marketplace realities; appealing to diverse pools of students in the region, nation, and world; and consistent with the mission.
- ◆ Expand international programs and partnerships. The University is emphasizing the importance of global awareness and study abroad programs; UMC is actively participating, but has much unrealized growth potential.
- ◆ Strengthen relationships with Minnesota high schools: the Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), College in the High School (CIHS), and a variety of enrichment programs can attract more and better prepared students to UMC.
- ◆ Grow the portfolio of distance deliverable courses and programs. Online learning is a natural for the Crookston campus because of its long history of commitment to teaching with technology and its robust technology infrastructure. Online programs earn revenue for reinvestment and expand access to higher education.
- ◆ Customized training and other not-for-credit programming can be developed and delivered to specialized learner audiences. The Minnesota Job Skills Partnership for education in horticulture is one example. Training public agency personnel offers another potentially rewarding niche.

Twenty baccalaureate programs enroll approximately 1200 students on the UMC campus. The number and scope of academic programming is being critically evaluated as part of the Strategic Positioning process: Enrollment needs to grow and several new programs have been explored (Biology, Criminal Justice, Emergency Management, and Applied Psychology, for example). Another strategy under review is to expand student choice by creating more academic minors from existing degree programs. Priorities for new investment will reflect the recommendations of the Strategic Positioning report.

Administrative efficiencies are being gained by aligning systems and sharing services within the University. The library and bookstore are closely aligned with University systems. Enterprise system software enables closer university-wide alignment of most back-room management and student services functions. In addition, areas including admissions and recruiting, environmental health and safety, and facilities management are developing greater synergy through collaboration.

Enhancing faculty research and scholarship is a campus priority. It is directly related to the University goal of becoming a top-three research university, and presents both opportunities and challenges. The major challenges involve transitioning to a more research-oriented faculty and providing the necessary facilities, funding, and services to support strong research programs. The best opportunities for growing research productivity will be to expand collaborations with other parts of the University and with other institutions. UMC faculty already have cooperative research projects involving other parts of the University including the Northwest Research and Outreach Center, St. Paul campus; College of Biological Sciences in the Twin Cities; University of Minnesota Itasca Field Station; and other institutions such as Argonne National Laboratories; Georgia Technical Institute; University of North Dakota; North Dakota State University; University of California at Los Angeles; and University of Sydney.

New and creative funding opportunities will need to be found that enable the campus to invest in the people, equipment, and facilities that will create new efficiencies, capture emerging opportunities, and drive growth. Revenue growth through diversification is part of the answer, and the campus is poised to (1) more aggressively pursue grants and other externally sponsored projects, and (2) expand the already successful distance education enterprise through the development of online degrees for targeted learner audiences.

As demographic trends indicate, UMC students will be coming from farther away, including out-of-state and international students. Because these students will not travel home most weekends, UMC must align facilities and services to satisfy students with different sets of needs and expectations. The end of UMC as a suitcase campus is in sight. Simultaneously, investment in physical resources and programming to meet the needs of a changing student body can also effectively engage the community and promote cultural events in northwest Minnesota. Currently, UMC is evaluating an exciting opportunity to partner with the community and school district in a new community center for fitness and wellness activities, recreation, and athletic events.

The Morris campus recently partnered in a similar way and finds benefits accruing not only to users of the facility but also to the University and City of Morris. Building the physical structures and resources that have multiple uses and benefits – like enhancing student learning, facilitating campus-city cooperation and dialogue, promoting regional-cultural enrichment, and meeting the out-of-class needs of students – is part of the future. The Crookston campus' role as a civically engaged institution and resource for regional economic development and social vitality is as clear as its traditional role as the University's primary resource for learning and scholarship in northwest Minnesota.

The University has been investing in physical structures and resources at the Crookston campus. The Kiehle Building was remodeled within the last five years, the Student Center was recently completed, and the construction of Centennial Hall, a residential life building, is well underway. With the plan to build the recreation and community center and another plan to move the facilities building, with an eye towards creating a research opportunity for studying alternative energy sources, the campus is repositioning to strengthen its programs. With the wind generated energy sources already in place at the Morris campus and plans under consideration for alternative sources at the Duluth and Twin Cities campuses, the University of Minnesota may become a model for the use and research of alternative energy sources.

There have been continuous improvements made in teaching and learning space on the Crookston campus over recent years. Although emphasis over the last 10 years has been on building construction and the development of the technology strategy and infrastructure (including broad band Internet access at every seat and a multi-media teaching station in most classrooms), attention has also been on improving classrooms and teaching laboratories. For example, this year UMC is spending \$120,000 on various classroom renovations, \$300,000 on teaching laboratory improvements, and \$100,000 on the renovation of the art room. Funds for these projects along with other general campus improvements are provided by the legislature under the University Higher Education Asset Preservation and Replacement (HEAPR) act.

Student Learning and Effective Teaching

UMC documents student learning and effective teaching, which demonstrates the institution is fulfilling a key dimension of its mission. The creation of The Electronic Assessment Management System (TEAMS) provides UMC with a reliable, user-friendly way to convert individual information into organizational knowledge. An original web-application, TEAMS is coauthored by a UMC education faculty member and a UMC information technology applications development professional. The goal is to collect, analyze, and document assessment activities in a way that is easy to understand and convenient to maintain.

The pedagogical design and foundation of this program is based on Five Continuous Steps to Improve and Support Student Learning: 1) Document Learning Outcomes, 2) Select Methods and Criteria, 3) Create Learning Experiences, 4) Collect Data and Interpret Evidence, and 5) Use Results to Improve Learning. Although parts of the application are still in development, its concept and underlying functionality is well tested. Initial design occurred spring 2005. Substantial redesign occurred over the summer, and data entry began in the fall. The system supports significant data sharing between individuals, disciplines, programs, and departments. Faculty informed by anytime-anywhere access to real-world data will be empowered to discuss and analyze teaching and learning with ease and confidence. In a relatively short period of time, the work will form a sustainable closed loop for outcomes assessment, feedback, and continuous improvement.

The faculty-led initiative has received strong support from academic departments, the Chancellor, administrators, and support staff. In addition to its usefulness to individual faculty, TEAMS generates data from an institutional perspective:

- ◆ Collecting and organizing data over time, providing the capacity to detect and interpret trends
- ◆ Linking course-based learning to program outcomes and institutional core components with a holistic feedback mechanism
- ◆ Offering tremendous tracking flexibility for interdisciplinary and other creative teaching and learning initiatives
- ◆ Serving as a searchable data repository, enabling the generation of potentially thousands of reports for use in faculty research and continuous improvement activity

TEAMS is potentially expandable to other campuses within the University and beyond, which would create a database of unprecedented heuristic value to scholarly research in teaching and learning.

As important as TEAMS is to UMC, significant challenges remain. At this time, not all faculty members are fully participating in data entry and maintenance, and the software requires occasional upgrades and de-bugging. These challenges will be met as the project evolves and continues to improve. The institution is committed to continued support for faculty leaders and web-based application development. As TEAMS moves from “beta test” to full deployment, it is expected that a position with oversight responsibility for assessment will be required to maximize its usefulness for individuals and the institution.

The implementation of TEAMS has a catalytic effect on the conversion of individual assessments into organizational knowledge. Historically, despite much effort and investment, this has not been the case. As part of the journey that has led the campus to TEAMS, several approaches to assessment of student learning have been initiated. Four Vice Chancellors for Academic Affairs have provided varying levels of direction and support in this area in the past decade. Three Chancellors and one Campus Executive Officer (between spring 2003 and fall 2005) have done the same. Assessment committees and sub-committees have been formed and inconsistently sustained, yet determined faculty members have persisted. Without this part of the process, including all of the false starts and frustrations, it is likely that TEAMS and its promise of a sustainable assessment process would not exist today.

Today, administrative leadership with a commitment to student learning and assessment is in place. This commitment extends to supporting faculty and staff for the continued development, training, and implementation of TEAMS. In November 2005, the Faculty Assembly reinforced its commitment by amending By-Laws to establish a standing committee for Assessment with duly noted responsibilities. The commitment to student learning and assessment pervades the institution.

Another tool developed for assessment by the UMC Instructional Technology Center (ITC) professional staff is the Course Syllabus Management System (CSMS). It will significantly increase institutional accountability to external constituencies. CSMS is a web-based syllabus document repository. CSMS provides a tool for faculty and staff to upload, store, and review syllabus documents for all courses taught at UMC. This tool allows UMC to continuously monitor the development of syllabi, the inclusion of institutional requirements, statements of learning outcomes, and evaluation measures of student achievement.

Though UMC must evolve with the University and external markets, teaching and learning will remain its focal point for the foreseeable future. The CSMS is one example of the campus commitment to clearly state learning objectives and support that commitment with investment in multiple direct and indirect measures of achievement. The challenge is to achieve full faculty participation, and the result of the effort will be accessible organizational knowledge.

A policy requiring the periodic review of all baccalaureate programs was approved in 2002. A triennial schedule, under which one third of UMC programs would be reviewed each year, was adopted. The purpose of the review is to provide faculty, department heads, and administrators with information necessary to improve programs and program performance. The review ties investment in programs with measures of value and growth potential, and recognizes the increasingly important connection between management at the program level and strategic decision making at the institutional level. In addition, the review can provide an early warning of unfavorable trends so sufficient time is available for redesign, repositioning, or reinvestment.

The program review process is not unlike an abbreviated and more narrowly focused self-study at the program level. Its value is primarily as a continuous improvement planning tool. Now that the first three-year cycle of reviews has been completed, academic administration has an opportunity to define improved systems for responding to the reviews and, most importantly, for closing the feedback loop by taking action based on the recommendations received. Though the program review process was initially focused more on financial and other measures of efficiency, strengthening content related to student learning is likely to increase the value of the report. The assessment data gathered in TEAMS should be incorporated into the expectations for triennial program reviews.

The Program Improvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) is integral to the success of the Crookston campus mission. PIAC work substantiates that the institution is fulfilling its commitments to students, employers, and the public. Employers and other professionals in the field offer valuable insight regarding curriculum, graduate and employee competencies, and current issues in the discipline. In addition, the PIAC is a significant link to student placement, including internships, student teaching, and job placement.

Because UMC offers career-oriented polytechnic programs, employer feedback, whether through the PIAC or other means, is essential to meaningful assessment. In a recent e-mail message to the department head, a recruiter interviewing job seekers graduating with Natural Resources degrees wrote the following (personal communication, February 22, 2006):

Recently we interviewed 12 to 15 candidates from colleges all over our region, and by far Crookston students come to us with the best base knowledge of plants/plant communities, interview skills, life experience and hands on skills. We appreciate the quality of young professionals UMC is producing, and as you might know last week we offered positions to several of your current and former students.

Employers recognize and appreciate the strengths Crookston campus graduates offer, and UMC recognizes that employer needs and priorities change with markets and market conditions. Continuous review and revision of the curriculum and learning outcomes, to match the demands of the marketplace and ensure graduate employability and career advancement potential, are central to the success of the Crookston campus.

Academic advisement at UMC is regarded as a significant contributor to the overall student experience and an important faculty responsibility. Students value access to faculty in and out of class. Opportunities for advisement begin early in the student academic experience and at regular intervals thereafter. Students are encouraged to take advantage of advisement opportunities from multiple sources.

UMC maintains electronic tools that contribute substantially to the availability of current and reliable information for students and advisers. The electronic Midterm Grade Notification Report system informs students and advisers of mid-semester progress in specific courses. The Academic Progress Audit System (APAS) generates student academic progress reports. Students can access the APAS report to track current progress and, if desired, explore how their courses fit the requirements of other programs. The administration can provide more training opportunities on these reports for students and faculty to produce a more consistent use of them.

Students today expect to be able to access services online. As noted above, however, many also place high value on accessible faculty. Finding the proper balance between traditional face-to-face advising and the efficiencies of automated systems will require continued monitoring and assessment. The data will inform the decisions.

The UMC student body includes a high proportion of first generation college students. The traditional admissions requirement used at UMC and other campuses allows students to enroll who may not be fully prepared to succeed in college. Consequently, UMC retention and graduation rates are lower than other campuses within the University. Close analysis of these areas is a campus priority.

Federal TRIO funding supports work to enhance the chances of academic success for at-risk students. The TRIO project provides tutoring, academic and support services, multicultural opportunities, and faculty and peer mentoring to 200 low-income, first-generation and disabled students per year. Program success is well documented, and requests for renewal of funding have been consistently approved. Because eligibility for participation in the TRIO program is limited, UMC also invests in an Academic Assistance Center (AAC). The two programs are located in the same physical area and share some personnel. Together the programs ensure all students, regardless of ability, ethnicity, background, and economic status have access to academic assistance.

The liberal education requirement at UMC aligns with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC), a state-wide initiative to ensure transferability between campuses. MTC, along with the three core components (communication, critical thinking, and working with others) provide students with enduring skills of lifelong value. The liberal education component and applied, career-oriented program focus help students prepare for better lives and for successful entry into the workforce. In addition, UMC graduates have a distinct comparative advantage because of the skill sets acquired as a result of the technology-rich curriculum and ubiquitous computing environment, as well as the focus on civic engagement and service learning.

Historically, UMC has tended to view the learning outcomes of liberal education courses and those of program-specific courses as distinctly different. At the same time, however, UMC faculty members understand that meaningful outcomes at the program level reflect both liberal and applied learning in an undifferentiated blend. TEAMS is an important advancement in the campus evolution toward a more holistic view of how and when students will achieve the specific learning objectives defined within and between degree programs. TEAMS data will contribute to improved curricular efficiency and effectiveness because program and institutional level outcomes can be compared better with course and discipline specific inputs for decision making.

Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

The Crookston campus promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission. Future opportunities to enhance the culture of and capacity for research and discovery at UMC are forthcoming, with the University goal to become a top-three public research university. The Crookston campus will be expected to articulate its contribution to this goal.

UMC has seen a substantial increase in research over the last five years. These research activities directly involve undergraduate students whenever possible; providing hands-on research experiences to undergraduate students is highly consistent with the mission. This trend is expected to continue as the number of faculty with terminal degrees grows. In conducting research UMC adheres to all policies, procedures, and practices of the University, and assures compliance with all training and reporting requirements.

As an integral part of the University, the Crookston campus provides a collegiate atmosphere in a very rural area, 300 miles from the Twin Cities. The campus serves as a regional hub providing access to the vast resources of the University for people living in northwest Minnesota. The committed, respected faculty members work for the success of the campus, and an energetic and increasingly diverse student body provides important service to the community through volunteer initiatives and service learning.

One measure of quality is that UMC has been a *U. S. News & World Report* “Best College” for eight consecutive years. While UMC appreciates the limitations of such listings, it is a recognition that does not come without effort and evidence.

The campus philosophy of individual attention and personal service places multiple demands on faculty time. Most faculty members teach a full course load (24 credits per semester), advise students, serve on several committees, work with student clubs and organizations, participate in professional and trade associations, conduct research, and engage in community activities. As the campus accelerates its evolution toward full participation in the University land grant mission, budgets will need to be adjusted to support faculty research and professional development. This is recognized by the administration of the campus and the University.

Engagement and Service

The Office of Service Learning (OSL) and its award-winning serving learning program and the Center for Adult Learning (CAL) identify and serve external constituencies. The service learning program connects course and program learning outcomes to applied experiences in community service. CAL provides flexible education options for non-traditional learner audiences. Both online and offsite programs are offered, and most future growth is anticipated in the online sector. Online learning makes sense for UMC because of its existing investment and expertise in technology and land grant commitment to accessibility in higher education.

The Northwest Research and Outreach Center and the Crookston Regional Center of the University of Minnesota Extension Service work in harmony with UMC to meet the three dimensions of the land grant mission – teaching and learning, research and discovery, and service and engagement. Although UMC, the Extension Service, and the Research and Outreach Center are administratively separate, all units exist to serve the public good. It seems likely that the lines between each should (and will) fade over time.

For over 100 years, the Crookston campus has been responsive to the changing educational needs of its constituencies. The Office of Development and Alumni Relations connects with graduates and friends of the University in ways both value. Under the leadership of President Bruininks, this commitment is stronger than ever. He says: “It is imperative that land grant institutions evolve to support the change that must occur in their respective states...” For the Crookston campus, its strength has always been influenced by its ability to anticipate and adjust to changing circumstances to lead the change.