

Transforming the U University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) Campus Progress Report 10 December 2005

Introduction

In his April 2005 letter to the UMC community, President Bruininks explained: “We are in the midst of a comprehensive strategic positioning initiative to ensure the future excellence of the entire University of Minnesota system.” He said UMC has “the promise and potential” but must develop a “new strategic direction ... to strengthen its future.” The UMC community agrees, and gratefully acknowledges the President’s commitment to partnering with UMC in this important work.

The UMC Task Force has met five times to lay the foundation for a strategic vision that is **academically and financially strong, distinctive in the marketplace, and of high value to the region and the state.** The group understands the urgency of its task and is confident that the outcome will serve the UMC campus and the University well, both today and in the years ahead.

Design Parameters

The Task Force is examining strategic positioning options and priorities in the context of several operating assumptions http://www.academic.umn.edu/crookston_strategic/assumptions.html.

These include:

- alignment with University mission
- state support will not rise beyond inflation; it may remain at current levels or decrease
- the University’s allocation of state support to UMC will be based upon reasonable standards for comparable institutions
- UMC must assume greater responsibility for more of its cost
- partnerships with other resources in the region, where possible, should be forged.
- success will be judged by clear, specific, detailed accountability measures

In addition, the Task Force has identified other foundational assumptions that UMC:

- utilize existing strengths & assets (maybe in new/different ways)
- recognize external trends (what does the future look like?); build comparative advantage
- identify expected results and benchmarks appropriate to a vital learning community
- reposition UMC using a dynamic process - a journey as well as a destination

Process and Objectives

The Task Force discussed the scope of its work with Vice President Jones and others at its first meeting, September 29-30. Transforming UMC, in the context of University-wide strategic positioning, involves:

- defining UMC’s contribution to the U of M goal to become one of the top three public research universities in the world
- exploring ways to enhance the teaching, research, and outreach mission of UMC

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- examining complementary and collaborative roles for UMC, the Research and Outreach Center, the University of Minnesota Extension Service Regional Center, and the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
- differentiating UMC from MnSCU and other regional competition
- articulating the role of UMC in regional economic development and community vitality
- confronting fiscal, demographic, political, and technological realities
- assessing opportunities to improve operational efficiencies and business practices

The Task Force facilitator, Jody Horntvedt (Extension Educator in Leadership and Civic Engagement) introduced a framework called “Preserve – Change – Create” (from *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too*, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, 2001) in which information and discussion are organized to identify strengths to preserve, weaknesses to change, and opportunities to create as part of a new strategic design.

To inform its work, the Task Force has:

- received a set of background documents including the Public Strategies Group (PSG) report, the Current Trend Analysis, and others
- heard presentations on the Chancellor’s priorities, institutional data, historical perspectives, and University resources available to the Task Force
- accessed regularly updated information on its Web portal – 84 documents currently posted under six headings: General Administrative Information, U of M System Expectations & Background Information, Perspectives: Articles and Information of Interest, UMC Student and Program Information, Previously Collected Strategic Planning Data (03-04), and External Information and Data
- collected Preserve-Change-Create input from staff (26 participants), students (137 participants), external stakeholders (members of 13 Program Improvement Advisory Committees), and facilitated faculty discussions in each of the five departments
- planned time for discussion of business practices & efficiencies, diversity (including international/global/multicultural perspectives), and campus climate (culture, morale)

This progress report will serve as a catalyst for broad community and stakeholder input.

Status of the Work

Recurring, *overarching themes* are emerging. Strategic positioning to address these themes (or causes) will result in improvement in critical measures (effects) especially recruitment, retention, external funding, faculty scholarship, student profile, and campus climate.

➤ Image – Reputation

UMC currently has little or no image beyond its traditional service area. Locally, the campus is still seen by many as “The Tech.” The campus adopted a “polytechnic” mission as part of its conversion to baccalaureate programming. People like what it is (career-oriented programs, experiential and active learning) but the word has not created the desired distinctiveness or competitive advantage. A related question, “**For what do we want to be known?**” is often asked. The Task Force expects its final report to recommend answers.

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➤ Academic Programs

The limited selection of academic programs at UMC is a frequently cited weakness. Lack of academic choice is a barrier to recruiting, especially women, and a contributor to low retention. As part of its work, the Task Force is likely to endorse building an academic portfolio that includes degree programs 1) in specialized markets or sub-disciplines (where there is realistic potential for national & international recognition), 2) of particular importance to the region, and 3) with appeal to a larger, more diverse pool of prospective students. Priorities will reflect student demand, campus strengths, graduate employability, and market trends. The future role of 2-yr degrees at UMC is questionable, but **the campus should be a top choice for transfer students** with related degrees from 2-yr colleges. **Comparative advantage could be created by emphasizing competencies that enhance graduate employability**, e.g. computer proficiency, hands-on know-how, and management (including “soft”) skills, in all programs.

➤ Student Experience

UMC’s advantages include small classes, accessible faculty, many student clubs, and a friendly and safe environment. **UMC students like being “a name, not a number;” they value individual attention**, both in and out of class. It is a powerful recruiting tool and a strength that contributes to the concept of the campus as a learning community. At the same time, UMC’s enrollment is not at a level to support a wide range of on-campus entertainment/enrichment activities. Increasing enrollments will increase demand for activities both on campus and in the broader Crookston community. A student recreation/fitness/wellness center has been cited as a high priority need.

➤ Non-Traditional Education Options

Technology is a strength integral to the campus culture. **Faculty use of technology and UMC’s technology investments create an opportunity for the campus to reach new markets, improve access for underserved learners, and diversify revenue.** One of the PSG design options “broker of academic resources — both its own and those of other providers” closely parallels the business model being developed by UMC’s Center for Adult Learning. **Technology is a comparative advantage in capturing emerging markets and reaching underserved learners** (including concurrent enrollment in high schools). Innovative high quality curriculum and flexible delivery systems appear to be a promising opportunity for revenue diversification and growth.

➤ Diversity & Multiculturalism

UMC has made modest progress toward a more diverse student body. However, the campus still largely reflects regional homogeneity. The campus’ uniform tuition rate could attract more out of state and international students. Investment in international experiences such as study abroad, globalization of the curriculum, and international academic partnerships with other institutions represent opportunities to enhance campus diversity. In addition, attracting a larger number of students from outside the state will contribute to UMC’s role in regional economic development. Some of these students will stay in the area after graduation, and sustainable economic development depends on attracting and keeping talented people.

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➤ Research & Scholarship

Many UMC faculty arrived during its time as a technical college when scholarly research was less of a priority. **The campus is now transitioning to a more research-oriented faculty**, a transition that should be accelerated to support excellence in teaching and learning. The Task Force is exploring the idea of **offering research experiences to all undergraduates** as a means of 1) building academic distinctiveness, 2) combining the teaching mission with a greater emphasis on research, and 3) and creating greater value for graduates, employers, the region and the state. New investment may be required to achieve this objective.

➤ Outreach and External Partnerships

The University is often characterized as Minnesota's economic engine. Likewise, UMC is well positioned as a major economic engine in the region. The campus is poised to create visible, measurable value for the region, and be the first resource people and communities turn to when working to create economic growth, enhance social vitality, and conserve the natural environment. UMC's capacity to engage communities and help people design a sustainable future is a campus strength. Partnerships with key constituencies in the government, education, business, and philanthropic sectors are a key strategic direction for UMC.

➤ Athletics

The Task Force understands that intercollegiate athletics is important to the campus community. Questions pertaining to NCAA division affiliation are on the table, and further assessment of the options will be included in the final report.

➤ Campus Climate

In response to the Chancellor's request for input on what his priorities should be, many asked that he work to improve the campus culture. The Task Force will work to gain a more thorough understanding of culture and morale issues prior to preparing its final report, but timely, clear communication with all stakeholders is particularly important at UMC. It will help the campus move beyond recent uncertainties and build grass-roots support for a new strategic direction.

To date, the Task Force has gathered much good information from many sources. Its members recognize that there are significant challenges, but all are confident that this work will guide the kind of transformation UMC must pursue to assure long term vitality and success.