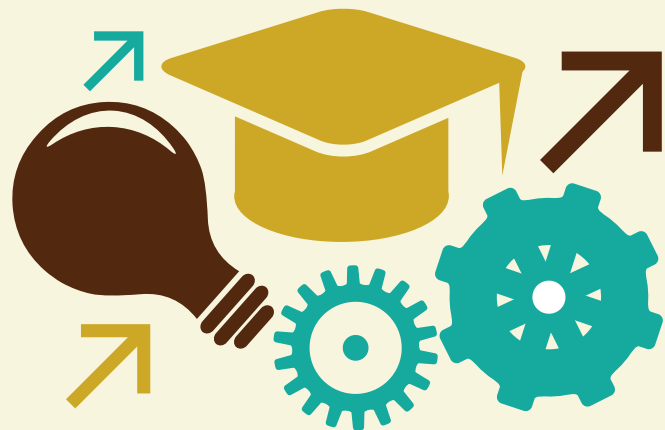


Southwest Minnesota State University

I AM  
SMSU



2014 SELF-STUDY

Prepared for the Higher Learning Commission

OCTOBER 2014



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents .....	i
List of Tables and Figures .....	ix
Message from the President .....	xi
List of Acronyms .....	xii
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Brief Overview of Accreditation History.....	1
Getting to Know SMSU .....	1
Mission.....	2
Institutional Profile .....	3
The Influence of Organizational Structures .....	6
Making an Impact .....	9
Changes Since the 2004 Visit.....	12
Leadership and Support of the University’s Mission .....	12
Academic Program Innovations and Growth.....	15
Student Support Initiatives .....	17
Improvements to Facilities .....	19
Response to the 2004 Review .....	21
General Education .....	21
Graduate Education and the Teacher Education Program .....	22
Financial Concerns, Budgeting, Growth, and Equipment .....	24
Recruitment of a Diverse Faculty and Administration .....	26
Academic Program Review, Annual Reports, and Data-Based Decision-Making .....	27
Faculty Evaluation, Tenure, and Promotion Process .....	28
Technology Plan.....	29
Faculty Overload .....	30
Student Complaint Log .....	31
HLC Contact Information in Academic Catalog.....	31
Improvements to the University Website .....	31
Engaging in the Self-Study Process.....	32
The Steering Committee .....	32
Goals and Priorities for the Self-Study Report.....	34
Audiences and Purposes for the Self-Study Report.....	34
Collecting Information for the Self-Study .....	35
Preparing the Report .....	36
Third-Party Comment .....	36
<b>Criterion 1 Mission.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Core Component 1A: The institution’s mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations. ....	39

1A1. <i>The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.</i> .....	39
History of the Mission Statement .....	39
Shared Governance in Developing the Current Mission Statement.....	40
1A2. <i>The institution’s academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.</i> .....	41
Academic Programs and the Liberal Arts Foundation: SMSU’s Centerpiece for Transformative Education .....	41
SMSU Enrollment Profile .....	44
Student Support: Alignment of the Mission and Academic Success .....	51
1A3. <i>The institution’s planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)</i> .....	57
Strategic Planning: A Template for Action .....	57
Core Component 1B: The mission is articulated publicly.....	59
1B1. <i>The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.</i> .....	59
Pride in the SMSU Mission.....	61
1B2. <i>The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution’s emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.</i> .....	63
1B3. <i>The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.</i> .....	63
Core Component 1C: The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.....	65
1C1. <i>The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.</i> .....	65
Providing for an Inclusive University Community.....	65
1C2. <i>The institution’s processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.</i> .....	70
A Blue Print for Action in Fostering Diversity .....	70
Core Component 1D: The institution’s mission demonstrates commitment to the public good. 77	
1D1. <i>Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.</i> .....	77
1D2. <i>The institution’s educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.</i> .....	77
1D3. <i>The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.</i> .....	77
SMSU’s Efforts to Promote Accessible Higher Education .....	78
An Emphasis on Civic Engagement .....	79
Service-Learning That Impacts Community Life .....	80
Enriching the Learning Environment for Our Communities .....	82
Co-curricular Activities: Leveraging Academic Success .....	84

Community and Regional Partnerships .....	87
Criterion 1: Strengths and Recommendations .....	88
<b>Criterion 2 Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct .....</b>	<b>89</b>
Core Component 2.A: The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows fair and ethical policies and processes for its governing board, administration, faculty and staff. ....	89
Integrity in the Academic Function.....	89
Integrity with Regard to Personnel.....	97
Integrity Related to Financial and Administrative Functions.....	100
Integrity in SMSU’s Auxiliary Functions .....	102
Core Component 2.B: The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships. ....	104
The SMSU Web Site .....	104
Programs and Requirements .....	106
Accreditations .....	107
Cost to Students.....	107
Faculty and Staff .....	108
Control .....	108
Core Component 2.C: The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity. ....	108
<i>2C1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution. ....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>2C2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution’s internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations. .</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>2C4. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and expects the faculty to oversee academic matters. ....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>2C3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests, or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution. ....</i>	<i>110</i>
Core Component 2.D: The institution’s policies and procedures call for reasonable acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge by its faculty, students, and staff. ....	111
Core Component 2.E: The institution ensures that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly. ....	113
<i>2E1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>2E2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>2E3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity. ....</i>	<i>116</i>
Criterion 2: Strengths and Recommendations .....	117
<b>Criterion 3 Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support.....</b>	<b>118</b>
Core Component 3A: The institution’s degree programs are appropriate to higher education.	119

3A1. <i>Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.....</i>	119
Curriculum Design and Review Processes .....	119
Program Accreditations, Certifications, and Licensure.....	121
Faculty Review and Currency.....	123
3A2. <i>The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs. ....</i>	123
3A3. <i>The institution’s program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).....</i>	124
Undergraduate Distance Programs .....	124
Graduate Distance Programs.....	125
College Now (Dual Credit/Concurrent Enrollment) .....	127
Core Component 3B: <i>The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs. ....</i>	131
3B1. <i>The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution. ....</i>	131
3B2. <i>The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.....</i>	131
Creating a Liberal Education Program (LEP) Rooted in SMSU Values.....	131
LEP Curricular Framework .....	132
LEP Oversight and Support .....	133
3B3. <i>Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments. ....</i>	134
3B4. <i>The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work. ....</i>	134
3B5. <i>The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution’s mission. ....</i>	135
Core Component 3C: <i>The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services. ....</i>	136
3C1. <i>The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning. ....</i>	136
3C2. <i>All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs. ....</i>	138

3C3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.....	139
3C4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.....	140
Professional Study and Travel.....	140
Sabbatical Leave .....	141
Faculty Improvement Grant (FIG).....	141
MSUAASF Professional Development.....	141
3C5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.....	142
3C6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.....	142
Core Component 3D: The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.....	143
3D1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.....	143
3D2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.....	145
3D3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.....	148
3D4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).....	150
3D5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.....	152
Core Component 3E: The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.....	153
3E1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.....	153
3E2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development... ..	153
Criterion 3: Strengths and Recommendations .....	154
<b>Criterion 4 Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement.....</b>	<b>156</b>
Core Component 4A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.....	156
4A1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.....	157
Academic Program 5-Year Self-Studies.....	157
Academic Department Annual Reports .....	158

4A2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties. ....	159
4A3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer. .	159
4A4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum. ....	160
Maintaining Rigor: Curriculum, Course Descriptions, and Prerequisites.....	160
Maintaining Rigor: Expectations for Student Learning and Learning Resources.....	162
Maintaining Rigor: Faculty Qualifications .....	162
4A5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes. ....	163
Component 4A6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).....	163
Core Component 4B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.....	167
4B1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals. ....	168
4B4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.....	168
Identifying Goals for Student Learning .....	168
Creating a Sustainable Assessment Structure .....	169
4B2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.....	181
4B3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning. ....	181
Liberal Education Program Assessment.....	181
Academic Program Assessment.....	185
College Now (Dual Credit) Assessment.....	187
Co-curricular Program Assessment.....	188
Conclusions .....	190
Core Component 4C. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates.....	190
4C1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.....	190

4C2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs. ....	191
4C3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data. ....	191
Retention and Completion.....	191
Persistence.....	197
Using Data to Focus on Student Needs .....	198
4C4. The institution’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)....	201
Criterion 4: Strengths and Recommendations .....	201
<b>Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness .....</b>	<b>203</b>
Core Component 5A. The institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.....	203
5A1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered. ....	205
Fiscal Resource Components .....	205
SMSU’s Current Fiscal Picture.....	212
Physical Infrastructure .....	217
Human Resources .....	217
Technological Infrastructure.....	219
5A2. The institution’s resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to any superordinate entity. ....	220
5A3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution’s organization, resources, and opportunities.....	221
5A4. The institution’s staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.....	221
5A5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.....	223
Core Component 5B. The institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.....	224
5B1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight for the institution’s financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities. ....	224
5B2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies – including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students – in the institution’s governance.....	225



5B3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort. ....	227
Core Component 5C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning. ....	228
5C1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities. ....	229
5C2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting. ....	231
5C3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups. ....	232
Planning Groups and Task Forces .....	232
External Studies .....	233
Advisory Boards .....	233
5C4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution’s sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support. ....	234
5C5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization. ....	234
Core Component 5D. The Institution works systematically to improve its performance. ....	236
5D1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations. ....	236
5D2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts. ....	237
Criterion 5: Strengths and Recommendations .....	239

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Fall Enrollment History 2003 to 2013	44
Figure 1.2	Fall Enrollment by Category	45
Figure 1.3	Fall 2013 Headcount and FTE Enrollment Share	46
Figure 1.4	Ten Year Enrollment Comparison by Minnesota County, Fall 2003 Compared to Fall 2013	47
Figure 1.5	Percentage Of New Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Students Who Are First Generation Students	48
Figure 1.6	Percentage of New Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Students Who Are Pell Eligible	48
Figure 1.7	Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Enrollment, Fall Semesters 2003 to 2013	49
Figure 1.8	Graduate Enrollment	50
Figure 1.9	College Now Enrollments by High School Since 2004	51
Figure 1.10	Student Affairs Organizational Chart	53
Figure 1.11	Global Studies Enrollment by Year 2001-2013	56
Figure 1.12	Overall Response to “I was familiar with SMSU’s Mission Statement prior to reading this survey.”	61
Table 1.1	Overall Response to “SMSU’s Mission Statement is easily understood.”	61
Figure 1.13	Community Response to “SMSU’s Mission Statement accurately represents the pursuits of SMSU.”	62
Table 1.2	Employee Responses Regarding Agreement with the Statement “The current administrative structure (school divisions and reporting lines) effectively supports SMSU’s mission.”	63
Table 1.3	Biennial Strategic Plan 2003-2005 Diversity Component and Progress	65
Table 1.4	Strategic Plan 2007-2012 Diversity Component and Progress	66
Table 1.5	Strategic Plan 2012-2017 Diversity Strategic Direction	66
Figure 1.14	Number of Students of Color and International Students 2003-2013	69
Figure 1.15	Percentage of Students of Color and International Students 2003-2013	69
Table 1.6	Students of Color and International Students	70
Figure 2.1	Responses of Public/Staff and Students Asked Whether the Information Indicated on Graph Was Easy to Locate on SMSU’s Website	105
Table 2.1	Response to Statement “The SMSU community is open to the expression of diverse opinions.”	112
Figure 2.2	Response to Statement “My professors practice(d) what they preach(ed) with regard to academic behaviors and standards.”	114
Figure 2.3	Aggregated Response across Student Groups (Alumni, On/Off Campus, & Graduate) to Statement: “I am/was instructed in reliable and ethical ways of conducting research.”	116
Table 3.1	Current Fields of Practice for Two Cohorts of Social Work Graduates 2008	121
Table 3.2	I/O Faculty Searches 2004-2014	137
Figure 3.1	Comparison of Faculty and Staff/Administration Response to the Statement “There are a sufficient number of faculty members in each program.”	138
Figure 3.2	New Entering Freshmen (NEF) Enrollment by Provisional Admission Condition	146
Figure 3.3	Senior Survey Results Regarding Advising Attributes – AY 2012-2013	149
Table 4.1	Employment Rates of SMSU Graduates	165
Figure 4.1	HLC Self-Study Survey Spring 2013 Employer Responses to the	166

	Question: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding SMSU students' preparation for joining the workforce.”	
Figure 4.2	HLC Self-Study Survey Spring 2013 Alumni Response to Question “In what areas did your experiences at SMSU prepare you well for the following workplace needs (check all that apply).”	167
Figure 4.3	SMSU Institutional Assessment Flowchart	171
Table 4.2	Faculty and Student Affairs Professional Development and Assessment Activities, 2011-2014	178
Table 4.3	Planned Schedule for LEP Outcome Assessment	183
Table 4.4	2013 PWC Portfolio Scores	187
Figure 4.4	Composite Retention Rates for 2004 to 2011 NEF Cohorts	192
Figure 4.5	SMSU Completion Rates since 1991	193
Figure 4.6	Degree-Seeking Cohort Completion Rate for Cohorts Years Fall 2002 to Fall 2007	194
Figure 4.7	Average Retention by Select Sub-Groups of NEF (Fall to Fall)	195
Figure 4.8	NEF Cohort 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Transfer-Out Rate	196
Figure 4.9	NEF Cohort Composite Completion by Race/Ethnicity (With Average # of Students in Cohort)	197
Figure 4.10	NEF Long-Term Persistence Detail	198
Table 4.5	Comparison of Early Alert Recipients Retention from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013. Total Alerts and Whether They Met with the OSS	199
Figure 4.11	Retention of New Entering Freshmen Participating in On-Campus Living & Learning Communities. Fall 2008 to Fall 2012 Cohorts	200
Figure 5.1	MnSCU System Percentages of Tuition and State Appropriation (System-Wide)	204
Table 5.1	Overall Revenues 2004-2012, Excluding Capital-Type Items and with Scholarship Allowance, in Thousands	207
Figure 5.2	SMSU Gross Tuition and Appropriation Revenue	208
Table 5.2	SMSU Tuition & Fees Rates and Percentage Change 2004 – 2014	209
Table 5.3	Numbers of Alumni Of Record at MnSCU Institutions (as of 2013)	210
Table 5.4	SMSU Expenditures in Dollars 2009 – 2013 (IPEDS Data, Year Ending June 30, in Thousands)	211
Table 5.5	SMSU Expenditures in Percentages 2009 – 2013 (IPEDS Data, Year Ending June 30)	211
Table 5.6	Composite Financial Index including Foundation Ratios 2008 - 2013	214
Figure 5.3	Ten Year Composite Retention Rates by Gender: New Entering Athletes and Total New Entering Freshmen	216
Table 5.7	Comparison of FTE Numbers Of Employees Per Unit Fiscal Years 2004 to 2014	218
Figure 5.4	2013 Percentage of Expenditures	230

**\* A Note on Documentation and E-Resources**

All documents directly linked in this report may be accessed by logging in with a StarID. Other documents referenced in the report that are of an internal nature are housed in a D2L section for the HLC Peer Review team members, and are indicated as such. The files in D2L are copies of files found on campus in SMSU’s secure, internal campus file share system called the “t-drive,” referred to in several chapters of the self-study.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear HLC Review Team:

It is a pleasure to provide you with our Institutional Self-Study and the accompanying materials. Southwest Minnesota State University has worked diligently to prepare this report in a process that began in 2010 and which has been overseen by the Self-Study Committee.

As you will see, we are an institution that lives its mission to prepare students to meet the complex challenges as engaged citizens in their local and global communities. The conversations and dialogues that have resulted from our approach to this Self-Study have led to meaningful insights and intentional actions that support our dedication to connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world.

In the midst of leadership changes over the past ten years (three presidents during this time period), the university community has remained steadfast in its commitment to continuous improvement and learning—commitments that have been achieved in this process. We listened and learned from previous teams and have made significant progress in addressing issues raised in prior visits. In the ten years since the last comprehensive visit, we have transformed our campus physically and organizationally. I am impressed with the resiliency of our university community and our continuing commitment to transform lives and improve our world.

We look forward to learning from you and with you as we share our reflections and experiences about this special place. The entire SMSU community has been involved in this endeavor, and we are eager to welcome you in person in October.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connie J. Gores". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Connie J. Gores, Ph.D.  
President

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACS	American Chemical Society
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
ARAMARK	Name of the dining services provider on campus
BESI	Board Early Separation Incentives
BOT	Board of Teaching
CIA	Committee for Institutional Assessment
CN	College Now (concurrent enrollment program)
CTL	Center for Teaching and Learning
D2L	Desire2Learn (course management system)
DARS	Degree Audit Reporting System
FY	Fiscal Year
FYS	First Year Seminar
FTE	Full-Time Equivalency
FYE	Full Year Equivalency
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IFO	Inter Faculty Organization (statewide faculty association)
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISRS	Integrated Student Records System
LAC	Liberal Arts Curriculum (former general studies program)
LEC	Liberal Education Committee
LEP	Liberal Education Program (replaced LAC)
L&Ls	Lunch and Learn assessment-related informational sessions
LLCs	Living and Learning Communities
MAPE	Minnesota Association of Professional Employees
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MnSCU	Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
MSUAASF	Minnesota State University Association of Administrative and Service Faculty
MMA	Middle Management Association
MTC	Minnesota Transfer Curriculum
NACEP	National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships
NEF	New Entering Freshmen
OLA	Office of the Legislative Auditor
PDP	Professional Development Plan
PDR	Professional Development Report
PSEO	Postsecondary Enrollment Options (at SMSU, term often used to refer to high school students taking courses on campus)
SMSU	Southwest Minnesota State University
SmSUFA	Southwest Minnesota State University Faculty Association (local branch of IFO)
SW/WC	Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative
SREC	Schwan Regional Event Center
Twin Cities	Minneapolis and St. Paul MN
UDS	Undergraduate Degree-Seeking student population
URC	Undergraduate Research Conference

## INTRODUCTION

Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) is seeking reaffirmation of accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. SMSU was last reviewed in 2004 and awarded a ten-year accreditation; the University was then granted an additional year extension in order to allow a new president to acclimate to the University and include her thoughts in this final self-study report. The HLC review team will visit SMSU October 20-22, 2014. This is the last PEAQ process evaluation. At the end of the 2014 visit, HLC reviewers will determine which of the new accreditation processes, the Standard or Open Pathway, SMSU will be placed in.

### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION HISTORY

Southwest Minnesota State University was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1963. SMSU began its mission in 1967, and its charter class graduated in 1971. Southwest Minnesota State College (as it was originally named) received initial accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as a four-year liberal arts and technical college in March 1972 after having been admitted to candidacy in 1970. In 1978, the University was granted accreditation for five years. Comprehensive reviews leading to ten-year accreditation of Southwest Minnesota State University occurred in 1983, 1993, and 2004.

At the time of SMSU's last comprehensive review in February of 2004, SMSU was found to have "made significant progress in maintaining its mission, improving student enrollment, and managing resources in times of fiscal restraint." The review team recommended and SMSU was granted a ten-year accreditation cycle, which was extended an additional year to accommodate a changeover in the University's presidency. As one outcome of the 2004 review, SMSU was required to write a [progress report on general education in 2007](#), which was followed by another [progress report in 2009](#).

Since that time, SMSU's off-campus Master of Science in Education was also reviewed in March of 2010 as part of the streamlined review process with a multi-site visit of its cohort learning communities, and the University had a successful [distance delivery substantive change](#) site visit in September of 2011, for which HLC granted the initiation and expansion of distance education up to 20% of total degree programs. All of these reports and evaluations are available in e-resources and Appendix A. Responses to the [2009 progress report](#), [multi-site visit](#), and [substantive change](#) were positive and required no follow-up prior to the next comprehensive review. A full explanation of SMSU's response to the 2004 comprehensive review is detailed later in this introduction section.

### GETTING TO KNOW SMSU

Southwest Minnesota State University is rural, public liberal arts institution. It is the second youngest of the seven, four-year institutions within a state system of universities and community and technical colleges, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. Founded in 1963, the University serves as a regional hub, providing access to quality higher education and enrichment and fostering meaningful partnerships for students, employees, and community members. (The introduction to the 2004 Self-Study linked here provides an excellent brief history of the institution.) In 2013, SMSU had grown to an overall fall semester enrollment of approximately 6,800 students, with 2,400 undergraduates, 450 graduate students, and 3,950 dual credit enrollees. SMSU is located

in Marshall, Minnesota (population of 14,000), a regional center located ninety miles from Sioux Falls, South Dakota and 150 miles from the Twin Cities. Its academic, social, and cultural programs are flourishing and the campus continues to grow.

---

## MISSION

Southwest Minnesota State University is proud of its tradition of excellence, which is anchored in its mission. The mission has remained relatively constant since the first mission was approved in 1966, with emphasis on supporting the educational and career goals of its students and developing programs responsive to the needs of the region. Southwest Minnesota State University offers a diverse undergraduate curriculum in the arts and sciences and selected professional programs, as well as master's degree programs in Business and Education. The current mission statement, adopted in September of 2008 following the recommendation of a year-long Presidential Brown and Gold task force comprised of individuals from across the university, reads as follows:

“Southwest Minnesota State University prepares students to meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities. Our comprehensive degree programs, taught in the liberal arts tradition, are dedicated to connecting students’ academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world.”

This mission reflects an updated and more concise description of the work the University does in serving its region and system compared to the 1993 mission in operation during the last comprehensive review. In 2008 the University also adopted a new vision statement, “Southwest Minnesota State University is a university of choice,” and thirteen core values, all of which arose from the work of the same task force. The vision statement and core values recognize the University’s emphasis on attention to student needs, promoting respect for diverse voices, and encouraging sustainable actions. A full description of the mission, vision statement, and core values can be found in [Criterion 1](#).

The mission guides the University’s strategic planning process. The [most recent strategic plan](#) (academic years 2012-2017) includes five strategic directions and subsequent goals for each; each of the five points supports the mission and core values. The five strategic directions focus on academics, enrollment management, facilities and equipment, community partnerships, and diversity.

Further, the University mission aligns with its governing system’s mission and strategic priorities. The MnSCU System lists as [its mission](#) that “The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system of distinct and collaborative institutions offers higher education that meets the personal and career goals of a wide range of individual learners, enhances the quality of life for all Minnesotans and sustains vibrant economies throughout the state.” MnSCU completed a thorough review of SMSU’s mission and organizational structure in 2011-2012.

---

## INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

### *Facilities and Outreach*

Located on 216 acres in the northeast corner of Marshall, Minnesota, SMSU's campus consists of fourteen academic buildings, twelve revenue-funded facilities including athletic facilities, a conference center, and residence life buildings, a separate child care center, and the ADM Environmental Learning Area. All academic buildings, the Student Center, and the Conference Center are connected by enclosed links or tunnels; SMSU was designed in the late 1960's with accessibility in mind, before the passage of ADA. Thanks to the legacy of an internationally-known emeritus art professor, the entire campus serves as an art gallery, with rotating displays of student and faculty art hanging side by side with that of internationally and nationally known artists throughout campus. The campus boasts several beautifully maintained gardens, cultivated by master gardeners on staff and by campus volunteers, who continue to expand their efforts across campus.

The past ten years in particular have seen a renewal in campus facilities, including construction of student apartment buildings, a new residence hall, a new Regional Event Center, an Alumni Plaza, and an underpass to connect the university to the local high school, as well as major renovations of the library and science and Culinology ® labs and the rebuilding of the Student Center and Conference Center after fire destroyed the old Food Service building in 2002. Technological infrastructure has been enhanced. Wireless network access is now ubiquitous across most campus buildings and technology enabled classrooms and meeting rooms have increased from five to fifty. Other technologies such as the Mustang Card, Data Center generator, and new Internet-based phone system have been implemented. Nearly [\\$86 million in renovations and upgrades](#) was invested into the campus from 2003 to 2012 from state, system, campus, and insurance sources, demonstrating a deep level of commitment to the University.

In addition to the physical facilities, SMSU offers educational opportunities throughout the region and beyond through distance learning via online degree and course options (as noted above, HLC approved SMSU to offer up to 20% of its total degree programs via distance education), rotating sites in Minnesota and bordering states for cohort groups associated with its 2+2 and graduate programs, and its pioneering, well respected [College Now \(CN\) program](#), a dual credit program in which high school students earn college credit while remaining in their high school setting.

### *Programs*

SMSU offers a portfolio of broad and diverse educational opportunities, with programs guided by a liberal arts tradition and a purposeful selection of professional and graduate programs that align with the needs, resources and expertise of the region. SMSU students may choose to pursue studies in two colleges: the College of Arts, Letters and Sciences (ALS) or the College of Business, Education and Professional Studies (BEPS). The College of BEPS is organized into four schools, the School of Business and Public Affairs, the School of Education, School of Agriculture, and the School of Graduate Studies.

The University offers the following programs:



- 4 Associate’s degree programs
- 50 Bachelor’s degree programs
- 4 Master’s degree programs
- 1 Graduate certificate in Autism
- 13 pre-professional programs
- Numerous licensure and specialist degree programs

Southwest Minnesota State University is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships; the National Association of Schools of Music; the Minnesota Board of Teaching; the American Chemical Society; and the Council on Social Work Education.

*Students*

Overall enrollment headcount at SMSU has gradually increased over the past decade, moving from 5,982 in 2004 to 6,824 in 2013, based on fall enrollment numbers. The total headcount data include undergraduate regular and transfer students, graduate students, and CN dual credit students (indicated by the broader, legislative term “Post Secondary Enrollment Option” students in University data documentation). Full evaluation of the enrollment demographics trends and plans can be found in Criterion 1 in the [Enrollment Profile](#) section, with some of the information replicated here. Detailed data can be found on the [University’s Data Management webpages](#), from which much of the following information was drawn.

Of the total headcount enrollment, approximately 2400 are undergraduate students, taking most of their coursework on campus. The majority of students on the SMSU campus are traditional-age students who enter the University directly from high school. Even now, forty-seven years into the University’s history, almost 60% of full-time entering first-year students are first-generation college students. Though this percentage has declined slightly since the 2004 review when the rate was over 60%, half of SMSU’s students come from families with little firsthand exposure to higher education. The average ACT score of incoming first year students is 21, a number that has held fairly steady over the past ten years. Many students from the region come from low-income circumstances; over 40% of SMSU students are Pell-eligible.

In 2013, the student body included students from 27 states and 22 countries, with 3.3% international students. Approximately 11% of all students in 2013 were students of color. The campus is well known for its attention to students with disabilities; in Fall 2013, the University served 104 students with disabilities; that is 4.4% percent of degree-seeking undergrads, of which most of these students are.

<b>Fall 2013 Student Data</b>	
Total Headcount	6,824
<b>Undergraduate</b>	
Degree-Seeking	2,377
Non-Degree Seeking	4,002
<b>Graduate</b>	
Graduate	445
<b>Demographics</b>	
Male	41%
Female	59%
Students of Color	11%
International	3%
<b>Geographic</b>	
MN Resident	81%
Out-of-State	16%
States Represented	27
Countries Represented	22
<b>New Entering</b>	
ACT	21.4
First Generation	59%
Retention	67%

First year students are required to live on campus if not living with guardians or in other special circumstances. In 2013, 833 students lived in residence halls on campus or in SMSU Foundation-owned Residence Apartments. Housing ranges from traditional residence hall arrangements and multiple-person suites to apartments.

Primarily the rest of SMSU's enrollment headcount comes through its graduate programs in Education and Business and through the CN program. Graduate enrollment, as noted above, was approximately 450 students in Fall 2013. As of 2014, SMSU partners with nearly 100 school districts to offer the CN program; the number of unduplicated high school students in SMSU's CN program through the 2013-2014 school year totaled 4,808.

### *Faculty and Staff*

Over 200 outstanding instructional faculty support and provide instruction to the Southwest Minnesota State University student body. The faculty is comprised of 41 professors, 34 associates, 35 assistants and 109 instructor/adjunct professors (Fall 2013 data). 90% of probationary or tenured faculty members hold the highest degree in their field. Although the faculty are committed primarily to undergraduate teaching, they also engage in research and scholarship. Their research often leads to additional opportunities for undergraduate students — opportunities that would be available only to graduate students at many other universities.

In addition, 116 professional staff, 75 support staff, and 13 administrative personnel provide support to students and are distinguished by their dedication to the University's mission and students. They are critical to the overall institution's success and to the success of individual students. Several staff members and offices have recently been recognized for outstanding contribution, including, for example, Financial Aid Director David Vikander, who was honored by the Minnesota Association of Financial Aid Administrators with its [Distinguished Service Award](#); Deb Almer, University Human Resources Director, who was awarded a [Human Resources All-Star Award](#) from the MnSCU system in Fall 2013; and the Alumni Relations Office, which was presented a [bronze award for its Mustang Traditions House](#) residence hall initiative by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District V. SMSU employees are actively helping to recruit, advise, register, employ, lead and engage students outside the classroom.

Faculty and staff take a proactive approach to ensure the academic success and social well-being of the students. Students' scholarly projects are highlighted each year at the annual Undergraduate Research Conference, a pioneering effort within the MnSCU system which highlights student achievement and research. From 2008 through 2013, SMSU also hosted a Student Philosophy Conference; the Philosophy Program expects the conference to return again this spring. For the past five years, Honors students have been presenting their senior seminar research at the conference put on by the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Council. Many students also present at professional conferences and regional research symposiums within their areas of study.

### *Tuition and Affordability*

Tuition and fees are the same for in-state students and those from outside of Minnesota: \$8,074 for full time students in 2013-2014. Tuition throughout the MnSCU System was frozen for the last two years by the legislature. In 2005, SMSU began to utilize banded tuition, in which students taking 12 to

18 credits pay the same set tuition amount. In 2013 the average financial aid package was \$10,620, and 88% of students received financial aid. Approximately \$28 million in financial assistance was administered during the 2012-2013 academic year, including \$4.5 million in federal grants, \$1.9 million in SMSU scholarships/grants and \$2.1 million in state grants.

SMSU has received several awards in recent years for the return on investment that students and families receive. In 2013, SMSU was one of 12 institutions in Minnesota to earn the “20-30 Club” designation by The College Database. Based on data from the federal government, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census and the American Fact Finder, as well as the Carnegie Foundation, the College Database created a “Minnesota 20-30 Club” which recognizes 12 colleges and universities that have an annual tuition rate below \$20,000 and new graduates who earn more than \$30,000 per year, on average. In 2013, SMSU was given the award along with eight other public institutions, two private for-profit universities, and one private not-for-profit university.

Also in 2013, the University was ranked fifth among colleges and universities in Minnesota for affordable online degree programs by AC Online and ranked sixth among Minnesota schools for Best Lifetime Return on Investment by AffordableCollegesOnline.org (AC Online). A total of 145 Minnesota colleges were analyzed, and of those, 22 were ranked. Graduates from the ranked schools enjoy the largest earning gap between non-degree holders when comparing the amount of salary earned by a graduate in the 30 years after earning a degree, and earn more on average than graduates from other Minnesota schools. SMSU was the highest-ranked of the seven four-year institutions within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. The University of Minnesota was ranked second, and the other four institutions in the top six were all private colleges.

#### *Resource Development*

The [SMSU Foundation](#) was established in 1963 to foster and support the advancement of Southwest Minnesota State University. The Southwest Minnesota State Foundation Board is comprised of up to 31 members representing a variety of occupational and economic backgrounds. The SMSU Foundation has a successful history of establishing meaningful relationships and securing generous support from alumni and friends. The University’s most recent capital campaign, which closed in FY09, successfully raised \$24 million in contributions and pledges for scholarships, programs and construction projects at the University. At the close of FY13, the Foundation showed total net assets of \$11 million. In 2013, contributions, revenue and support totaled \$3.9 million, made possible by 4,351 donors. The alumni giving percentage of 11.5% remains the highest of any four-year public institution in Minnesota. The Foundation was able to give back more just over \$3 million to the University with approximately \$800,000 going directly in to student scholarships in 2012-13. More information regarding the Foundation can be found in [Criterion 5](#), and the capital campaign is also discussed below in the “Changes Since 2004” section.

---

## THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

### *A History of Shared Governance and Bargaining Units*

SMSU has a strong history and reputation within its state system as an institution which values the role of shared governance in its daily operations. SMSU is a unionized campus; there are five collective bargaining units, as well as three labor plans, which guide personnel operations on the

campus. The governance structure is in part determined by Minnesota's collective bargaining laws, which are unique to Minnesota and apply to most University employees. Under Minnesota law, collective bargaining agreements are negotiated at the state level rather than at the University level. In Minnesota, most public employees are entitled to collective bargaining under MN Statute 179A, the Public Employee Labor Relations Act. With the exception of a handful of employees in the labor plans and the twelve employees in the MnSCU Administrator Plan, who serve at the will of the President, or, in the case of the president, at the will of the chancellor and the board, University employees are members of collective bargaining units and participate in governance through their respective bargaining organizations.

Faculty participate in governance in accordance with statutory language and with provisions of the Master Agreement, or contract, between the MnSCU Board of Trustees and the Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), the collective bargaining entity representing state university faculty. The Southwest Minnesota State University Faculty Association (SmSUFA) is the local representative body. Contract negotiations are conducted every two years at the state level between IFO and the Office of the Chancellor, representing the board. The constitution and bylaws of [IFO](#) and of [SmSUFA](#) are available in e-resources, along with copies of the [IFO-MnSCU collective bargaining agreement](#), which is also available in whole on the [MnSCU website](#) and in Materials Set II or [viewable by article](#) on the IFO website.

Items that might ordinarily be the province of the traditional faculty senate are included in the collective bargaining agreement and are the province of the Faculty Assembly, the voting assembly of SmSUFA. Interaction between faculty and administration occurs through the Meet and Confer structure set out in the collective bargaining agreement ([Article 6, Section B](#)). The term "Meet and Confer" refers to official meetings between the president and elected representatives of the faculty at which views, recommendations, and proposals are exchanged on matters of interest and concern to faculty. Interaction also occurs through the structure of academic departments, with department chairs elected by department members. Department chairs do not have supervisory authority over their departmental colleagues; that role is reserved for the deans. Department chairs meet as a group with both academic deans concerning matters relevant to department operations.

Four other collective bargaining units exist at Southwest Minnesota State University, each with its own collective bargaining agreement and Meet and Confer processes. The other units include the Minnesota State University Association of Administrative and Service Faculty ([MSUAASF](#)), the Middle Management Association ([MMA](#)), the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees ([MAPE](#)), and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees ([AFSCME](#)), Council 5. The MSUAASF bargaining unit includes professional student support services staff; MMA employees are supervisory classified staff; and MAPE includes professional employees who are classified but not primarily supervisory. The AFSCME unit includes classified clerical and office staff, craft and maintenance staff, service staff, and technical staff. Collective bargaining agreements are available on the [MnSCU Website](#), the [Minnesota Management and Budget website](#), and in e-resources. Each of these unions has a "Meet and Confer" with the administration, much like what is described in the faculty Meet and Confer above. Some of the unions, because of the small size of their staff on campus, combine their Meet and Confer with other unions. Though the Student Association is not a union, they too have a similar, regularly scheduled meeting with the President and administration called "Meet and Discuss."

### *Institutional Administrative Structure*

With oversight by the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor, the President is the chief executive officer and is responsible for management of the affairs of the University. The President establishes and organizes the administrative staff and charges each staff member with appropriate responsibilities. In July 2013, the ninth president of Southwest Minnesota State University, Dr. Connie J. Gores, was appointed to replace a two-year *interim* president named after the retirement of the previous president in June 2011.

The President delegates specific administrative authority, as defined by the Office of the Chancellor, to members of the President's staff, who comprise the President's Cabinet. The Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, and the Vice President for Advancement (who also serves as the Foundation Executive Director) report directly to the President, along with the Athletic Director and the Affirmative Action Officer. The Cabinet includes those directly reporting as well as the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of ALS, the Dean of BEPS, the Chief Information Officer, and the Special Assistant to the President/Admissions Director (whose position on the Cabinet will be replaced by the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success as of July 1, 2014). The full [organizational chart](#) can be found is available on the University website and in Appendix A. (Separate organizational charts for the [Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs](#) and for [Student Affairs](#) can be found in e-resources.)

### *The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System*

As noted earlier, Southwest Minnesota State University is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. The MnSCU system includes seven state universities and 24 two-year technical and community colleges. It is the fifth largest higher education system of its kind in the United States; according to the [MnSCU website](#), over 430,000 students take courses at System campuses. The MnSCU system as it exists today was formed in 1995, when the legislature combined almost all of the state's public higher education institutions (community colleges, technical colleges, and universities) with the exception of the University of Minnesota into a single system. Prior to 1995, for twenty years the seven four-year institutions had operated under their own governing body, the Minnesota State University Board.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system is governed by a 15-member [Board of Trustees](#). The Board approves conditions of admission, prepares and confers diplomas, adopts policies governing the institutions, appoints the Chancellor and the presidents of the state colleges and universities, develops allocation formulas for distribution of funds, and adopts budgets for the system office and all campuses. Trustees are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Minnesota Senate. Twelve trustees serve six-year terms, eight representing each of Minnesota's congressional districts and four serving at-large. Three student trustees – one from a state university, one from a community college and one from a technical college – serve two-year terms. (See [Board Policy 1A.2](#) for a full description of the Board's role.)

The Board appoints the Chancellor who acts as the chief executive officer for the system. The current Chancellor, Steven Rosenstone, was appointed on August 1, 2011. The previous Chancellor, James McCormick, served from 2001-2011. The Chancellor recommends to the Board the appointment of college and university presidents who then report to the Chancellor.

System Office personnel represent the colleges and universities at the Minnesota legislature, review and coordinate educational programs, oversee credit transfer, negotiate labor contracts, coordinate presidential searches, and carry out policies of the Board. The Chancellor meets regularly with campus leadership concerning matters such as policy, budgets, and legislation. Divisions within the System Office support or manage functions such as student records, e-services, financial systems, learning management platform, and other such systems. Further information about the Board of Trustees, the System Office, and system policies and procedures is available on the [MnSCU website](#).

In January 2012, the MnSCU Board adopted a strategic framework for the future of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. The framework emphasizes MnSCU's essential role in growing Minnesota's economy by opening doors of educational opportunity to all Minnesotans. To that end, the strategic framework commits MnSCU, and by extension SMSU, to:

1. Ensuring access to an extraordinary education to all Minnesotans
2. Being the partner of choice to meet Minnesota's workforce and community needs
3. Delivering to students, employers, communities and taxpayers the highest value/most affordable option

In November of 2013, after three workgroups developed recommendations, the System Office released a recommendation report titled *Charting the Future*, which lays out six broad recommendations. Implementation of the recommendations is a work in process, with four campus-led implementation teams having kicked off in Spring of 2014, including the "Student Success" implementation team convened by President Gores. Four additional teams begin in Fall of 2014.

Further detail regarding the Charting the Future initiative can be found on [its website](#). SMSU's relationship with MnSCU can be found in Criterion 2.

---

## MAKING AN IMPACT

The University deeply affects the local community and region through its contributions to the economy, cultural offerings, and partnerships and service initiatives. Many of the examples that follow are described elsewhere in the self-study, especially in the evaluation of how the University serves out its mission in Criterion 1; the samples here provide merely an overview of the many activities and collaborations that the University sponsors.

### *Economic Impact*

SMSU has a profound impact on the economic vitality of the region. The results of a [study conducted by Wilder Research](#) and published in 2013 demonstrate that the annual economic impact of SMSU on the regional economy is estimated to be \$141 million and an estimated 1,898 jobs in southwest Minnesota. The study concluded that SMSU generates approximately \$8 million in tax revenues for state and local government. It also concluded, based on the southwest region's economy of \$5.6 billion, that for every \$100 produced in the region, \$3 are directly or indirectly related to SMSU. The study further estimated the value of the increase in productivity that the 748 bachelor's and master's degrees awarded by SMSU in 2011 will yield throughout the careers of the graduates. Assuming a 40-year work life, the education received by these graduates will yield additional state income of \$185 million.

### *Enhancing the Culture of the Region*

SMSU hosts numerous activities and programs that draw community members from the town of Marshall and the surrounding region as well as students and staff. University departments and programs sponsor a rich variety of events each year, such as lectures, plays, concerts, and readings. SMSU also offers 84 clubs and organizations for students, all of which contribute programs and activities to the campus and often to the community. Students also support the campus by serving on campus committees and task forces, and actively participating in the SMSU Student Association and their governing bodies.

The University is also home to a number of events and endeavors of distinction in the region and beyond. Some examples include the [Fine Arts Celebration](#), a month-long slate of fine arts activities; the [Marshall Festival](#), a celebration of writing, which takes place on campus approximately every five years and draws in visitors from across the region; [AgBowl](#), a regional event held by the Athletic Department in conjunction with a home football game each year that celebrates agriculture, and for which the SMSU Athletics Department has earned the NCAA Division II Community Engagement Award of Excellence (for this event and for a related event, “Smokefest”) for five of the past six years; [The Yellow Medicine Review](#), an international journal centered on indigenous writers; [GOLD](#) (Growth, Opportunity, Leadership, Development) College, formerly called Senior College, which provides non-credit classes for adults in the region; and [Boys State](#), an annual summer educational experience for 350-plus high school boys sponsored by the American Legion for which SMSU has served as the site since 2007. This is but a small selection of the types of ongoing, prominent opportunities that SMSU provides for the region.

Yet another strong influence in the region comes from SMSU’s highly active Athletic Department and its associated programs. SMSU is a Division II member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and adheres to the NCAA Division II Philosophy Statement prepared for the administration and supervision of the intercollegiate athletic program for men and women. The SMSU Mustangs have a proud tradition of success in athletics and compete in the 16-member Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC). Men’s teams include baseball, basketball, cross country, football and wrestling. Mustang women’s teams include basketball, cross country, golf, soccer, softball, tennis and volleyball. Men and women compete on the co-ed wheelchair basketball team. In addition, SMSU added a men’s and women’s track and field team in 2013. The University boasts 50 NSIC championships, and the athletic facilities are some of the finest in the conference.

### *Partnerships and Service to the Region*

In addition to providing a variety of activities and events, SMSU collaborates with regional and state stakeholders to provide access on campus for needed or entrepreneurial services such as the Minnesota Agricultural and Rural Leadership Program ([MARL](#)), a public/private partnership administered by SMSU in coordination with the Southwest Minnesota State University Foundation and the University of Minnesota Extension; the Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center ([SBDC](#)), a joint venture including the United States Small Business Administration, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and SMSU, which has hosted the SBDC for over thirty years; the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute ([AURI](#)), an initiative funded by the Minnesota legislature and whose facilities located on SMSU’s campus include analytical chemistry, bioproducts, and meat laboratories as well as staff offices; the Geographic Information Systems Center ([GIS](#)), established in 1999, which houses a network of computers and related equipment to

serve GIS users, both public and private, in southwest Minnesota; the [Southwest History Center](#), which began in 1972 as a joint venture of the Minnesota Historical Society and members of the History Department of Southwest Minnesota State University and is now an official public records repository established to serve the 19 counties of southwestern Minnesota; the [New Horizons Crisis Center](#), for which SMSU provides a campus office and support; and an on-campus [Veterans Resources](#) center, which is staffed by a Regional Veterans Service Coordinator from the State of Minnesota.

Beyond collaborating with external entities to provide services on campus, SMSU students, faculty, and administration have created a variety of opportunities for students and community members to engage together in professional work experiences and service work. For example, SMSU's [Center for Civic Engagement](#) provides myriad resources and ideas for students, faculty, and community members who wish to become involved in service work and a variety of community partnerships. The center is dedicated to connecting academic programs with community needs, but the services offered extend well beyond classroom connections to helping individuals realize the ways in which they can be involved in making a difference. Many SMSU faculty, especially from Education, Math, and Science, work very closely with the [SW/WC Service Co-op](#) in writing grants and delivering workshops to area K-12 teachers; the English Department co-sponsors a creative writing contest with the SW/WC Service Co-op for students in grades 3-12 throughout the 18 county service region. The Southwest Marketing Advisory Center ([SMAC](#)) is a self-financing student enterprise managed by an SMSU marketing professor and located within the academic marketing program; the Center provides marketing students with the opportunity to complete marketing research and related projects for a wide variety of businesses in the region and state. The Southwest Association of Graphic Arts student group provides a similar opportunity for students to experience real work applications while under the mentorship of a faculty member. The Redwood River Monitoring Project, spearheaded by two SMSU faculty members in collaboration with two school teachers, involves SMSU students mentoring Marshall High School and Junior High School students and working with them to test local river water quality.

Yet other examples include the service work that student organizations perform, such as the Enactus club's ongoing service projects in Jamaica. Enactus is involved in two projects there, helping reestablish a rest/food stop area called Faith's Pen, and helping set up a computer lab and improve the water supply to the Robin's Nest Children's Home. Other examples include the Chemistry Club's traveling "magic show" and hands-on learning experiences performed for local schools and accounting students who volunteer to help prepare taxes for low-income individuals in partnership with Western Community Action. In addition to drawing in spectators to athletic contests, SMSU's student athletes contribute hours of service each year through the camps and clinics for young athletes elementary age and up and through "Mustang Mail," a pen-pal program in which each of the 400+ student athletes exchange letters with over 600 elementary students in the local schools. Several Booster members have won the [Noel Olson Volunteer of the Year Award](#), given to individuals who have made significant contributions to the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. All of these activities are just a sampling of the kinds of experiences that SMSU creates to engage its students outside of the classroom but which also affect the community beyond campus walls.



## CHANGES SINCE THE 2004 VISIT

SMSU has continued to evolve since the last HLC review in 2004. Improvements made in the last ten years reflect the University's attention to its mission, indeed with one primary change being a revision of the University's mission statement. A number of changes also align with [AAC&U's "High Impact Practices."](#) While some changes, such as those regarding leadership, are a matter of course for a university and can cause temporary periods of adjustment, SMSU retains its core values and focus on the future throughout. Other changes include additional academic and student support programs and improvements to facilities.

### LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S MISSION

#### *A Revision and Reaffirmation of Mission and Identity*

In Fall 2006, then-President Danahar commissioned a Brown and Gold Task Force to study and answer three questions:

- 1) How might SMSU's mission, goals, and vision statement be revised and updated?
- 2) What can be done to achieve the goal of SMSU's being the University of choice for students?
- 3) How can the undergraduate experience at SMSU be enhanced?

The findings of the task force in these three areas were to provide direction for strategic planning, and task force members, gathered from across all areas and bargaining units of the university and including students, were to pursue a variety of perspectives, including from alumni and community members, in their research. The task force split into three subcommittees based on the questions, and reported back to the President at the end of the academic year with their recommendations.

A primary outcome from the task force was the revision of the mission statement language, the creation of thirteen guiding values (rather than specific goals), and a new vision statement. The revised mission statement condenses some of the language in the prior version, makes clear that SMSU offers "comprehensive degree programs, taught in the liberal arts tradition," and focuses on the student's learning experience as well as broader University and regional needs. Full description of the change as well as the process the University engaged in can be found in the [Criterion 1](#) chapter. The new mission, vision, and values have guided the strategic planning process since their adoption in Fall 2007.

Perhaps as important as what has changed is what has not. An important event affirming the mission and scope of the University occurred in Spring and Summer of 2011. Upon the occasion of President Danahar's retirement, the System Office commissioned a consulting agency to study higher education in southwest Minnesota; specifically, the study investigated whether the University should align in some manner with the nearby two-year college, Minnesota West, and its campuses, perhaps sharing a president who would oversee both. In regard to mission, the study affirmed that "Stakeholder commentary from across the region, and particularly in Marshall, suggest that Southwest Minnesota State has done a good job in engaging both the business community and local residents close to home (Marshall) in a variety of areas including social and cultural functions, community service, and academic program delivery," and that "Employers and community leaders are passionately supportive of the higher education entities located in their respective communities."

In addition to physical distance considerations between the Minnesota West campuses and SMSU, the report noted each institution's strong supporters as well as the complexity of the region's needs and the time and culture shift it would take for the two institutions to undergo any deep realignment. The consultants concluded in their [report](#) (also described in [Criterion 1](#)) that both institutions should explore additional academic program collaborations and eventually begin to identify whether any shared services might be possible, but that "the time for administrative alignment is not yet at hand." After the two-year *interim* presidency of Dr. Ron Wood, the System Office moved ahead with a hiring a new permanent president, Dr. Connie J. Gores, who began her duties in July of 2013.

President Gores has renewed the strategic planning process with a focus on three themes, each related to the mission: academic excellence and distinctiveness; student learning and success; and meaningful partnerships and engagement. The mission, vision, and value statements and structure are likely to be reviewed under the new administration as the University continues to move forward.

#### *Administrative Personnel Changes*

While SMSU has seen its share of turnover in the administrative team at the university over the past 10 years, several of the positions have been filled by personnel who have been at the University for a number of years, contributing to the stability of the institution.

As noted in the section above, SMSU has a new leader in President Gores. Dr. David Danahar retired in June 2011 after serving as president for 10 years, the longest tenure of any president in SMSU history. Dr. Ron Wood served as *interim* president for two academic years following Dr. Danahar's retirement.

Several changes occurred following other retirements of administrative personnel. They include the following:

- Provost Dr. Ray Lou retired in June 2007. He was replaced by Dr. Beth Weatherby, who had been serving as Dean of Arts, Letters, and Sciences (ALS) since July 2002. She remains as Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, although she has announced her resignation effective at the end of December, 2014.
- Vice President for Finance and Administration Doug Fraunfelder retired at the end of fiscal year 2011, replaced by Deb Kerkaert, who had been the University's Business Manager.
- Director of Institutional Grants Chuck Myrbach retired in 2005; at that time the area and associated resources were reorganized into the Data Management and Institutional Research Office, led by a Chief Information Officer and a Director of Institutional Research and Reporting. The changes are detailed further in [Criterion 4 \(link\)](#) and in the "Response to the 2004 Review" section below ([link](#)).
- Athletic Director Lloyd (Butch) Raymond retired in June 2004. Howard Gauthier was in the position from 2004-2006; he was replaced by Chris Hmielewski, who had been the Associate Director of Enrollment at the University.

Other administrative changes occurred as people moved on or, in several cases, when growth in programs required additional support:

- After the Dean of ALS Beth Weatherby became Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs in June 2007, Dr. Betsy Desy, a Professor of Biology, filled the position as *interim* for two years. She was followed by Dr. Lyn Brodersen, who took a different position

- after two years. Dr. Jan Loft, formerly a Professor in the SMSU Speech Communication Program, was appointed first as *interim* Dean in June 2011 and as permanent Dean in 2014.
- The Dean of Business, Education, and Professional Studies (BEPS) also changed over several times since 2004. Dr. George Mitchell served as interim Dean for five years, from 2000 until 2005. A permanent hire, Dr. Donna Burgraff, held the position for five years until leaving the University in June 2010. Dr. Dan Campagna was hired and also left after one year. Dr. Raphael Onyeaghala, formerly a Professor in the SMSU Agribusiness Management Program, served as *interim* Dean from June 2011 until being named permanent Dean in 2014.
  - Vice President of Advancement Vince Pellegrino left the University in 2008; Associate Vice President of Advancement and Foundation Executive Director Bill Mulso led the office and in 2012 was promoted to Vice President of Advancement and Foundation Executive Director.
  - Dean of Distance Learning and Director of the Library John Bowden was reassigned to Advancement as Director of External Program Development in 2004 until his retirement in 2007. Responsibilities for his position were assumed by a Dean of Distance Learning and the department chair position in the library, whose position was retitled to University Librarian at that time. Distance Learning responsibilities were melded into the Dean of BEPS' position in 2008.
  - An Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Student Services position was staffed for one year (2010-2011) and not replaced.
  - *Interim* President Wood hired a Special Assistant to the President, Gary Gillin, to work on recruiting efforts. Mr. Gillin remained with the University through the first year of President Gores' term. A new position, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, was created during that year, with Mr. Allan Vogel beginning in this role in July of 2014.
  - The growth of concurrent enrollment prompted the addition of several positions. Initially a faculty member was reassigned half-time in 2008 to oversee what was then called the Challenge Program (the name was changed to College Now in 2009-2010). A Director of Concurrent Enrollment, Kim Guenther, was hired in January 2011, initially on a fixed-term basis and in 2013 in a permanent position. A College Now Coordinator position was added to the office in May of 2013.
  - A Director of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach position has been added and is being searched in Summer of 2014. The director position is in line with a name change from the Office of Distance Learning to Extended Learning and Academic Outreach, to reflect the broader responsibilities and range of programming. The Director will be responsible for developing the vision and setting the direction of all operations and the day-to-day activities of the 2 + 2 programs and all other academic outreach programs, as well as promotion, marketing, and recruiting.

### *Capital Campaign*

The University successfully attempted its first capital campaign from 2003-2009. The initial goal was \$17.2 million; the campaign far exceeded the goal by raising \$24 million. The monies are being used to support a variety of campaign priorities, including scholarships, signature programs, and facilities projects such as the Culinology® kitchen renovation, Alumni Plaza, and the Regional Event Center. More detail about the capital campaign can be found in [Criterion 5](#).

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM INNOVATIONS AND GROWTH

### *Liberal Education Program Revision*

When SMSU was last reviewed in 2004, the University was required to reconsider its general education program, which was then called the Liberal Arts Core (LAC). After several years of careful creation and deliberation, the faculty passed and implemented a revised curriculum, built on a philosophy grounded in liberal education and spanning all four years, with graduation requirements in addition to the general education core. The requirements include a first year seminar class as well as an interdisciplinary capstone course (in addition to a major capstone course) and writing-intensive course requirements; each of these are high impact practices. The new Liberal Education Program (LEP) is based on ten learning outcomes, and a committee co-chaired by the Dean of ALS and a faculty member with reassigned time oversee the LEP. The full story of the creation of the LEP is found in [Criterion 3](#), and a discussion of the assessment plan and results is in [Criterion 4](#).

### *Assessment Resources*

In recognition of the importance of assessment and the desire to create sustainable assessment practices, additional resources have been devoted to assessment. An assessment coordinator position, which is a partial reassignment for a faculty member, was established in 2011. Additionally, the LEC faculty co-chair's position description includes responsibilities for assessment related to the LEP, and the ten LEP outcomes are being assessed on a rotating basis by ad hoc assessment (AHA) teams. Assessment Days have been added on a regular basis to the academic calendar for the last several years, an outgrowth of annual Professional Development Day presentations and in response to faculty requests for more time to perform assessment. The full history of assessment and the addition of resources can be found in [Criterion 4](#).

### *Changes in Degree Programs*

In keeping with the University mission, new programs are added when identified as beneficial to the region and in keeping with the MnSCU System's priorities. Several programs have also been closed in the past ten years, generally as need and demand for the programs ebbed, and in some cases coupled with the fiscal demands of the cost associated with maintaining a low enrollment program.

#### **NEW**

BS Finance (start Fall 2005)

BS Management (start Fall 2005)

BAS Marketing (start Fall 2006)

BS Culinology® (start Fall 2006)

BA Music Management (start Fall 2006, closed Fall 2013)

BS Hospitality Management (start Fall 2007)

BA Professional Writing and Communication (start Fall 2008)

BS Agronomy (start Fall 2008)

BAS Management (start Fall 2009)

Graduate Certificate in Autism (start Fall 2009; transitioning to a licensure emphasis area in Fall 2014 given Department of Education shift for this area)

BS Exercise Science (start Fall 2010)  
BA Medical Laboratory Science (start Fall 2012)  
BS Special Education (start Fall 2013)  
BS Education Studies (start Fall 2013)  
BAS Agriculture (start Fall 2013)  
BS Ag Solutions (start Fall 2013)  
BS Teaching English as a Second Language (start Fall 2013)  
RN to BSN (start Fall 2013)  
Master of Science: Physical Education (start Fall 2013)  
BS Early Childhood Special Education (start Fall 2015)  
BS Agricultural Education (seeking MnSCU and Board of Teaching approval Fall 2014)

### **SUSPENDED**

Minor in Spanish (Fall 2014)

### **CLOSED**

BS Health Education (closed Fall 2012)  
BA Public Administration (closed Fall 2012)  
BAS Code Enforcement (closed Fall 2011)  
BA Physics (closed Fall 2011)  
BA Music Management (closed Fall 2013)  
BA in Spanish (closed Spring 2014)  
BS Spanish K-12 Education (closed Spring 2014)  
BS in Chemistry (BA in Chemistry remains) (teach-out begins Fall 2014)  
Minor in French (closed Spring 2014)  
Minor in Geology (closed Spring 2014)

### *College Now*

As noted in the earlier section on additional personnel, the concurrent enrollment program, specifically the College Now (CN) program, has continued its enrollment trajectory from 2004, growing from a Fall 2002 enrollment of 2,388 students (the data supplied in the 2004 self-study) to 4,736 students in academic year 2012-2013. The CN program allows high-achieving high school juniors and seniors to enroll in college credit courses from the university while pursuing their high school degrees. SMSU faculty members mentor high school teachers in this program, and those teachers, in turn, teach the courses in participating high schools. SMSU and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities are the two largest concurrent enrollment providers in the state of Minnesota.

In addition to personnel changes, the CN program has undergone three significant developments since 2004. First, it is now accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), having achieved that status in 2010. Second, the compensation model for SMSU faculty has changed. Previously compensation was based on the total number of students enrolled; the number of students equivalent to a credit of load varied from department to department. The new model, instituted in 2011-2012, is based on a per school and course offered model. The shift in compensation model defined the focus on a faculty mentor model, alleviated compensation differences between departments as well as between faculty in a department, and brought with it a common set of expectations for SMSU faculty. As part of the budget balancing for current biennium, a decrease in the compensation rate has been adopted for 2014-2015. However, after discussion with

the faculty and departments involved, a graduated system depending on whether the high school teacher is being newly mentored was approved. Finally, a third change has been the increased commitment to providing professional development for the high school teachers, including a full-day conference each August. More detail about the College Now program can be found in [Criterion 3](#).

#### *Distance Education*

SMSU has long been a supporter of students' needs in the region, offering distance education solutions such as cohort-based learning communities. Since 2004, distance education has expanded beyond the ITV and site-based learning communities to which faculty would travel and now includes online delivery of courses and several degree programs. A substantive change for online delivery of up to 20% of programs was approved by HLC in 2011. The substantive change self-study outlines the increased use of technology and can be found in [e-resources](#) and on SMSU's [HLC web page](#). Since 2004, ITV has been replaced by the use of Adobe Connect and classes based on the D2L course management platform. The name of the distance learning office was changed to Extended Learning and Academic Outreach in Summer 2014, with a search for a Director of that Office ongoing at the time of this writing. Further description of changes in distance education can be found in [Criterion 1D](#) and [Criterion 3A3](#).

---

## STUDENT SUPPORT INITIATIVES

#### *Office of Student Success*

Over the past ten years, SMSU has organized several retention and recruitment task forces to study what measures would best help students stay at the University and continue to completion. In 2011 SMSU created an Office of Student Success (OSS) that is focused on advancing a shared sense of responsibility for student learning and a commitment to enhancing the student experience and supporting the success of its students. The OSS acts as the hub of numerous campus-wide initiatives designed to help new students find success and realize a more gratifying college experience. The OSS initiatives include a campus-wide early alert system that goes beyond academic concerns to include a broader set of possible concerns, a coordination of support from multiple offices, an exit procedure for students choosing to leave the University, and Mustang Mentors, returning students who help new students acclimate. Additional information on the OSS can be found in [Criterion 1](#) and [Criterion 3](#), with information on early alert procedures in [Criterion 2](#) and assessment-related information in [Criterion 4](#).

#### *Living & Learning Communities*

Living & Learning Communities (LLCs) debuted in 2006. These are residence hall houses where students who share similar interests live within a house. Current Living & Learning Communities include Mustang Traditions, Culinology @ House, Fine Arts Community and Access, Opportunity and Success House. Initial assessment data shows that students in these shared-interest living quarters have a higher retention rate than other first-year freshmen. The LLCs reflect another example of one of the AAC&J High Impact Practices in operation. See [Criterion 4](#) for further detail on retention data.

#### *Academic Commons and Added Tutoring Services*

Academic support services were combined into one general location in 2005 with the creation of Academic Commons, located on the second floor of the Individualized Learning building. The

Academic Commons houses the Math Lab, tutoring services for selected courses, including Math, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, Accounting, Economics, Physics and Statistics, and the Education Curriculum Library. Academic Commons is a place where students can come to study, individually or in groups. It is equipped with computers and academic study software and houses print and web-based resources, and is open to all students, regardless of major. While the Writing Center also initially moved into the Academic Commons in 2005, it has since moved to the fifth floor of the library, where it was joined by a Speech Center in spring semester 2010.

#### *Undergraduate Research Conference*

Yet another high impact practice was established with the annual Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), which began in December 2006 and grew out of the University's engagement with Project Kaleidoscope, the national network devoted to improving undergraduate STEM education, and an Environmental Science program review. The annual conference has grown each year and is now a university-wide event. MnSCU developed a System-wide undergraduate research conference that began in Spring 2013. More information about the URC can be found in [Criterion 1](#).

#### *Office of Civic Engagement*

While civic engagement efforts were underway when the previous HLC review team visited in February of 2004, the focus on the first year experience and civic engagement was just emerging. Since then, an Office of Civic Engagement, active involvement with national and regional organizations, and annual assessments of civic engagement, just to name a few endeavors, demonstrate how civic engagement has evolved since 2004. A full history of the multi-pronged approach to civic engagement can be found in the [Office of Civic Engagement's timeline document](#), and the Office of Civic Engagement's [web site](#) makes clear the variety of opportunities the Office provides. The Office of Civic Engagement is also described in [Criterion 1D](#) and [Criterion 3E2](#).

#### *Testing Center*

In Fall 2012, the Testing Center doubled in size, with 14 testing stations, and subsequently doubled the number of tests that are proctored. A number of testing services are now available. These include University tests such the MTLEs for education licensure and Senior Exams needed by Finance students as well as tests needed in the broader community, including ACT testing, proctoring for anyone needing a certified testing center, and computerized GED testing, which had previously taken place at a downtown location. Thus the Testing Center supports the community as well as SMSU students.

#### *Investment Research and Trading Center*

The Investment Research and Trading Center opened in April 2012. The Center gives students an opportunity to have practical experience with investing and financial research. They are able to create investment portfolios while choosing different types of financial instruments. There is also a stock ticker in the Center, which is predominantly used by students taking an investment class required for Finance majors. It also supports other economic coursework.

#### *Student Restaurant*

Following renovations in 2010, the Culinology® Program debuted four new kitchen spaces along with a renovated dining room area. The kitchens and dining room are used to support an on-campus

restaurant, where students from the Culinology® and Hospitality Management programs put into practice what they are learning in the classroom. The restaurant, open in spring semesters, is renamed as the emphasis changes. Originally titled Green—A New American Bistro the first year, the restaurant has also had an Italian theme and this past spring semester operated under the name Bon Appetit.

---

## IMPROVEMENTS TO FACILITIES

The student restaurant facilities referenced above are just one example of many facilities improvements. Since 2003, Southwest Minnesota State University has invested \$86.3 million in construction, renovations and infrastructure improvements that have contributed to a more modern, energy efficient and attractive campus. Major projects include the completion of a new Student Center and Conference Center following a 2002 fire that destroyed the old food service building; a new Regional Event Center; new options for students living on-campus; and renovations of the science labs and library. Many other improvement and maintenance projects have been accomplished as well. In addition, many technology improvements were made throughout campus.

### *Post-Fire Student Center Renovation*

The Student Center/Conference Center buildings were completed in April, 2005. The Student Center is the opposite of its predecessor. Whereas the former Student Center was situated primarily underground and lacked windows and amenities, the new Student Center has plenty of windows and a welcoming, open atmosphere. It includes the Barnes & Noble Campus Store, coffee shop featuring Starbucks coffee, computer kiosks, and offices for the Women’s Center, International Student Services, Student Success, and Student Government, as well as the Alumni Heritage Gallery and several meeting spaces. It is also the site of the food service dining area/kitchens.

The Conference Center is a unique space in Marshall and is used by on- and off-campus constituents throughout the year. The Conference Center is a versatile space that can be split up in a number of ways to accommodate large gatherings, or small. It is a favorite wedding reception location.

### *Regional Event Center*

The Schwan Regional Event Center opened on Aug. 24, 2008 and is the region’s only facility of its kind. The facility cost \$16 million. During the 2006 Minnesota State legislative session, SMSU secured \$11 million in state funding that was matched with \$5 million in private funds secured by the Schwan Food Company. The facility is home to both SMSU and Marshall High School football and soccer games. There are also a number of meetings, presentations and speakers throughout the year. Suites are purchased by businesses and/or individuals. The University has a suite on the 50-yard-line and is the site of many friends-of-the-university gatherings, along with alumni events and other get-togethers. The name “Schwan” was added to the Regional Event Center in May 2013 and dedicated during the 2013-2014 year in recognition of The Schwan Food Company’s contributions to the University over the years.

### *On-campus Housing*

The Foundation Residence Apartments and Sweetland Hall opened within the last 10 years and offer students housing options that were not available in the past.



The \$6.9 million Foundation Residence Apartments welcomed students back for fall semester 2006. The project is a unique collaboration between SMSU, the City of Marshall, Bremer Bank and the SMSU Department of Residence Life. They are owned by the SMSU Foundation. The Residence Apartments include over 30 two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments, housing 141 students. Each apartment is furnished and includes a washer and dryer. The building is air-conditioned.

Sweetland Hall, a \$14.3 million project that anchors the west edge of campus, opened for the 2009-10 academic year. It is named for Doug Sweetland, SMSU's seventh president. Sweetland Hall is a three-story structure that includes 104 double rooms, 18 single rooms, 21 accessible rooms and 4 RA rooms. It has 250 total beds, and was built with conservation in mind. The majority of the residence hall features four-student suites comprised of two, two-person rooms that share a semi-private bathroom. Sweetland Hall is co-ed and air-conditioned.

#### *Science Lab Renovations*

SMSU science labs went through a Phase I renovation that began in summer 2009 and concluded in January 2011. The construction included tearing the old labs down to the walls, reconfiguring the space to make it more efficient and installing new desks and more stations for students with disabilities. New ventilation hoods were installed, as well as exhaust and air handling units. The desk configuration includes numerous stations, rather than the old, linear configuration installed when the buildings were constructed in the 1970s. The first phase lab overhaul occurred in the Science & Technology building. The second phase was in Science & Math. The Culinology® kitchens in the Individualized Learning building were renovated in the second phase of the renovations. The two-phase project cost approximately \$9.5 million.

#### *Library Renovation*

The SMSU McFarland Library underwent a \$9.2 million renovation, which was completed in the fall of 2005. The renovation included a new entrance, a more user-friendly configuration and numerous technology infrastructure improvements. In addition, computer teaching labs were added, as well as more space for group study sessions. Many computer stations were added, and the William Whipple Art Gallery was expanded.

#### *Additional Improvement and Maintenance Projects*

While too numerous to list here, a sampling of other improvements to campus include the renovation of the Greenhouse in 2009-2010, Alumni Plaza construction in summer of 2010, cooperation with the City of Marshall to put in bike paths along campus and construct a pond on the southwest corner of campus, renovation of the track and field complex, and motion sensor lights in all of the restrooms.

#### *Technology Improvements*

A multitude of technology improvements has been made to campus over the past ten years. Hardware and physical changes include additional smart classrooms, upgraded wiring and wireless connections throughout campus, and a new VOIP phone system. Other changes include the adoption of Desire2Learn (D2L) by MnSCU in October of 2003. Though adopted shortly before the previous review, not very many faculty were yet aware of or using this course management system when reviewers were here in February of 2004. Today the platform is used for fully online programs and courses, as well as an adjunct to many on-campus classes. Adobe Connect is also now used to support online education. Traditional ID cards have been replaced by the Mustang Card, an integrated, all-in-

one card that provides access to a variety of services on campus, including the library, dining services, student activities, vending, the bookstore, and Community Transit. The Mustang Card can be linked to a U.S. Bank account for full use as a debit card.

Technology upgrades to the Planetarium also occurred between 2007 to 2009. The Planetarium, only one of two in the state, underwent a \$230,000 two-phase improvement project that included a new laser, new seating and sound system, a new full dome projector system and new computer software.

## RESPONSE TO THE 2004 REVIEW

The following sections describe SMSU's response to the concerns and advice described in the 2004 Assurance and Advancement reports. While all five criteria were determined to have been met overall, the University was required to write the general education progress report for Criterion 3, and other issues requiring institutional attention were described in several other criteria.

### GENERAL EDUCATION

SMSU's general education program, now called the "Liberal Education Program" (LEP), has been completely reviewed and revised since 2004. The new [curricular structure and requirements](#) were adopted by faculty in May of 2009 and went into effect for students the following fall. The LEP has as its basis [ten learning outcomes](#) and includes requirements at the upper-class level as well as coursework aligned with the mandatory Minnesota Transfer Curriculum ([MTC](#)) in the first two years.

As noted above, the 2004 reviewers required a progress report on general education, asking for "articulation of an overarching institutional philosophy of general education, a curriculum aligned with the philosophy and goals, and a plan for assessing student learning outcomes." The [progress report](#) was due three years later. By 2007, the University had moved forward in developing a new general education program, having established the overarching philosophy after significant research and discussion by the faculty. However, the final curriculum was not yet in place. A second progress report was due in 2009. As the [2009 report](#) describes, the revision of general education went through three phases up to that point: Design (years 1-4), Development of the pieces (year 5), and Implementation (year 6 [2009] and beyond). The response from HLC was positive and indicated that no further reporting was necessary until the next comprehensive review. Since 2009, significant progress has been made regarding assessment. An [overall assessment cycle](#) for the ten outcomes is in place and operational; three of the outcomes will have been assessed by the time of the October review with the assessment of three additional outcomes underway. The University has also joined the AAC&U Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project aimed at testing the Value Rubrics and how they might become a national assessment instrument. In 2014-2015, several of the LEP outcomes being assessed will dovetail with the AAC&U project, with additional outcomes expected to be included in the following academic year pending funding. In addition to assessing outcomes, one of the two key new courses, LEP 100 First Year Seminar, has been reviewed by the Liberal Education Committee (an oversight body for the LEP), with changes made to enhance a shared understanding of the course, which is taught by faculty from across the University. A thorough discussion of the history, process, and current status of the LEP can be found in [Criterion 3](#); discussion of the assessment of the LEP is found in [Criterion 4](#).

## GRADUATE EDUCATION AND THE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The 2004 review team noted the growth in graduate programs (offered by the Education and Business Departments) and described the need for oversight structures to guide those programs and any future development. Specifically, the assurance report stated the following:

“the traditional administrative structure is not yet in place, and the Dean of Education, Business, and Professional Studies is the Graduate Dean by default. Curriculum matters are being handled by the undergraduate curriculum committee, some of whom are not on the graduate faculty. There is a graduate committee that approves appointments to graduate faculty; however, this committee does not approve curriculum changes.”

SMSU immediately addressed the committee structure issue. A separate graduate curriculum committee was established; only faculty approved as graduate faculty are appointed to serve on this committee. This graduate curriculum committee is separate from the Graduate Council committee, which addresses all other graduate policies and procedures. The work of the Graduate Council resulted in an official description of all graduate policies and procedures, adopted in 2011 (see [A-045 Graduate Policies and Procedures](#)); the Graduate Council reviewed all of these provisions in 2013-2014. In Spring 2014, a revised [Graduate Faculty Appointment policy \(A-044\)](#) was approved by faculty and through the Meet and Confer process. This revised policy contains provisions related to graduate adult education, a new policy for which is pending. The [Graduate Assistant Procedure](#) has also been revised several times since 2004, most recently in 2008.

In regard to the administrative structure governing graduate education, the Dean of Business, Education, and Professional Studies (BEPS) continues to also serve as the Dean of Graduate Studies (as well as serves as the Dean of Distance Learning). While that may have been the default structure in 2004 during the graduate program’s rapid growth, the administrative structure for graduate programming has been considered several times since then. Because all of the graduate programs currently offered originate from the Education and Business Departments and faculty frequently teach both undergraduate and graduate-level courses, retaining the Dean of BEPS to also serve as the Dean of Graduate Studies has proven to be most efficient and practical solution to administrative oversight of graduate education. Given the University’s size and financial capacity, adding a deanship for graduate studies-only is not economically feasible with the current size of the graduate programs. A Director of Graduate Studies manages the recruiting, admission, and cohort organization needs. Faculty Directors of the graduate programs in Business and in Education receive reassigned time (1.5 credits per semester) to oversee the academic needs of the programs. While the 2004 review was primarily concerned with graduate distance education, it is helpful to note the University’s continuing attention to distance learning overall, with the recent name change from Distance Learning to Extended Learning and Academic Outreach and the current search for a Director of that office (as described in “Changes Since the 2004 Visit”).

In 2004, some of the concerns regarding graduate education were also linked to Education Department personnel issues. In 2005, a new Dean of BEPS worked to combine the off-campus graduate program with the on-campus graduate and undergraduate education programs. Department retreats were held to mediate differences and to determine a new structure for the department. The off-campus graduate faculty retained their seniority schedule and status but are now currently listed with the Education Department. Since that time, the Wellness & Human Performance Department has also dissolved, with the Physical Education: K-12 Teaching and the Physical Education with Recreation or Sports Marketing emphases majors moving to the Education

Department, while the Exercise Science program moved to the Science Department. The Physical Education program has grown to include a new Masters in Physical Education: Coaching of Sport degree, which launched its inaugural cohort in the fall of 2013 and will be adding a second cohort in the fall of 2014.

The 2004 review also noted the following concerns regarding the Teacher Education Program: “Administrative duties are done by faculty as an add-on to their load, and consistency is lacking due to faculty turnover. Approval of applications for the Teacher Education Program is done by the department as a whole or those who are available, not by a standing committee. There is no input from practitioners in the field.” The issue of administrative duties being added on to the faculty members’ load remains a concern, due to the heavy and increasing assessment/accreditation requirements of the Board of Teaching. Responsibility for these requirements fall on the department chair or on one faculty member who receives 1.5 cr./semester of reassigned time. The assessment and accreditation issues affect both undergraduate and graduate licensure programs and have increased dramatically due to the addition of the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment) for all student teachers and a move to a bi-yearly review of data by the Minnesota Board of Teaching and an on-site review now scheduled for every five years instead of the previous seven year cycle. The Education Department has been diligent in meeting the needs of the state and its students and has received positive program and accreditation reviews. However, the Department and the University are aware of the strain these activities cause. As part of the continued attention to the Education Department’s needs, and given its complexity of programs and licensure demands, a consultant has been retained. Much like an academic program review, the purpose of the review is to provide some perspective on the array of degrees offered, staffing and resources. The external consultant’s report should be available in Fall 2014 by the time of the HLC campus visit.

The Education Department has addressed the concerns regarding the application process. Applications to the Teacher Education Program meet current Board of Teaching standards, which were reviewed in the fall of 2010. The admission process has changed during the past ten years. Prior to January 2013, student applicants were called in for an interview with one or two Education faculty members and, if a secondary education student, their content area advisor. The students were scored on their responses to questions on the 10 Standards of Effective Practice, and that score along with meeting other criteria determined whether the student was admitted. The Education Department moved to the new system as of January 2013. Candidates complete an [application packet](#), which is appraised by the candidate’s faculty advisor. Content area faculty advisors are asked to complete an academic recommendation as part of this process. If all requirements are met, the faculty advisor brings the application to the undergraduate education faculty meeting, where the applications are reviewed by all undergraduate faculty members for approval. This allows all members of the undergraduate education faculty to have input in the process, as well as saves on the resources and time needed for all the interviews with the limited number of faculty and the increasing number of education majors. If the faculty have any concerns, the candidate is asked to attend the meeting to participate in an interview. Candidates are then notified of their acceptance status immediately following the faculty meeting.

In relation to input from practitioners in the field, the Education Department has several mechanisms in place for continual review and input from outside of their department and from external community members. The Minnesota Board of Teaching requirements for accreditation of a unit require that the Education Department has regular Teacher Education Advisory Committee meetings held each year, comprised of mentor teachers, university supervisors, school administrators

(employers of SMSU graduates), and current and former students. These stakeholders provide valuable input and receive updates regarding program changes, new programs, and current assessments of SMSU student teacher candidates. The Education Department also conducts regular Campus Liaison meetings to connect with each of the other departments where courses are taught in Education licensure programs, such as Art, Music, Math, Science, and English. These meetings also provide program updates and current assessments of student teacher candidates. The agendas for both meetings are posted on the [Education Department website](#).

---

## FINANCIAL CONCERNS, BUDGETING, GROWTH, AND EQUIPMENT

Of ongoing concern are the financial stresses the University must manage. The 2004 reviewers noted “a bleak budget picture for the foreseeable future,” an unfortunately accurate prediction. In the ten years since the last accreditation, there have been several periods of budget shortfall, to which the University has had to respond with strategic belt-tightening, including cuts to operating budgets, early separation incentive programs, and restructuring. Most recently the University dealt with a large budget shortfall for the current biennium; shared governance and transparency by the administration regarding the University’s finances and budget-balancing decisions aided the University in coming to a resolution.

As described in detail in [Criterion 5](#), causes for the budget crunch are related to a problematic state budgeting process, overall decreasing state appropriations, which combined with simultaneous tuition freezes in the past several years, enrollment shortfalls, and higher state-wide compensation settlements than provided for by legislative funding. The MnSCU System financial allocation model distributes state funds to the system’s colleges and universities based on a formula using enrollment data from two years prior to the funding year. While the University works to improve factors that might negatively affect its allocation, positive results are not evident in the distribution of funds until the following biennium. Other factors in addition to those listed above caused the University’s Composite Financial Index (CFI) score to drop to .93 as of June 30, 2012, which falls in the low range per the evaluation table for public universities by the Higher Learning Commission. The University, under the new leadership of President Gores, is keenly aware of how all of these factors come into play and is addressing them, for example via the development of an adjusted enrollment modeling system, data-based decisions regarding course offerings, a more extensive program review process, and the hiring of a Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success to target further strategies related to admission and retention, among many initiatives. Faculty, staff, and departments have responded by scrutinizing their practices, for example course offerings and rotations, and providing the administration with a long list of cost-savings and ideas about growth initiatives. The University has weathered these shortfalls and operates with a lean, efficient staff. As would be expected, the difficult economic times and periods of uncertainty have affected employee morale, but the University as a whole remains resilient.

### *Tuition*

Several specific items mentioned in the 2004 Assurance document concerned tuition increases affecting the affordability and access of education, the stress on the physical plant, and leveraged equipment and equipment needs. As mentioned above, tuition was frozen by the state legislature for academic year 2013-2014 and academic year 2014-2015. MnSCU had requested \$97 million from the legislature for the 2014-2015 biennium plus increasing tuition by 3%. The legislature froze tuition and increased MnSCU’s appropriation by \$102 million: \$78 million in the funding base to offset the tuition freeze that they mandated as part of the package (\$25.5 million in FY14, with \$521,945 to

SMSU, and \$52.5 million in FY15, of which \$1,092,703 was SMSU's share), \$17 million in one-time funds to retain quality faculty and staff, and \$7.3 million for leveraged equipment funding in the second year of the biennium. So although there were additional funds from the legislature, the total increase appropriated did not equal the \$97 million request by the System plus the new revenue that would have been generated by the 3% tuition increase. While the funding level affected the University's ability to meet its expenses, the tuition freeze did help to keep higher education more affordable for students. In addition, the rate of tuition increases slowed over the past ten years (see [Table 5.2](#) in Criterion 5; see also Appendix B Federal Compliance) from the previous double-digit rates noted in 2004.

### *Physical Plant Budget*

The annual operating budgets allocated to the Physical Plant and Repair and Replacement budgets remain tight. However, several forms of funding have helped with some Physical Plant and facilities needs. Over the past bonding cycles since 2004 either through capital bonding or through the Higher Education Asset Preservation and Restoration (HEAPR) funding, SMSU has received funding to make improvements to the fire protection system, install a central chiller system, update the Astronomy Lab, make improvements to the Greenhouse, upgrade elevators to meet new code requirements, remodel science labs and the Culinary @ labs (included with these remodels were improvements to the heating and ventilation systems within those areas), improve high voltage switch gear, improve the main entry door systems and replace the roof on Founders Hall, replace windows and entry roofing on the Individualized Learning building, and replace the filter system within the natatorium. In the summer of 2012 with funding from the MN State Public Building Enhanced Energy Efficiency Program (PBEEEP), a large percentage of all lighting throughout the campus was retrofitted, eliminating the old T12 bulbs and converting to T8 lighting, which reduces the cost of bulb replacements as well as aids in energy efficiency. The academic and administration buildings continue to have deferred maintenance of approximately \$33 million as defined in the FRRM program.

Insurance payouts have also helped with some replacements. On July 1, 2011, a windstorm ripped through southwest Minnesota, causing extensive damage to many towns and rural areas. The storm caused approximately \$750,000-\$800,000 of damage to the SMSU campus. Damage included broken windows, roof flashing damage, water damage from rain coming under doors or into the building from doors ripped open from the wind, a large light pole totally bent over and destroyed at the Regional Event Center, damage to athletic field fencing, hail damage to newly installed roofing, and many trees with broken limbs or torn totally from the ground. Although the goal of insurance is to fix those items damaged by the storm, efforts were made to make improvements, not just replace, where possible.

Other forms of assistance with the Physical Plant budget include lowered maintenance costs, revenue, and donations. The Revenue Fund buildings have approximately \$7 million of deferred maintenance, most of which is within the older residence hall buildings. The newer buildings, however, have lower maintenance costs. The Sweetland Hall residence hall has reduced maintenance since it just opened in 2009. The remodel and additions to the Student Center and Conference Center, which reopened in April of 2005, have lowered the maintenance needs of these buildings and have created spaces much needed, used, and appreciated by the SMSU students. The remodeled conference center has generated additional revenue from many rentals of space for weddings, meetings, and other large gatherings. In the summer of 2011, improvements were made to the area west of the Student Center known now as Alumni Plaza. This rework of the ground area to make for

better flow and use of space along with a tiered space for events was all accomplished with donations from Alumni, hence the naming Alumni Plaza.

Although the Physical Plant and Repair and Replacement budgets continues to be lower than needed, through prudent use of resources, the Physical Plant and Facilities staff have been able to accomplish many improvements throughout the University. Preventative maintenance improvements are helping to maintain and lengthen the life of the physical plant and equipment.

#### *Stimulus Funds and Equipment Needs*

The University used approximately \$300,000 of ARRA stimulus funds to purchase equipment for academic programs during fiscal years 2010 and 2011. The University also used approximately \$200,000 of the ARRA stimulus funds to purchase equipment for the maintenance and grounds crews.

In 2012, the System Office offered a competitive leveraged equipment funding program. SMSU received funds for equipment for the Culinology ® and Hospitality labs. These funds were matched by contributions from local companies. During the 2014-2015 biennium the state legislature allocated funds for a leveraged equipment program, and these funds must be matched by collaborating third parties or foundations. SMSU will receive \$104,294. State funds must be matched dollar-for-dollar by cash or in-kind contributions from non-state funds.

The University has developed separate funding cycles to refresh computer workstations for faculty/staff, including smart classroom systems, and for student access workstations, including the computer labs. These funding cycles supported by University General Funds and Student Technology Fee funding also provide a process for updating workstations available for use by adjunct faculty, student workers, special purpose labs, student clubs and organizations, and even public access locations.

In 2008, the Science Department was able to secure funding from the Student Technology Fee process to acquire 20 digital microscopes for utilization in science labs.

---

### RECRUITMENT OF A DIVERSE FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

As noted in the 2004 review, “Recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty and administration continues to be a concern for the campus, exacerbated by the lack of a community of color both on and off the campus.” Attracting and keeping faculty of color continues to be a concern. Overall, there has not been a significant change in the number of faculty of color since 2004. In FY04, 11% of faculty were minorities and in FY13 10% were minorities. The percentage has fluctuated between 9% and 14% over the past 10 years. While difficulties attracting faculty of color remain, additional progress has been made since 2004 in the hiring of women. In the 2012-2014 Affirmative Action Plan, females were not underutilized in the faculty work group in the 2012 workforce analysis. It is possible that within a specific discipline, females might be underutilized. The System Office also is working to further support diversity initiatives (see [MnSCU Diversity Plan](#) in e-resources; see also the [Criterion 1C](#) discussion on diversity]. Support systems and recruitment and retention strategies for faculty and staff of color, along with students of color, must be clearly outlined in a new campus diversity plan; this will be addressed in the 2014-2015 strategic planning process.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW, ANNUAL REPORTS, AND DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Much progress has been made regarding academic program review and academic planning, resulting in better communication internally as well as aiding in explanations to the public, legislature, and System Office regarding changes or improvements. Data are increasingly used to support decision-making processes, not only in the program review process but throughout campus. This increased and more purposeful use of data addresses a concern voiced in the 2004 review: “The campus collects extensive data on its students, programs, and operations, but it is unclear how effectively this data is incorporated into the decision-making process.” Further, in the 2004 Advancement section, HLC reviewers suggested additional focus on institutional research needs. Examples of the University’s commitment to improved use of data and communication include a reorganization in 2005 to create a Chief Information Officer position and additional reallocation of resources and positions to create a Director of Institutional Research and Reporting Services in 2009; the annual collection and dissemination of Program Analysis System (PAS) data, which departments receive and use to help in their budgeting and planning processes, and which the entire University relied upon as one tool in making decisions during the recent budget shortfall; the creation of an Enrollment Analytics Team, whose analyses aid in retention and recruitment efforts; the creation of a new Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success position (with the first person in this position taking office in July 2014) to help develop and oversee strategic uses of data for these purposes; survey features from Hobson’s Retain, used since 2010, to help identify students struggling and provide them the appropriate outreach; the use of data to improve course scheduling; and the improved understanding of data’s role in assessment and continuously improving assessment methods and measures. While the outcomes of some of these efforts remain works in progress, the University has made significant strides in recognizing the importance of data, creating appropriate infrastructure to support data-driven decision-making, and sifting and selecting appropriate data to utilize, and continues to work on revising data collection and mining approaches where necessary.

While academic program review and campus communication were identified in the 2004 review as meeting or exceeding expectations at the time, it is worth noting that the University has continued to work on its efforts in these areas, especially in regard to sharing information and communicating across departments. Departments annually collect and summarize their accomplishments and changes in a departmental report, and all department reports are collected and summarized in annual college reports; in an effort to further promote transparency, the current college reports have been published in recent years on the University website on the [Academic Deans’ web page](#). The information in the reports is conveyed to the System Office and, as well, is used as needed in public relations efforts locally and across the state and in the legislature. Departments are able to use the information filed in the annual reports in their five-year program reviews. The Program Review [policy](#) and [procedure](#) was updated in 2014, and a [guide for the external reviewer’s](#) report helps to standardize the process across departments. The program review process, with its analysis of course-level and program-level data and subsequent changes based on those findings, feeds the annual department report as well, and both processes require feedback on five-year plans for programs and departments. Both processes thus contribute to ongoing improvements to programs and departments.

The 2004 Advancement section also recommended several additional kinds of data that would be useful in program review, specifically naming surveys of employers and alumni and the creation of



advisory boards for all academic programs. While many programs do indeed survey employers and alumni as part of their program review process, this is not a standard requirement in SMSU's official procedure. Several programs have established advisory boards, most notably [Culinology® and Hospitality](#) and Nursing programs. The Teacher Education program is now required by the Minnesota Department of Education to do a survey of past graduates and their employers as part of the new PERCA (Program Effectiveness Reporting for Continuous Approval) requirements. The first such survey was completed in Spring 2014, with results being distributed to Campus Liaison and Teacher Education Advisory Committee meetings in the Fall 2014 semester. However, for other programs, conducting such surveys or having advisory boards remains a choice of individual programs rather than a requirement. The Deans and Provost continue to emphasize the importance of program review while also recognizing that sometimes circumstances require a postponement or an alignment with a discipline's content-area accreditation from an external organization; by the time of the 2014 HLC visit, the Library and all major degree programs except two (Agronomy and Marketing, which is scheduled to be completed in Fall 2014) will have completed at least one program review since the 2004 HLC visit.

---

## FACULTY EVALUATION, TENURE, AND PROMOTION PROCESS

The 2004 review noted the following as needing further attention: "Within the broad parameters established by the IFO Master MnSCU agreement, the campus is encouraged to work toward more effective and standardized practices for tenure and promotion." The IFO and MnSCU work through contractually prescribed procedures and deadlines. In regard to the faculty evaluation process, much remains the same in the Agreement as it was ten years ago. The [IFO-MnSCU Agreement](#) requires goal-setting and reporting of faculty progress in five criteria: 1) effective teaching or other assigned duties; 2) scholarly or creative achievement or research; 3) evidence of continuing preparation or study; 4) contributions to student growth and development; and 5) service to the university and community), with evaluation required at both the planning and final report stage. Each fall the Deans' Office hosts a training session on writing Professional Development Plans and Reports, and a template is posted on the Deans' web page. The timeline for the goal-setting and reporting varies according to faculty status, with annual review of probationary full-time faculty, for example, and biennial reporting of tenured full professors. While department chair input is part of the process, department chairs are not supervisors under the contract; only Deans function as supervisors in the evaluation role, with personnel files and complaint records in the Deans' Office only. Faculty are to include in their plans "a process for student assessment" but are not required to conduct formal student evaluations; there is no University-wide formal student evaluation procedure. The Agreement also provides latitude for what to include within each of the criteria. (The IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement can be found in Materials Set II; see especially Article 22 and Appendix G, which describes guidelines for each of the criteria, in the Agreement document.)

The IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement recognizes the unique differences between the wide range of disciplines and therefore allows flexibility for departments to establish guidelines and procedures for tenure and promotion. A recent change in the Agreement is the requirement that departments must now submit comments in writing regarding department members' professional development reports, with these comments forwarded to the appropriate Dean. This change was enacted in the 2013-2014 academic year (after the 2011-2013 Agreement was ratified by the legislature in spring of 2013) and so is a recent development. It prompted each department to consider its internal processes for the faculty reporting cycle as well as tenure and promotion, the procedures for which, according to the Agreement, continue to remain under each individual department's purview. Thus

the review process has been more formalized, and departments write their own policies and procedures for approaching the review requirement. The requirement was the subject of a faculty assembly and several all-chairs' meetings, and many departments developed similar procedures.

The new departmental requirement coupled with the ongoing training from the Deans' Office has helped to create clarity and consistency in the evaluation process. A new provision in the Agreement marks statewide concern regarding evaluation issues. The provision calls for a joint task force with members from both IFO and MnSCU to explore professional development process training and faculty evaluation guidelines, with the first meeting scheduled for summer of 2014.

---

## TECHNOLOGY PLAN

While the 2004 review recognized "major strides in the incorporation of information technologies into instructional and institutional operations over the last decade" and commented positively on overall strategic planning, the review also cited a need for better planning and implementation of technology: "The campus lacks a comprehensive strategic plan for the deployment and use of emerging information technologies in support of learning and student success." This has been addressed through comprehensive oversight via a CIO position and through the creation of a three-year technology plan, in addition to the ongoing work of a number of committees and work groups.

As noted in the earlier section regarding data-based decision-making, a CIO position was created and hired at the University in 2005. Simultaneously, the previous Computer Services department was reorganized into a new Information Technology Services division. In July of 2007, the current CIO, who is in a shared position with the Southwest/West Central Higher Education Organization for Telecommunications and Technology (SHOT), joined SMSU, initially in an interim position which has since moved to a permanent role. The CIO reports directly to the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. An initial internal organizational structure implemented in 2007 focused on enhancing the quality of the division's services has been modified during the Summer of 2014 to help the division with making progress towards meeting its new Strategic Plan outlined below. Thus the creation of the CIO position has enabled the University to create an integrated system for reporting, planning, and assessment of needs.

At the time of the 2004 review, SMSU was in the process of responding to a MnSCU System-wide request for all campuses to complete a technology plan using a MnSCU standard format. That plan was finished shortly afterward. At the System level, turnover and change in mission or approach happened several times since 2004, affecting somewhat the University's own planning process. While awaiting MnSCU plans for further templates, the current CIO created annual plans based on objectives as needed. In spring 2011, a thorough strategic technology planning process kicked off, culminating in the comprehensive [SMSU Information Technology Services July 2013 – June 2016 Strategic Plan](#). Four strategic directions resulted, each supported with four to eight goals followed by specific objectives. For example, the new Mobile Technologies Lab (MTL), which opened in Spring 2014, accomplishes one of the objectives related to Goal Two, "Develop and implement strategies that enhance the SMSU community's ability to fully utilize mobile devices in teaching, learning, work and recreational activities," of Strategic Direction Four, "Support for tools and processes that enable increased efficiency and innovation across all areas of the University." The Mobile Technology Lab is a location where faculty can experiment with mobile technology tools that can be used to support instructional activities. Among the resources currently available in the Lab include a mobile iPad cart containing 15 iPads and several pre-installed apps, Apple TV, a smartboard, and a projector. A workshop to assist faculty in the implementation of new technologies into their teaching was funded

by a grant from the Minnesota Tele-Media Board and offered during the summer of 2014 to faculty from SMSU, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Ridgewater College, and area K-12 schools.

The technology strategic plan supports all areas, not only academics. For example, trainings for administrative assistants on the use of data for their internal operations now take place as part of Goal One for Strategic Direction Four. Yet another example is the migration of all campus systems to MnSCU StarID, a single identifier for logins to University and System services, part of Strategic Direction Two, maintaining a “reliable, accessible, secure and advanced technology infrastructure.” A great number of initiatives described in the strategic technology plan are enacted or in process. The full plan, which describes the history of the planning process, organizational structure, and directions, goals, and objectives, can be found on the Information Technology Services [\(ITS\) website](#); the ITS organization chart can also be found at this link.

In addition to the ITS Department, technology needs on campus are supported by a variety of committees and work groups, whose efforts are guided by the strategic directions. SMSU has several standing technology services-related committees. These committees include: 1) University Technology Advisory Committee; 2) Student Technology Fee Committee; 3) SMSUFA Academic Technology Committee; and 4) the Information Security Team. Also, on an as needed basis, ad hoc committees or task forces are created to develop recommendations for addressing specific issues. An example of such an ad hoc group was the Technology Accessibility Task Force (TATF) that met during the Fall of 2012. The TATF developed recommendations for the University to pursue to address the issue of providing technology-enabled services that meet accessibility targets for persons with disabilities. Outside of committee structures, a D2L Users Group meets regularly to provide training and information to interested faculty and staff; a similar concept for Adobe Connect Users is in process.

---

## FACULTY OVERLOAD

Overload and its possible strain on faculty was listed as needing attention in the 2004 review, which stated that “Budget reductions have added to the limited staffing pattern. Faculty members are often asked to teach overload to insure that essential courses are offered. It appears that large numbers of faculty regularly carry overload assignments which may diminish their effectiveness in the classroom and their ability to provide service to the students, the university, and to the community.” Overload and the related issue of use of adjuncts has remained a concern as well as a focal point in budgeting since 2004; in addition to being a local concern, overload has been a System-wide issue. Since 2004, the University has reduced the number of overload credits an individual faculty member can carry. This is an enforcement of the [IFO-MnSCU Agreement](#), which states in Article 12 that “Normally ... total overload shall not exceed five (5) credits per academic year or nine-month appointment year,” or in other words, 29 credits per nine-month appointment (the cap does not apply to summer school appointments). Historically, the University operated on a 30-credit limit given its three-credit course scheduling backbone. MnSCU requires reporting of overloads, and the Deans must put into writing the rationale for why a faculty member might exceed the normal limitation. In addition to MnSCU oversight, the University is monitoring overload, as well as adjunct usage, as one mechanism for helping to balance the budget and to avoid retrenchment of tenured or probationary faculty in response to recent budget shortfalls. As much as possible, faculty are to teach essential courses within their normal load limits and to review and revise course offerings in order to do so.

However, some overload is still needed in order to maintain programs. Contractually, the administration is required to offer faculty an overload option before hiring adjuncts. In the summer of 2013, the IFO won an arbitration decision in which the faculty union had grieved the decision of a different MnSCU university to deny overload to a tenured faculty member (within the five credit limit) and hire an adjunct to teach instead. The university in question was found in violation of Article 21, Section E, Subd. 3.a of the IFO-MnSCU Agreement. In addition, some faculty prefer overload. Depending on the nature of the overload and individual faculty members' experiences with it, some faculty are happy and able to accommodate the overload. In some cases, in fact, the overload is a better solution than an adjunct hire, as the faculty on overload have greater contractual office hour and service obligations, and thus are held responsible for student and University needs. Yet another circumstance given SMSU's rural location is that at times, overload is the only option available due to the limited number of qualified adjuncts present in the region, especially those with certain expertise areas.

Sometimes adjuncts are used rather than overload because a faculty member chooses not to have overload (s/he dislikes it), or because s/he understands the need to save money and realizes an adjunct might cost less, depending on the faculty member's salary level. When and why overload is used compared to hiring an adjunct varies from department to department, depending on the circumstances. Overall, the University administration and departments are mindful of fiscal responsibility and take care to ensure, as best they can, that faculty have adequate time to meet all of their responsibilities associated with a normal workload, including service.

---

#### STUDENT COMPLAINT LOG

An item in the "Compliance with Federal Requirements" section of the 2004 review noted that "The procedures for handling complaints have not been centralized, but the university does maintain the individual complaint records in several locations. The institution intends to immediately address this issue with all complaints recorded in log format with detailed documentation of each complaint and its disposition in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs." This complaint log was indeed created shortly after the previous HLC review. Rather than being housed in the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, however, the log is maintained by the Deans' Administrative Assistant. Given the nature of the log and FERPA considerations, the log is available for review in the Deans' Office rather than in e-resources.

---

#### HLC CONTACT INFORMATION IN ACADEMIC CATALOG

Also noted as needing attention in 2004 was the following: "SMSU's catalog fails to include the address and phone number of the Higher Learning Commission. The institution will remedy this deficiency in the next version of the catalog which will be published for the Fall 2004." The address and phone number of the Higher Learning Commission is now found in the introduction of the [academic catalog](#), as well as is published on the University web site.

---

#### IMPROVEMENTS TO THE UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

While listed as evidence of how Criterion 5 was met, the 2004 review contained a note suggesting that "The University's website <http://www.southwestmsu.edu> appears to be user-friendly, but needs continual development and maintenance." Since that time, the entire web site has been redesigned; in 2010, the redesigned site won [five awards](#) from eduStyle, an educational design web site. Of

course, the web site continues to evolve in order to serve the multiple audiences that visit it. Recent improvements include the creation of “SMSU Today” as a central location to post campus announcements and news, a “Web Alerts” system that notifies students and other University members about cancelled classes or other concerns, and the addition of mobile-enhanced applications since students prefer to access this information via mobile devices.

Keeping the web pages up-to-date remains a constant challenge. Office administrative assistants have received training, and the Web Services Office has [posted policies and instructions](#) for departments’ use. Support for the web site has also increased pursuant to 2004. Whereas in 2004, the web site was supported by a single staff person, the web site is now supported by a multi-person team that includes personnel from Communications & Marketing in addition to Information Technology Services. This team addresses such items as web site content and its technical underpinnings.

## ENGAGING IN THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

Many members of the SMSU community have been diligently working for several years to complete this self-study and prepare for review by the HLC. In February of 2010, less than a year after completing the 2009 progress report, the Associate Provost made an [all-University presentation](#) to engage the campus in preparations for the next review. The presentation ended with asking everyone to consider how their work connects to the LEP outcomes, tying the importance of the LEP to accreditation. This section will describe the process used to complete the self-study, including information about the Steering Committee, goals of the self-study, audiences for the report, information collected for the report, and preparation of the report.

### THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The self-study process began in August 2010 with the appointment of the self-study coordinator, followed by appointment of fifteen additional members of the Steering Committee representing students, faculty, staff, and administration. The Steering Committee began meeting in January of 2011 and continues its work preparing for the HLC review team visit.

Current members of the Steering Committee include the following:

Co-Chair:	Lori Baker, Self-Study Coordinator
Co-Chair:	Beth Weatherby, Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
Dean of ALS:	Jan Loft
Dean of BEPS:	Raphael Onyeaghala

Dean of Students:	Scott Crowell
Student Representative:	Rachael Posusta, Student Association President
Faculty:	Kathleen Ashe (Library)
	Will Thomas (LEC co-chair)
	Doug Simon (BEPS representative)
	Betsy Desy (ALS representative)
Vice President for Advancement and Foundation Executive Director:	Bill Mulso
Vice President for Finance and Administration:	Deb Kerkaert
Athletic Director:	Chris Hmielewski
Chief Information Officer:	Dan Baun
Director of Institutional Research:	Alan Matzner
Extended Learning and Academic Outreach:	Lori Wynia

**\* Notes:**

The Committee for Institutional Assessment is cross-represented by Baker, Loft, and Desy; the Physical Plant is represented by Kerkaert.

Jan Loft replaces previous Dean Lyn Brodersen (Jan.-May 2011); Raphael Onyeaghala replaces previous Dean Dan Campagna (Jan.-June 2011); Will Thomas replaces Corey Butler (Jan. 2011-May 2012); Lori Wynia replaces Betty Roers (Jan. 2011-July 2013). The Student

Representative is the President of the SMSU Student Association, elected annually; past Student Presidents include Joshua Anderson, Kyle Berndt, Joseph Stremcha, and Ben Dolan.

The Steering Committee was charged with a number of responsibilities:

- serving in an impartial role representing employees and constituents of the University;
- promoting University-wide participation in the self-study process;
- developing a communication plan;
- setting goals and identifying audiences for the self-study report;
- addressing issues noted in the previous HLC evaluation;
- developing questions related to the five Criteria for Accreditation to be answered during the self-study process;
- establishing subcommittees and supporting and directing the work of the subcommittees;
- understanding that the self-study report must be evaluative as well as descriptive;
- receiving findings, data, and draft chapters from subcommittees;
- deciding on evaluative recommendations to include in the report;
- and transmitting those recommendations to the university community.

All of the Steering Committee's agendas and minutes are available on [SMSU's HLC web site](#).

---

## GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

Early in the process, the Steering Committee established six goals for the self-study report. The Committee agreed upon the following goals:

- Strengthen the institution's overall effectiveness and serve the University's diverse student body and regional constituencies
- Demonstrate that the University meets the criteria as well as minimum expectations of the Higher Learning Commission for continuing accreditation
- Assess the University's overall effectiveness, given its institutional mission, vision, and goals, by identifying strengths and concerns and developing strategies to address any areas for improvement
- Use the self-study process to its best advantage to overlap and coordinate with ongoing work in strategic planning, individual programs' specialized accreditations, MnSCU system-level review, and University assessment efforts
- Involve all stake-holders, both internal to the University and external in the broader community, in the self-study process
- Communicate clearly across all constituencies

---

## AUDIENCES AND PURPOSES FOR THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

As the Steering Committee prepared this self-study, the members envisioned multiple audiences for the report. The primary audience is the Higher Learning Commission and its representatives who will review the report and evaluate its findings. The purpose of the report for this audience is to demonstrate an honest evaluation of the University and to provide evidence that Southwest Minnesota State meets or exceeds all criteria for accreditation.

Other audiences include the groups who make up Southwest Minnesota State, such as the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and members of the System Office and the MnSCU Board of Trustees. In

helping create and respond to this self-study, they in essence help to shape the vision and actions of the University itself. The purpose of the report for them is both formative as well as informative.

Finally, there are multiple external audiences who will also find elements of this self-study of use, such as parents, alumni, the legislature, System-level staff, the SMSU Foundation, donors to the Foundation, community and business constituencies (both local and in the broader region), other educational institutions, prospective students, and, because the self-study will be publicly accessible on the University web site, anyone who might access the self-study in that manner. The self-study document serves an informative purpose for members of these groups who might be in search of specific information, as well as should present a cogent, fully-formed vision of the University that these groups might be able to use in any decision-making.

---

## COLLECTING INFORMATION FOR THE SELF-STUDY

At its initial meetings, the Steering Committee created the [Self-Study Design](#) (summarized in the goals, audiences, and purposes sections above), studied the criteria for accreditation, and created a master storyboard, outlining the key topics that needed to be covered in each criterion. After this introductory work in Spring 2011, the Steering Committee adopted [a subcommittee structure](#) in order to accomplish the work of gathering and evaluating information related to the criteria for accreditation. In Fall of 2011, the Steering Committee established five criterion teams, each co-chaired by two Steering Committee members, with each team dedicated to one of the five criteria for accreditation. Because the Steering Committee began meeting early in the process, the Committee was already active during the revision of the HLC criteria, and the initial criterion teams were developed around the previous set of HLC criteria. The teams were gathering basic information that they felt would be of use whether or not the team retained that information or handed it off to a different team once the new criteria were finalized. In addition to the criterion teams, additional subcommittees included a Federal Compliance team; an evidence team, whose members aided the other teams in locating data as needed; a Publicity team, made up of the personnel from the Office of Communications and Marketing along with the Self-Study Coordinator; an Editing and Publishing team, which consisted primarily of the Self-Study Coordinator and the University Publications Editor; and a Hospitality team, overseen by the Vice President for Advancement.

Membership on the criterion teams was open to all university personnel, with appointments to the teams overseen by employees' respective bargaining units, in order to ensure that representation for the bargaining units was spread across the five criterion teams. Student representation for each of the criterion teams was sought by establishing a [student nomination process](#). Any member of campus (staff, faculty, other students) could nominate students to join a criterion team. The Steering Committee chose a nomination process in order to give the appointment to a committee prestige and to ensure that any student was eligible, with no restrictions on nominations and thus also avoiding selecting students from only Student Association or only students already known to Steering Committee members. The process worked well, with student representation found for all of the criterion teams. While there was some attrition when students graduated, the teams were able to retain student membership for the bulk of their investigative work. Membership on the Federal Compliance team was selected by the Steering Committee co-chairs to align with the types of information necessary to complete the federal compliance requirements. Minutes from many of the criterion teams' meetings can be found on the [SMSU HLC web site](#). As demonstrated there, the teams accomplished the work differently, with some teams assigning out the work and meeting only a few times, and other teams meeting intensively. This was in part determined by the type of information



required for the respective criterion and by how the teams chose to engage with the shifting criteria; several teams waited to meet in-depth only after the new criteria were established.

As one means of collecting information, the Steering Committee employed the Southwest Marketing Advisory Center, whose director and students aided the Steering Committee as requested. The Steering Committee developed a survey during the spring of 2013 to be conducted as part of the self-study process. The electronic format provided questions targeted for community members, students, alumni, employers, faculty, and staff. After approval by the IRB committee, a link to the survey was distributed to alumni, employers of graduates, and through University email, with the student survey sent separately in March to graduate, distance, and undergraduate students via email. The response rates varied depending on the intended audience. The survey questions and complete data can be found in e-resources ([student data](#) and [non-student data](#)). While survey results are included in several of the criterion chapters, the results are meant to be generally descriptive of attitudes and perceptions rather than serve as hard quantitative data. Additional survey information that the Steering Committee and criterion teams consulted included the NSSE results (from data collected in 2008 and 2011) and Senior Survey information (conducted annually when students apply to graduate). Survey results were available to all criterion teams for review during the self-study process. Additional information for all criterion teams included any data found on the SMSU [Data Management and Institutional Research web pages](#).

In addition, the Self-Study Coordinator visited meetings of faculty, staff, and students to invite constituent groups to send the Steering Committee ideas, concerns, and suggestions related to the self-study. She also discussed the accreditation process in several radio programs broadcast to area audiences, was interviewed in the local newspaper, and published several columns concerning the self-study process and an invitation to provide feedback in the [Focus alumni magazine](#).

---

## PREPARING THE REPORT

Using information from sources mentioned above, the five criterion teams and Federal Compliance team drafted chapters of the self-study report and presented them to the Steering Committee beginning in Spring 2013. During Fall 2013, the Steering Committee reviewed each draft and provided feedback. The Self-Study Coordinator rewrote each criterion chapter using the feedback.

In order to ensure that the full University community felt included in the process, during the spring semester of 2014, the drafts were posted on the SMSU HLC web site, and a link for online feedback for each criterion chapter was provided. Further, each criterion draft was then the subject of an all-University conversation, where more feedback was given. The Self-Study Coordinator revised all of the criterion chapters again based on the cumulative feedback, and wrote all of the introductory material. The revisions were circulated to the Steering Committee again. The full draft of the self-study was posted to the University web site in summer of 2014 for final review by bargaining units and any interested public. The President, Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, and Deans reviewed the final draft of the self-study, and the Publications Editor finalized the electronic document for submission to the HLC. Updated data not available until after June of 2014 will be provided to the HLC reviewers when they arrive on campus.

---

## THIRD-PARTY COMMENT

In addition to preparing the self-study report per HLC Requirements, the University also followed the guidelines for third-party comment. At the end of July, an advertisement in the local newspaper was

printed, and emails with the direct link to the HLC third-party comment survey were sent to alumni, donors, employers in the region, advisory board members, and other external constituents as well as were distributed via internal University email lists.

## CRITERION 1

### MISSION

*The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.*

Southwest Minnesota State University formally articulates its mission through a number of different channels, including written publications, the University web site, strategic planning, budget priorities, and its daily operations. The mission guides and instructs the manner in which the institution operates. The University mission is observable within program and departmental mission and curriculum development, strategic planning, co-curricular activities, adult education, concurrent enrollment programs, and partnerships with a variety of organizations.

The mission of Southwest Minnesota State University states:

Southwest Minnesota State University prepares students to meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities. Our comprehensive degree programs, taught in the liberal arts tradition, are dedicated to connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world.

The vision statement for the University is simple, yet precise: "Southwest Minnesota State University is a university of choice." The mission and vision are further accompanied by a list of thirteen guiding values, described in detail in [1B](#).

An example of how the mission guides the institution's operations is the transformation of University's general education program, formerly known as the Liberal Arts Core (LAC) but now referred to as the Liberal Education Program (LEP), which occurred over the course of five years. The University mission maintains a deep commitment to teaching in the "liberal arts tradition," and the investment by the University community to transform the general education program to satisfy a key feature of the mission is apparent. For a full description of this process, see [Criterion 3](#). The LEP is an exemplar of how the mission has guided the institution's operations, as administrators, faculty, and students channeled their efforts to create a general education program that is responsive to the University mission, to the students, and to the communities the University serves.

In living out its mission, SMSU engages in meaningful partnerships across the region and provides students and community members access to a broad variety of educational opportunities, not only through its degree programs but through the rich activities it sponsors. Over the past ten years since the last review, as described in the Introduction, SMSU has added key programs in demand in the region, strategically expanded and improved its facilities so as to enable the community's use of them, and enhanced the leadership and critical thinking skills of its students through multiple avenues for civic engagement and professional development.

## CORE COMPONENT 1A: THE INSTITUTION'S MISSION IS BROADLY UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE INSTITUTION AND GUIDES ITS OPERATIONS.

*1A1. The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.*

The current SMSU mission stated above has been in place since 2007, when it was approved by the MnSCU Board of Trustees after an extensive revision process in which the full SMSU community participated. Attention to the needs of the southwest Minnesota region has always been at the heart of SMSU's mission since the University was chartered in the mid-1960s. Additionally, since the MnSCU system was created by the legislature in 1995, SMSU's mission and strategic plan have been aligned with the system-level mission and strategic directions.

### HISTORY OF THE MISSION STATEMENT

SMSU's commitment to service began with its creation in 1963 and the development of its mission statement. The first mission statement received approval by the Minnesota State University Board on March 19, 1966. That mission statement emphasized the liberal arts and professional programs with special attention directed to the southwest Minnesota region. The mission statement remained largely fixed for the next three decades, except for formatting changes to the mission statement directed by the governing board.

In the 1980s, the university changed its focus from offering technical programs to supporting programs in two-year colleges through 2 + 2 programs and articulation agreements. While not a change in the mission, it highlights SMSU's shift in collaborating with regional two-year community college partners. Then, in 1993, the mission was revised to include graduate programs as one of the University's commitments to regional needs. Such programs included master's degree programs for teachers and administrators and for employees in the business field. In addition to the approved mission statement, in 1993 the University established nine values, and in 1994 added a vision statement (the [1993 mission, goals, and vision statement](#) is available in e-resources).

This 1993 version of the mission, vision, and values was in effect during the previous HLC review in 2004. Though in 2000 the System Office had proposed that each university review its mission at a future board meeting, Southwest Minnesota State University received permission to postpone their review until after completion of the self-study and accreditation review in 2004. During that HLC self-study process, no changes in the mission and values were proposed with the exception of revising outdated language used to refer to vocational-technical colleges and institutes, now known as technical colleges, and revising wording to reflect the change in emphasis on technical programs. On a related note, it was during this time that the name of the University changed from "Southwest State University" to "Southwest Minnesota State University" in 2003.

The 2004 HLC review team commended SMSU, stating in the [Assurance document](#) that they found “There is strong evidence of the growing recognition of the multiple responsibilities the campus has in serving a community, the 19-county service region, and the state,” and that the name change had been helpful in identifying the University with the region per its mission.

## SHARED GOVERNANCE IN DEVELOPING THE CURRENT MISSION STATEMENT

To follow up on the previous self-study’s recommendations and to move forward with an official review, on September 28, 2006, President David Danahar assembled a Brown and Gold Task Force to help create a “road map” for the next five years. A significant charge to the Brown and Gold Task Force was to consider revision of the mission, vision, and goals of the University. The President had all branches of his cabinet prepare biennial strategic plan white papers to aid the task force in their work. With these in hand, and over the next seven months, the task force worked to provide a series of recommendations to President Danahar.

The task force was made up of four students, six faculty, and eight staff members appointed to the group by their respective bargaining units or organizations and led by Dr. Mary Hickerson, Associate Provost, per President Danahar’s guidelines. The group was given the directive to study the history and consider the future needs of all components of the University and come up with a series of recommendations. There were three primary questions for the group to address: 1) How might SMSU’s mission, goals, and vision statement be revised and updated? 2) What can be done to achieve the goal of SMSU’s being the University of choice for students? and 3) How can the undergraduate experience at SMSU be enhanced? The task force members were instructed to reach out and talk to all areas of the University and, while being aware of the realities the University faced, to set forth ideas not yet thought of or enacted on campus. Task force members were told that the goal was not necessarily to abandon the then-current mission statement but to suggest revisions as fitting with their research and planning, and that the revised mission statement, and the rest of the work of the task force, would be used in helping shape strategic planning.

The Brown and Gold Task Force members decided to split into three subcommittees per the questions to be addressed. Each subcommittee elected their own chair; as an example of the involvement of the various constituent groups, a student chaired the Undergraduate Experience Subcommittee, while faculty members chaired the Mission Subcommittee and the University of Choice Subcommittee. The task force’s recommendations were delivered to President Danahar on May 1, 2007. The task force recommended a [revised mission and vision statement](#), [thirteen “Core Values,”](#) and [eight “Strategic Priorities”](#) to help focus the work of the University in its next round of strategic planning. The President took all of the recommendations under advisement over the summer and in the fall of 2007 announced that he accepted the task force’s work and organized Strategic Planning Day in September of 2007 around the task force’s recommendations. The recommendations were integrated into the strategic planning process. The Board of Trustees approved the revised mission, vision, and values in September of 2008. Documentation of the Brown and Gold Task Force’s recommendations and strategic planning can be found on the [Strategic Planning web site](#) under the 2007-2012 Planning link.

During the mission, vision, and values revision process, President Danahar required that all constituencies on campus be represented. Doing so ensured that the revisions strongly

reflected all of the varied perspectives, not just one leader's vision of what the campus should be emphasizing. Involving all constituencies also helped create buy-in across campus to the prioritization of this activity, enabling the tight turnaround time of a mere seven months for such a large project, and guaranteeing the project a high profile on campus. It is a good example of the importance of shared governance on the SMSU campus, and represents a fitting and appropriate approach for the SMSU university context.

*1A2. The institution's academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.*

---

### ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND THE LIBERAL ARTS FOUNDATION: SMSU'S CENTERPIECE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

SMSU's academic programs consist of the Liberal Education Program (LEP), which every student must complete, and the degree program(s) chosen by the student. Both are necessary components for fulfilling the promises inherent in the SMSU mission statement.

#### *The Liberal Education Program (LEP) Cornerstone*

A cornerstone of the SMSU mission is the offering of "comprehensive degree programs, taught in the liberal arts tradition." The Liberal Education Program (LEP) at SMSU provides the foundation for exposing all students to the liberal arts, regardless of their major. The LEP in its current form came into effect fall semester 2010, as a result of five years of planning and research prompted by the previous HLC review (see [Criterion 3](#) for the full history related to this revision). The LEP is built upon ten learning outcomes that were developed by the faculty to represent this foundation of higher education:

- Understand the techniques and habits of thought in a variety of liberal arts disciplines, having attained an adequate foundation of knowledge in those disciplines
- Communicate effectively
- Be creative thinkers able to identify, formulate, and solve problems using interdisciplinary perspectives
- Be critical thinkers who evaluate information wisely and examine how assumptions and positions are shaped
- Understand both physical and social aspects of the world and their place in it
- Embrace the similarities among peoples and appreciate the diversity that enriches the human experience
- Analyze moral judgments and engage in moral discourse
- Practice responsible citizenship in their local and global communities
- Continue life-long learning
- Integrate mind, body, and spirit, the essential elements of a flourishing life

The LEP is designed to ensure that all students obtain a solid, general education across the fundamental domains of human knowledge. Faculty believe that, when empowered with these ideas, facts, skills, and values, students can understand and effectively participate in the affairs of the community, nation, and wider world.

The University took great care in developing the LEP so that it reflects a philosophy and blend of coursework that align with the University’s mission and student needs. While many of the LEP outcomes correspond to the [statewide Minnesota Transfer Curriculum \(MTC\)](#) goals (the MTC requires forty credits of undergraduate general education which are fully transferable to other MnSCU institutions and the University of Minnesota), the LEP outcomes were created by SMSU, for SMSU, and reflect deeply researched and intentional themes in higher education most appropriate to SMSU’s student body and in keeping with its role as a state institution.

All undergraduates who begin their education at SMSU must take LEP 100 First Year Seminar, a first- and a second-year writing course, and a speech course. These courses provide a baseline in the “core skills” of critical thinking, oral and written communication, and information literacy. Other LEP goals are introduced in the remainder of the MTC requirements. The LEP requirements extend beyond the first two years of MTC general education outlined by the MnSCU System and include course requirements in the junior and senior years. In order to receive a bachelor’s degree from SMSU, in addition to the MTC curriculum, students must complete 1) a core skills-focused class within their major, 2) a capstone within their major (in some degree programs, the major capstone double-counts as the core-skills major requirement), and 3) the LEP capstone, an interdisciplinary LEP 400 Contemporary Issues seminar which also revisits the core skills while emphasizing creative thinking. (See the [LEP/MTC grid](#) for a visual overlay of the requirements.) Thus, the new LEP directly reflects many of the “High-Impact Educational Practices” advocated by AAC&U: a first year seminar, common intellectual experiences, writing-intensive courses, and capstone courses and projects. In this manner, the LEP provides an overarching frame for a student’s education at SMSU. Though not embedded directly in the LEP curriculum, other high-impact practices such as undergraduate research, collaborative assignments and projects, service learning, and internships can be found throughout SMSU’s academic program offerings. The LEP and the enactment of high impact practices help students make the connection between the foundational liberal arts and their academic degree programs.

*The Alignment of Academic Programs to the Mission*

In keeping with the mission, Southwest Minnesota State University provides a breadth of academic programs spanning from a limited number of associates degrees through key master’s programs in Business and Education. SMSU offers the following distribution of degree options:

Associate in Arts	1
Associate in Science	4
Bachelor of Applied Science	4
Bachelor of Arts	19
Bachelor of Science	33
Graduate Certificate	1
Master of Business Administration	1
Master of Science	3

The University is organized into [two Colleges](#), the College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences (ALS), and the College of Business, Education and Professional Studies (BEPS). BEPS is further subdivided into four schools: the School of Business and Public Affairs, the School of Education, the School of Graduate Studies, and the School of Agriculture. One hallmark of SMSU’s academic programming in regard to this part of its mission is the development of programs and related institutional structure designed to

fulfill needs in the region. For example, in 2006, in response to the needs of the food industry for product development, the Culinary<sup>®</sup> program was instituted. In 2012, an institutional task force was charged with exploring possible restructuring to add a school related to agricultural programs, which resulted in the addition of the School of Agriculture. This is another example of the University reviewing its offerings and structure in order to best align with contemporary needs and expectations.

Through the variety of degree options offered, SMSU is able to provide the “comprehensive degree programs” noted in the mission. Since 2004, several programs have been added to acknowledge demand and to enhance enrollment. These programs include an RN-to-BSN degree in Fall 2013, which was the result of a University task force’s investigation. The task force, which included members from the local and regional medical community along with SMSU faculty, administrators, and staff, found high demand for such a degree in this area. The acknowledgement of the community and region continues in the form of a Nursing Advisory Board, made up of ten nursing supervisors, administrators, and educators from across the area. Another example is the Associate of Arts degree. Though within the MnSCU system the community colleges are primarily responsible for associate degrees, the four-year universities offer a small selection. These associate degrees help students take advantage of coursework being offered by the University that suits their immediate needs and could be built upon later for a full four-year degree. While SMSU has long offered Associate of Science degrees in several areas, in 2013, the University added an Associate of Arts degree. This degree is intended for students who begin a four-year degree and fulfill the requirements for an Associate in Arts degree in that process but leave before completing the full four years. At the Master’s level, the Master of Science: Physical Education is the newest addition and has already met its enrollment projections. The University is adding a BS in Agricultural Education, with the expectation that all approval processes will be complete by Spring 2015. SMSU will be only the second institution in the state to offer this degree. The degree will have two tracks (teacher licensure or a communications, marketing, and leadership route), addressing demand from across the state. This new degree is yet another example of how SMSU is partnering strategically; SMSU received a grant from the Minnesota Ag Education Leadership Council as well as the Southwest Initiative Foundation to hire a program director to coordinate the recruitment and marketing of the program, with additional private fundraising well under way. In addition, SMSU is collaborating with several two-year institutions that can offer specific courses as part of the degree.

These programs are only the latest examples of this creative energy. As noted in the Introduction to the self-study, [a number of programs](#) have all been developed, supported by feasibility studies with input from external stakeholders, since 2004.

In addition to developing new programs in accordance with regional need, another manner in which SMSU makes certain that all of its academic programs are consistent with its mission is through the annual department report process. Each year, all departments submit a report of their activities, assessments, and related accomplishments. Each department has its own mission statement, which is aligned with the University mission. The annual reports springboard from these departmental mission statements. In 2012, a new [Program Analysis System \(PAS\)](#) was also instituted to provide annual data which helps make it clear to programs what the costs of their programs are and what the enrollment trends are. Departments use the data for efficient planning and respond to it in their annual reports. This data is also of use during the strategic planning process related to academic programming. More information on department annual reports can be found in [Criterion 4](#).



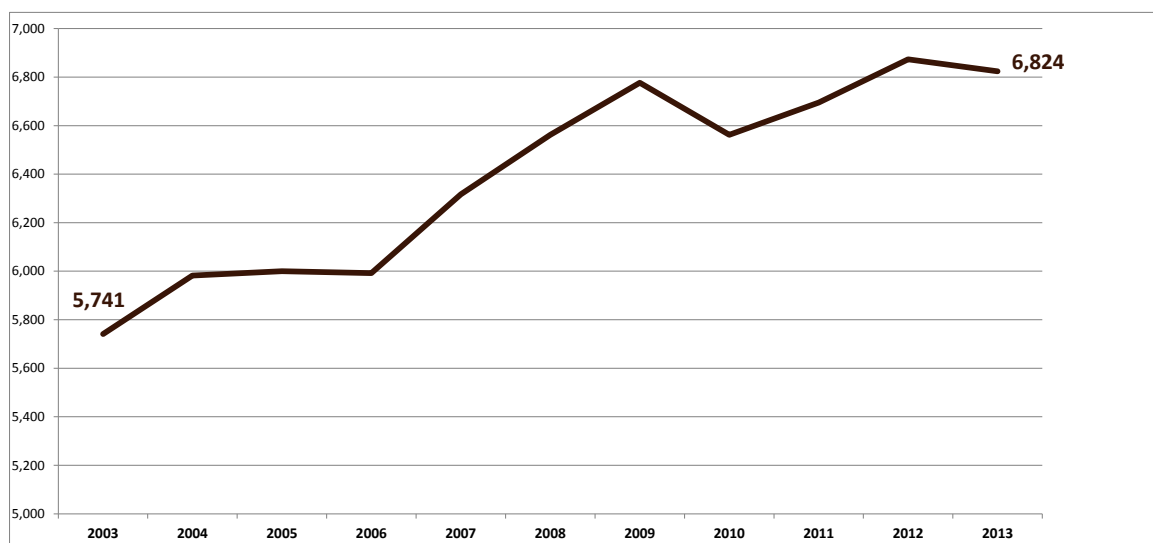
One other type of program that serves the institutional mission in a distinct way is the SMSU Honors Program. The Honors Program provides well-prepared and highly motivated students with an alternative to the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum portion of the LEP requirements. During the first semester, the student, in consultation with the Director of the Honors Program and a review board of faculty members from various disciplines, designs his/her individual program of study. Each program must include three courses from a selected list of honors courses and a senior-level honors interdisciplinary seminar. In addition, each student is required to complete an hour-long senior dialogue with selected faculty members. Students apply to the Honors Program, and while new students must have a strong record of achievement and a letter of recommendation, there is no minimum cut-off. Students who earn a 3.3 GPA while at SMSU and have a recommendation from an advisor may also apply. The Honors Program provides a rich educational engagement opportunity for high achieving students who might otherwise choose to pursue their education elsewhere. (For more information, see the [Honors section in the Catalog](#)).

### SMSU ENROLLMENT PROFILE

SMSU's enrollment profile is consistent with the University's mission of "connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world." SMSU was chartered to provide access to higher education in southwest Minnesota and to serve the broader needs of the state. In doing so, SMSU not only provides a traditional undergraduate residential experience and selected on-campus graduate programs but also has a strong presence throughout the state, exemplified by our 2+2 programs, College Now program, and graduate programs.

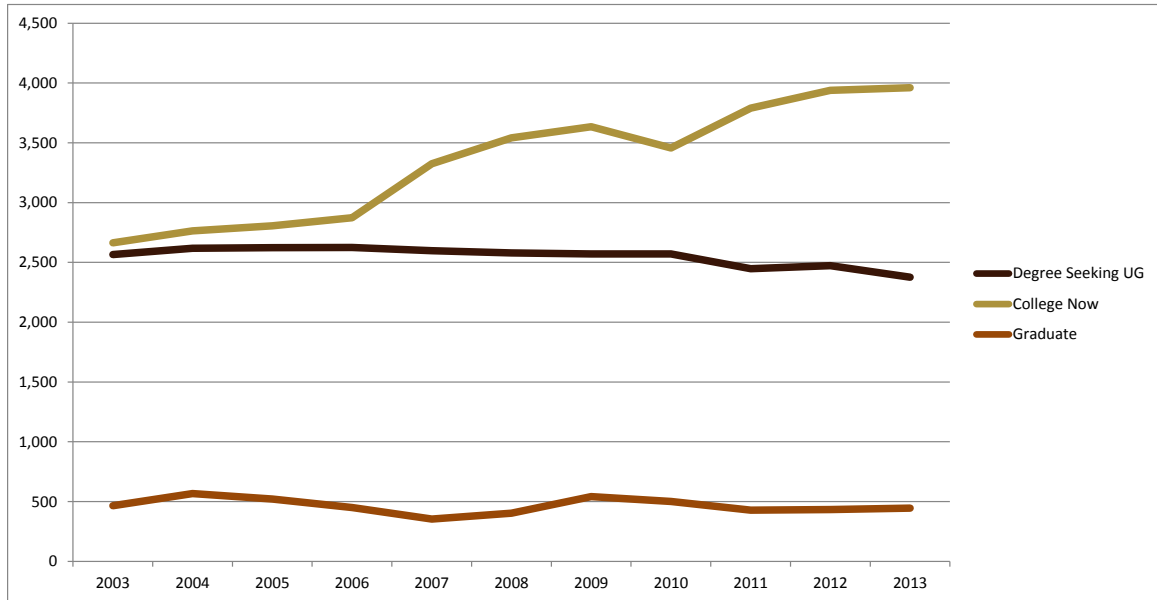
Overall enrollment at SMSU has gradually increased over the past decade, moving from 5,741 in 2003 to 6,824 in 2013. (See Figure 1.1; for consistency's sake, enrollment numbers are based on fall averages and thus do not include additional spring and summer students; over the past decade SMSU has annually averaged a total enrollment of more than 7,700 unique students.)

FIGURE 1.1 FALL ENROLLMENT HISTORY 2003 TO 2013



Much of the enrollment increase can be attributed to the extensive programming SMSU offers across the state, in particular, the College Now (CN) dual credit/concurrent enrollment program. The program, known within Minnesota as Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), is responsible for more than 90% of this increase. (More information about CN can be found in [Criterion 3](#); see Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 FALL ENROLLMENT BY CATEGORY

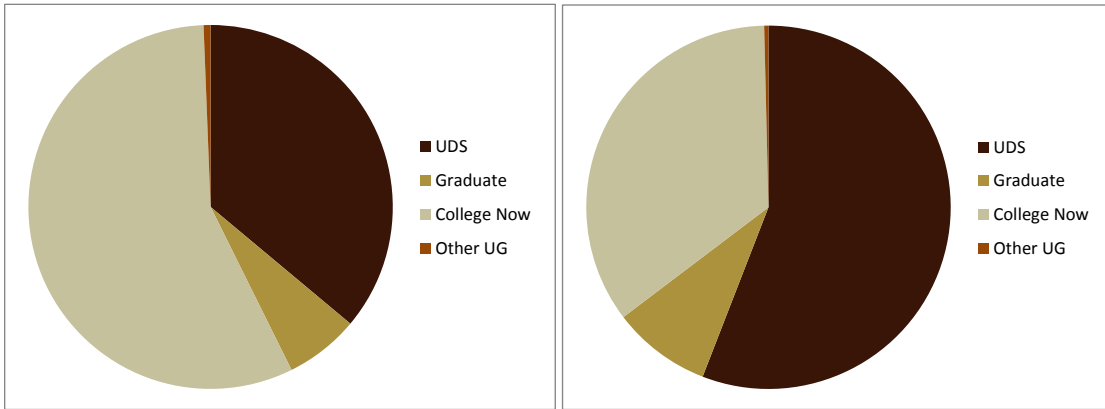


Although the total headcount reflects a large percentage of College Now enrollment, that picture shifts dramatically when viewing the data and its influence on SMSU’s functions in terms of FTE. Whereas the undergraduate degree-seeking (UDS) and graduate student groups only represent 43% of student headcount, they represent 65% of FTE enrollment (see Figure 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3 FALL 2013 HEADCOUNT AND FTE ENROLLMENT SHARE

HEADCOUNT

FTE

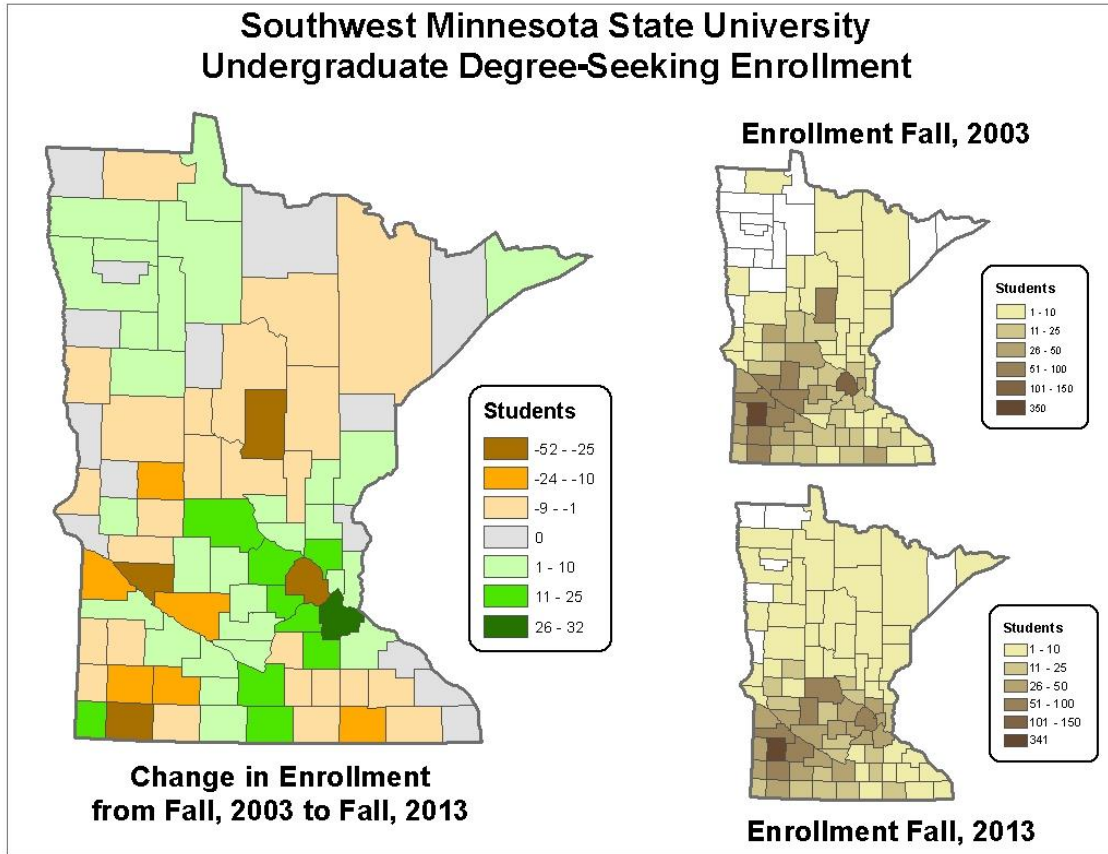


Thus SMSU maintains a strong focus on traditional undergraduate programming and services, while also building upon its graduate and landmark concurrent enrollment programs.

*Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Student Enrollment (UDS)*

In keeping with its charter, SMSU's undergraduate enrollment comes predominantly from within the borders of Minnesota (81%). The majority of students who attend SMSU come from the 19 county service region. However, in the past ten years, the overall percentages of students coming from the local region have decreased as demographic patterns have shifted populations toward urban and suburban districts. Enrollment from the 7 county metropolitan Minneapolis/St. Paul region is up approximately 20% since 2003 (see Figure 1.4). Despite SMSU's primarily in-state enrollment mix, 27 other states as well as 22 countries are also represented within the undergraduate student body.

FIGURE 1.4 TEN YEAR ENROLLMENT COMPARISON BY MINNESOTA COUNTY, FALL 2003 COMPARED TO FALL 2013



Beyond geographic measures of diversity, SMSU helps students from many disparate backgrounds in “connecting . . . to the wider world.” This is especially true of students with disabilities, first-generation college students, and students who come from low-income families. SMSU was built in the late 1960s as a barrier-free campus and has attracted students with disabilities ever since, helping them to achieve their goals of higher education. The UDS population has steadily reflected this. In Fall 2013, 104 students were being assisted by the Campus’s Office of Disability Resources. That amounts to 4.4% of the UDS student population. In addition, forty-seven years into the University’s history, almost 60% of full-time entering first-year students are first-generation college students, as shown in Figure 1.5. This poses a challenge to SMSU’s retention and persistence efforts as half of SMSU’s students come from families with little firsthand exposure to higher education. In addition, many students from the region come from low income circumstances. As Figure 1.6 demonstrates, over 40% of New Entering undergraduates are Pell Eligible (a proxy for income categorization). According to [US Census data for MN](#), the median household income in the region is lower than the national average (as it was ten years ago), even though the average income in Minnesota as a whole is higher than the national average.

FIGURE 1.5 PERCENTAGE OF NEW UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENTS WHO ARE FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS

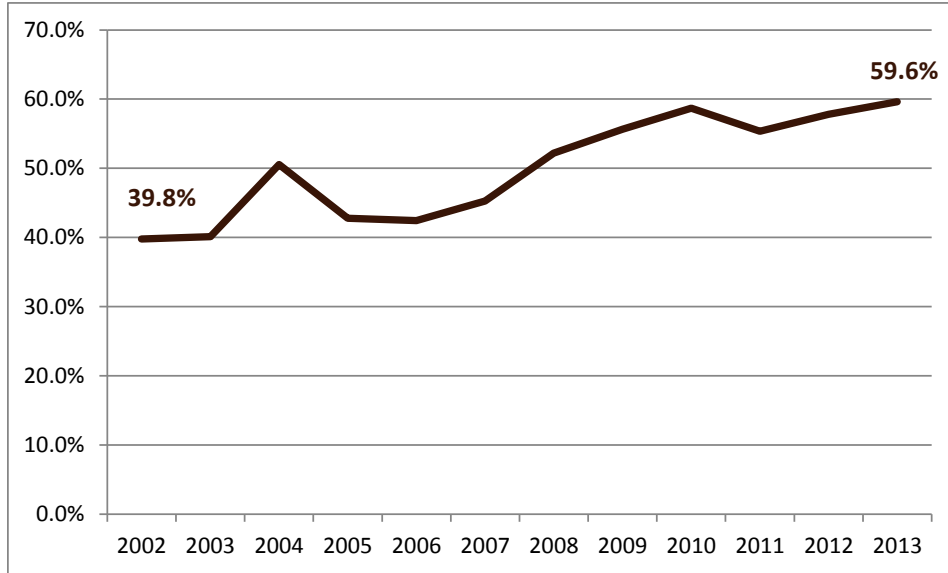
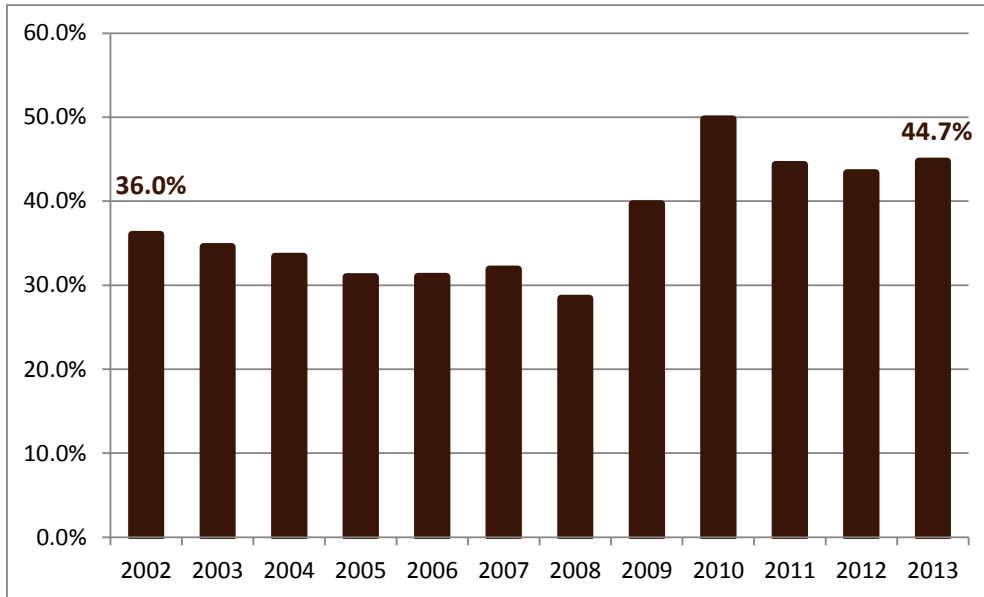


FIGURE 1.6 PERCENTAGE OF NEW UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENTS WHO ARE PELL ELIGIBLE

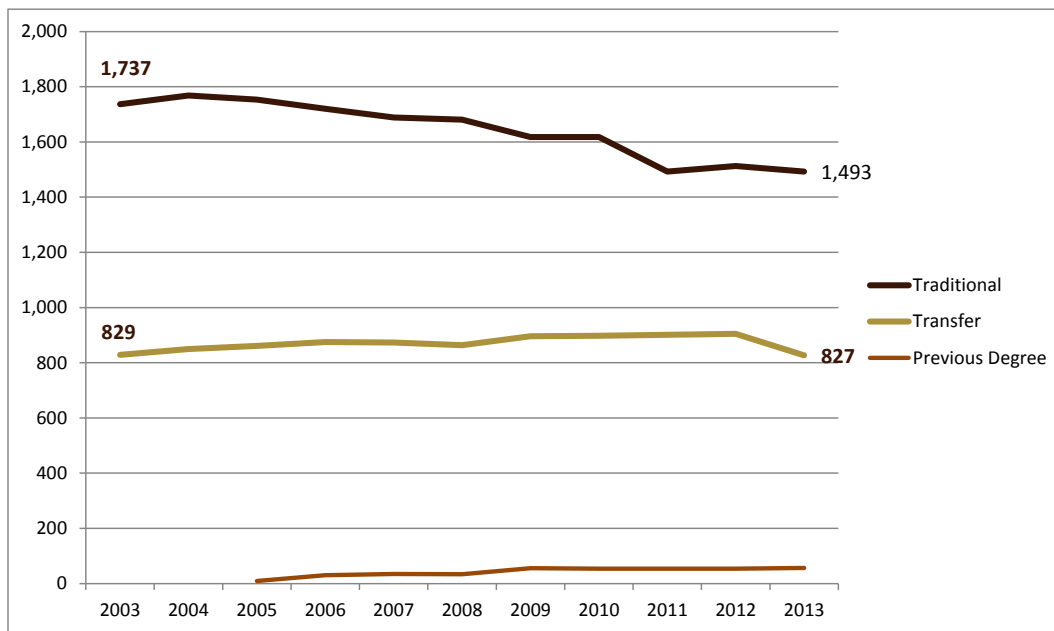


Of the total UDS students, enrollment is split 59% female and 41% male. The disparity in college participation between genders continues to widen, much like national figures. Although the population of the region continues to be predominately European-American, SMSU’s racial and ethnic make-up has steadily changed over the past decade. As of Fall 2013 nearly 11% of UDS were students of color. That reflects a rather steady increase over the past decade. However, those gains were offset by the decline in International UDS enrollment. Several efforts have been undertaken to

renew SMSU’s recruitment of international students. See [Criterion 1C](#) for a fuller description of issues related to diversity on the SMSU campus.

Transfer students remain a strong portion of the UDS population. It is not uncommon to hear that students from the region first attempt school elsewhere, but transfer to SMSU for a variety of reasons, ranging from appreciating the smaller class sizes and ability to interact directly with faculty to economic considerations requiring them to return home. Transfer students represent about 35% of the UDS category, and in the past decade their enrollment has remained steady, despite a slight dip in 2013 (see Figure 1.7). Over the past five years SMSU has witnessed an increasing number of previous degree recipients returning to college to obtain another undergraduate degree. These previous degree recipients represent a tiny, but increasing slice of UDS enrollment. Despite the overall growth in total enrollment at SMSU during the past decade, the UDS student population has faced a slow decline. Traditional students make up the majority of this category, and that group has declined during the time period.

*FIGURE 1.7 UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE-SEEKING ENROLLMENT, FALL SEMESTERS 2003 TO 2013<sup>1</sup>*



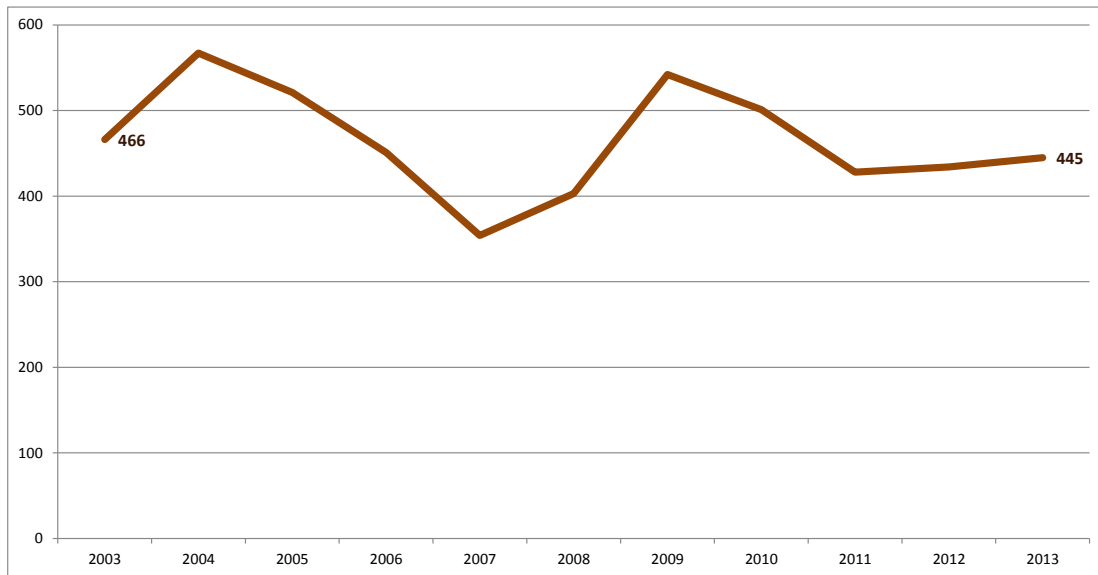
As a result of the decrease in UDS students, SMSU has begun efforts to address this issue in terms of both recruitment and retention. In Fall 2013, President Gores convened an Enrollment Analytics Team with the goal of reviewing enrollment and retention data to guide recruitment and retention, and a new position, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success, was created and the position filled in July 2014. Other efforts on this front involve the Office of Student Success that has been at work since Fall 2011 and an Advising Task force begun in Fall 2012. All of these efforts are directed toward revising or instituting high impact practices with the goal of better serving students and improving the retention rate of students. More information about these efforts can be found in Criteria 3 and 5.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS

### *Graduate Student Enrollment*

The University offers graduate programs in Education and in Business. The graduate programs support the mission of the University by responding to needs of citizens and employers in the region, delivering education to rural areas, and contributing to the quality of life in the region. Further, the programs support the system mission by meeting workforce and community needs. Graduate enrollment has some built-in volatility due to the two-year nature of the programs as well as factors such as cohorts, external locations, teaching loads, and impact of the broader economy. In 2004 and 2009 enrollment peaked at over 540 students. Average enrollment has been near 460 students. In the past 3 years enrollment has been between 425-445 students (see Figure 1.8).

**FIGURE 1.8 GRADUATE ENROLLMENT**

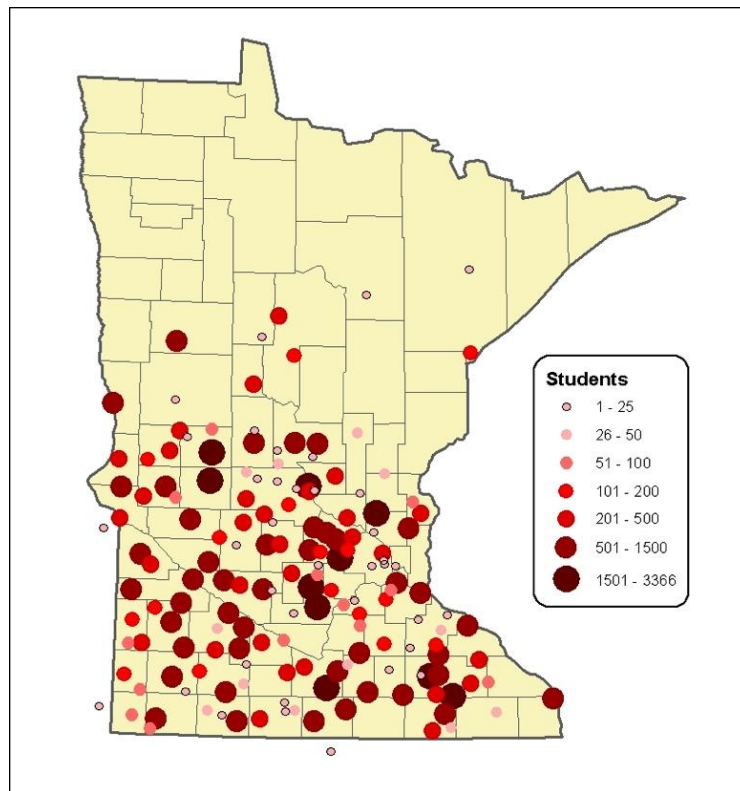


In response to regional needs and to the growth in the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) program, in the past decade graduate programs have shifted from being 75% online to 57% online. Similarly, over the past decade the mix of graduate programs has shifted from 80% enrolled in Education programs to 65%, with the growth being in the MBA program. In terms of enrollment diversity the largest gain has been in international student enrollment where graduate enrollment has grown from 1% to over 10% in ten years.

### *College Now Enrollment*

Perhaps no specific student group better shows SMSU's relationship to the region than enrollment in SMSU's College Now program. The map shown below in Figure 1.9 reflects enrollment in College Now by high schools across the state and emphasizes the many locations and numbers of students that SMSU has assisted on their educational journey. Since 2004, SMSU has served students at nearly 180 high schools and enrolled more than 28,000 individual students.

FIGURE 1.9 COLLEGE NOW ENROLLMENTS BY HIGH SCHOOL SINCE 2004



### STUDENT SUPPORT: ALIGNMENT OF THE MISSION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

SMSU is a university community deeply committed to academic student success. Student support services are designed to serve the range of enrolled students' needs; while academic programs serve as the foundation for academic student success, a variety of student support services help students achieve their goals.

From the moment prospective students or parents contact the University or come to visit campus, Admission staff guide them individually and help them address all of their questions. Some of the key resource areas for all students include Financial Aid, the Registrar, and Business Services. Each of these areas have developed information tailored to students' and their families' concerns.

The Division of Student Affairs encompasses a large number of offices that work directly with students (see Figure 1.10 Student Affairs Organizational Chart; the chart can also be found in [e-resources](#)). In July 2014, several Student Affairs offices, namely the Office of Student Success and International Student Services, were moved under the new Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success. More information about the mission and goals for the enrollment management area will be available when the review team arrives, after the office is established. Regardless of oversight lines, all of these offices and staff work closely with students and share common values in helping students succeed while at the University. The Student Affairs mission statement directly addresses the University mission, stating "Student Affairs supports the mission of the university by providing co-curricular programs and services that engage students in a successful, collaborative and inclusive education, preparing them to become leaders in a diverse global



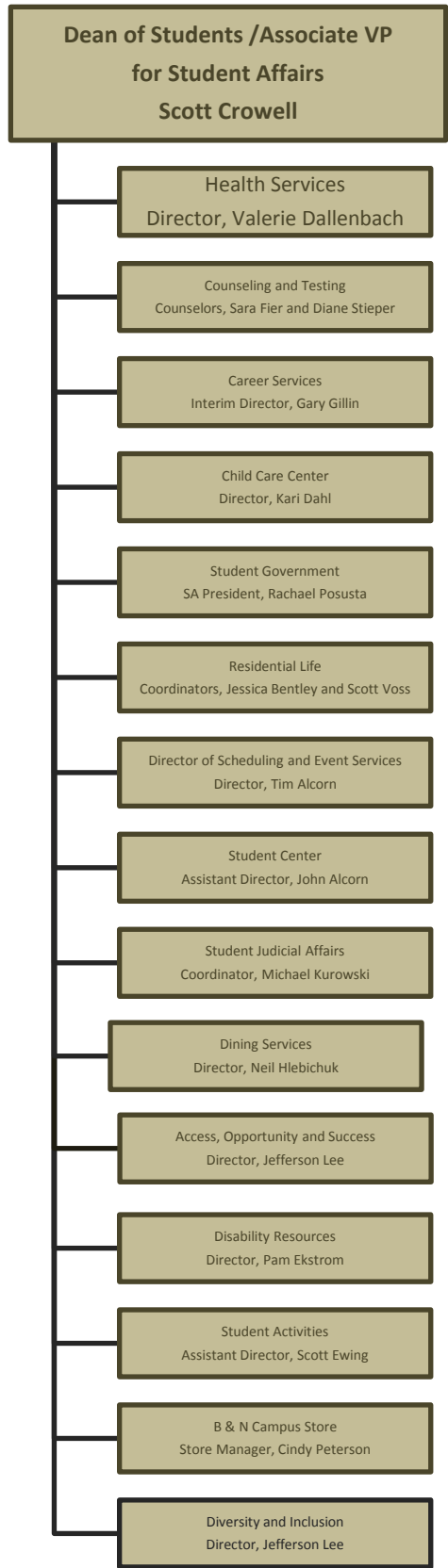
community.” The Student Affairs mission is accompanied by five vision statements related to all aspects of a student’s education at SMSU:

- Develop services that promote student recruitment, retention, academic excellence, and graduation
- Facilitate co-curricular learning through student participation in an inclusive university community
- Encourage student wellness, personal skills development, self-discovery, and personal accountability
- Develop a community that strives for personal integrity, ethical decision-making, mutual respect and human dignity
- Develop programs that promote multicultural competence and leadership necessary for a student’s lifelong personal success

### *Office of Student Success*

While all of the areas listed in the Student Affairs division and under the Enrollment Management and Student Success area are vital to the support of students and furthering SMSU’s mission, one of the most recent additions, the [Office of Student Success](#), serves as a good example of how the University strives to improve. The Office of Student Success was organized in academic year 2011-2012 to address issues related to retention, and helps students not only with academic issues that might be giving them difficulty but also provides guidance to appropriate campus resources for social or personal issues students might be experiencing. The Office of Student Success coordinates the Early Alert System used by faculty and staff members to notify the Office of any concerns the faculty and staff have about a student. The Office of Student Success provides a variety of “success tips” in different formats and delivery methods, with some aimed at new students who might be having trouble acclimating, but others appropriate for all students at different points in their academic careers. The Office of Student Success also employs “Mustang Mentors,” upper-class students who are partnered with first-year students to provide one-on-one help and advice. In year 2012-2013, the Office of Student Success implemented an exit procedure to track why students leave SMSU, in order to address any possible systemic issues. The Office of Student Success works closely with other key Student Affairs offices such as Counseling and Testing, Disability Resources, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Career Resources, and Access, Opportunity & Success to ensure that all students receive the help that they need to succeed.

FIGURE 1.10 STUDENT AFFAIRS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



### *Academic Commons, Technology Resources, Library, and the Writing Center*

In addition to Student Affairs, other departments on campus provide key support “prepare[ing] students to meet the complex challenges” of becoming educated citizens, per the SMSU mission. On-campus students can take advantage of the [Academic Commons](#), a central, visible study center located in one of the academic buildings. The Academic Commons offers content-area tutoring and is also home to the Education Department Learning Center and Math Lab. A large open space with a variety of tables and seating areas, it provides students with a place to study, meet friends, and seek assistance with coursework.

On-campus and distance students alike benefit from the services offered through the University’s technology resources, the SMSU library, and the Writing Center. All students have access to the course management system Desire2Learn (D2L), the platform chosen by and supported by the System Office, along with local support at SMSU. Distance classes utilize D2L and might also rely on Adobe Connect, depending on the class and instructor. All students have SMSU email, as well as access to the MnSCU e-services portal where they can view their degree progress, registration information, and class schedules. All students, faculty, and staff utilize the Help Desk, located in the [Technology Resource Center](#), with an online presence for aiding distance students. The [Library](#) provides an array of services for both on- and off-campus students, with its online databases, multiple methods for contacting a reference librarian for help through its “Ask a Librarian” portal on the home page, excellent interlibrary loan service, a special tab on the library home page for distance students containing all of the links they need, and “LibGuides,” organized online research guides developed for courses, programs, and topics for all students and faculty. All faculty, regardless of whether the course is being held on-campus, online, or as part of a College Now section, can request individualized library instruction for their class. The [Writing Center](#) has grown its services to include both face-to-face and online tutoring, offering an option of synchronous online tutoring using chat and a white board or asynchronous tutoring via email in order to serve all students from all programs as well.

While all of the student support areas have had to grapple with funding issues, they continue to serve the full range of students and continually tweak their efforts as class delivery systems and student expectations evolve. A fuller description of [student support services](#) can be found in Criterion 3, and more information regarding [technological infrastructure](#) is located in Criterion 5.

### *Global Studies and the Undergraduate Research Conference*

Two particular types of experiences that SMSU has become known for encourage our students to enact the liberal arts core skills and to connect their learning with the greater world beyond themselves and SMSU, two key aspects of the University’s mission.

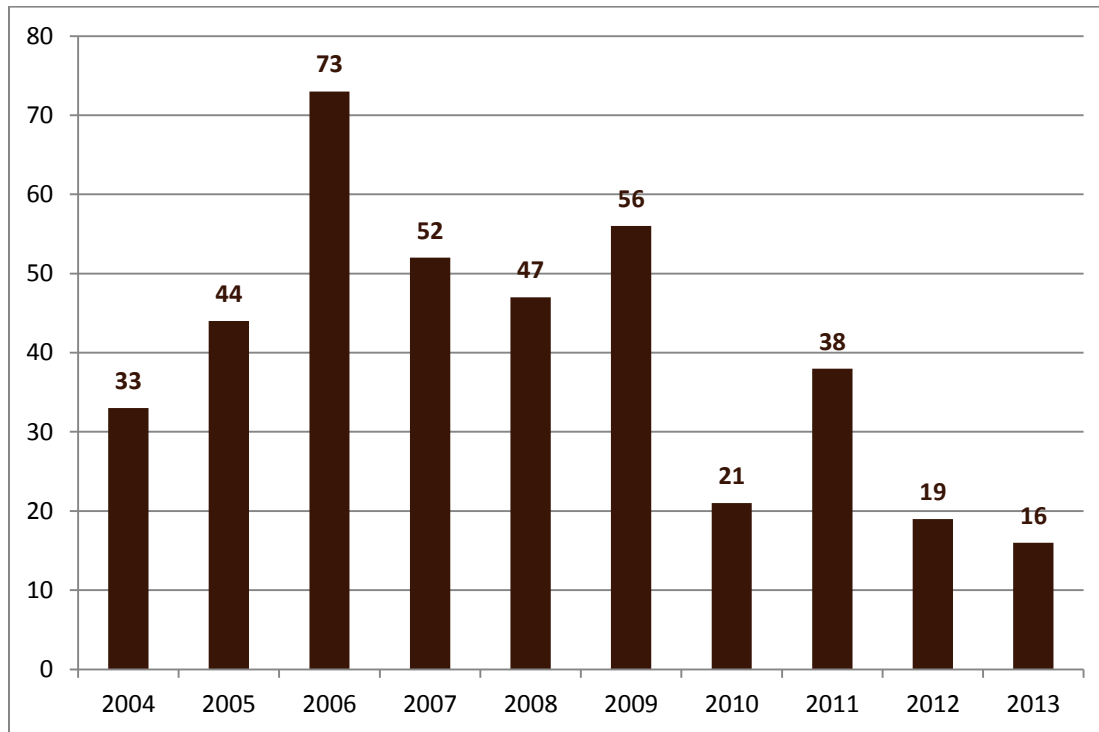
The [Global Studies program](#) has been helping students, many of whom are inexperienced with other cultures or with travel to other countries or other parts of the United States, gain a broader understanding of the world outside of southwest Minnesota. The Global Studies program began as part of the Q-7 initiative developed by the Minnesota State University System; the term “Q-7” referred to seven quality indicators, one of which was global understanding. SMSU’s Global Studies program was originally funded with a multi-year grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation in the Spring term of 1993.

Global Studies was created to stand apart from the common travel abroad experiences at other universities that generally occur during a student's junior or senior year. Rather, the SMSU Global Studies program originated with an emphasis on travel connected to students' first and second year Liberal Arts Core courses. The program has evolved to include three different Global Studies offerings: the original Cluster, a Seminar, and briefer Experiences. The Global Studies clusters are integrated around a theme or region of global significance. Regular Cluster students register for five courses: the one-credit Voyage; a three-credit team-taught Seminar focusing on the site and issue, and three basic courses, typically from the LEP curriculum. The end of the semester culminates in the Voyage, a two-to-three week trip to the country or countries studied, with the students accompanied by the faculty who taught the courses. Faculty may also choose to offer a stand-alone three-credit Seminar course focusing on a current issue and related travel site, also followed by a two-to-three week trip. In the past decade, the economic downturn and poorer exchange rates made the third type of offering, the Global Studies Experience, a more attractive option for many students. An Experience is a one-credit course coupled with a trip of shorter duration, usually one week or less. The Global Studies Committee and Director continue to explore how to expand travel options for students. For example, in Fall 2014, three SMSU exchange students will be going to Taylor's University in Malaysia, a university SMSU has recently partnered with.

Recent Clusters have included travel to Britain, France, Greece, Spain, and Ireland. Past Experiences have included theater- and art-focused trips to New York City and participation in a civil rights conference in Jackson, Mississippi. From 2001-2012, Global Studies programs directly impacted 366 SMSU students (see Figure 1.11 below). Please note there were no programs in 2002 & 2003 due to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. The enrollment numbers in the data below reflect a variety of factors; in some years, such as 2013-2014, other Global Studies programs might have been offered but did not generate enough enrollment for the University to sponsor the trip. Other factors include the initial multi-year grant ending, which affected the funding and therefore staffing arrangements, reducing the number of program offerings. (For more details, please see the [Global Studies Report—Spring 2012](#) in e-resources.)

FIGURE 1.11 GLOBAL STUDIES ENROLLMENT BY YEAR 2001-2013

(Note: The Global Studies experience offered in 2013, Civil Right and Civil Society in Greece and Philadelphia, was cancelled due to low enrollment)



Through the Global Studies program options, students not only learn about other countries and cultures but also develop their own self-confidence as well as awareness of the value of encounters with people outside their familiar surroundings. During the timeframe represented on the chart, the retention rate for these students has been 72.5%, indicating a higher rate of success retaining students who participate in Global Studies.

The annual [Undergraduate Research Conference \(URC\)](#), which began in 2006, is another avenue for students to make connections, in this case connecting their own work to the rich traditions of research within their disciplines. In doing so, they also polish their presentation and communication skills. The high impact one-day conference was initiated fall of 2006 by Dr. Emily Deaver, Professor of Environmental Science, as a mechanism for science students to engage in a professional exchange of scientific ideas and communicate the results of their research to the broader community, as well as a means to showcase and celebrate their hard work and accomplishments. In the first year, the program included 21 oral and 27 poster presentations from science students in Environmental Science, Biology, Physics and Chemistry. Because of the positive feedback from the academic community, the conference was expanded to include all disciplines across campus. By the eighth year of the conference in 2013, 223 presenters from 17 different programs participated. The conference continues to grow as a University-wide event as students and faculty recognize the value and benefits of participating in this event. Indeed, Dr. Deaver has since been involved in helping a System-wide committee launch a MnSCU undergraduate research conference, which began in 2012. The URC is directly aligned with the mission of the university which aims to “prepare students to meet the complex challenges of this century” and to connect “students’ academic and practical professional development experiences.” Providing opportunities for undergraduate research and a conference

event at which student research is presented to the public encourages innovative and collaborative curricula, attracts engaged students and community interest, is an opportunity for projects that focus on the local community needs and interests, and generally enhances the intellectual vitality of the institution.

*1A3. The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)*

While the budgeting and planning processes are discussed in detail in Criterion 5, the following paragraphs highlight the important role strategic planning holds in carrying out SMSU's mission.

---

### STRATEGIC PLANNING: A TEMPLATE FOR ACTION

The strategic planning process provides an essential link between the mission in theory and the mission in action. Although SMSU's strategic plan exists to benefit and guide the university, it is also linked to and integrated with the values and strategic plans of larger organizations with which SMSU interacts, including the following:

- 1) The strategic plan for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU)
- 2) The MnSCU Annual Work Plan Action Items
- 3) The Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
- 4) The State of Minnesota Statute (MS 135A.053 Subdivision 1): This statute defines five legislative purposes for higher education in Minnesota.

The primary responsibility for strategic planning rests with the President's Office, which oversees the process. At Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU), strategic planning has long been an emphasis. In 2002 the president and the University community agreed upon a revised strategic planning process informed by the mission and goals. This strategic planning process, integrated with refinement of strategic goals, specific objectives, and action items, has remained a consistent element of the University's ongoing operations.

The focus on strategic planning is evident in several ways. While different administrations over the past ten years have accomplished the work of strategic planning using different methods, shared governance is highlighted in the strategic planning process. A Strategic Planning Committee is a university committee established to provide support for strategic planning efforts. This committee is charged with reviewing, monitoring, and communicating the university's progress toward its strategic directions. The committee is responsible for updating the university's strategic plan as needed, obtaining input on the strategic plan from the university community, and also participating in SMSU's strategic planning events. Strategic Planning Committee members serve two-year terms. Membership spans the university and bargaining units (see glossary for abbreviations of bargaining units), including the following:

- Administration: 4
- SMSUFA: 9 (SMSUFA President; Long-range Chair; Curriculum Chair; CIA Chair; Academic Affairs; Physical Plant Chair; 3 at-large)
- MSUAASF: 2
- Council 5: 1
- Coalition (MMA, MAPE, MGR, CONF): 1

- Students: 2
- Other (Area Legislator, Community/ Region/ Alumni/ Foundation representative, Director of Institutional Research): 3
- Ex-officio Member (President)

Over the past decade SMSU has frequently built either a half-day or a full-day into the academic calendar at least once each year or has dedicated all-university meeting time to the topic. Everyone in the university community is encouraged to participate in these strategic planning discussions, including faculty, staff, students, and even citizens of the surrounding region. Suggestions made and discussed at these strategic planning events range from very specific, such as requests for better signage, to broader goals, such as distinguishing our student-centered approach from other schools. Real change can be traced to these discussions and to the impact of having voices from multiple university constituencies asking for the same thing. For example, more smart classrooms and the addition of a women's intercollegiate soccer team can be attributed to the influence of strategic planning day discussions.

There is a significant amount of information about SMSU's strategic plan and the strategic planning process posted to SMSU's Web site. Found off of the main "Administration" tab, the [Strategic Planning web page](#) contains links to the current strategic plan as well as planning documentation since 2002. Thus the strategic plan is easily visible to all university constituents and the public.

Given the cycle of strategic planning, the current plan for 2012—2017 was due during *Interim* President Wood's two-year term. President Wood did not call the full Strategic Planning Committee, but an all-university meeting was held to discuss the proposed plan's components and to brainstorm suggested changes or additions. In addition, the community was engaged through the SMSU Foundation Board. From information collected during the 2011-2012 academic year, five strategic directions were developed, along with their respective goals. During 2012-2013, the strategic plan was taken through the various Meet and Confers. The five strategic directions that were developed for the 2012—2017 time-frame include the following ([SMSU 2012—2017 Strategic Plan](#)):

- 1) **Academic Strategic Direction:** Review annually all academic programs and create new programs when justified that support the changing economic and social dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 2) **Enrollment Management Strategic Direction:** Develop and commit to an enrollment management program to increase university enrollment both on and off campus through recruitment and retention programs.
- 3) **Facilities and Equipment Strategic Direction:** Modernize the campus environment and update the campus classrooms and equipment using green technology where feasible.
- 4) **Community Partnerships Strategic Direction:** Build partnership connections to communities, business and industry, and educational institutions within the southwest region.
- 5) **Diversity Strategic Direction:** Build on existing strengths in creating an environment to celebrate the accessible and diverse nature of the SMSU campus community and encourage the growth of all groups on campus.

The five strategic directions listed above clearly resonate with the University's mission to "prepare students to meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities" and to "connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world."

In terms of a strategic planning template, it remains very important that the leaders of the university initiate and support the strategic planning process. In Fall 2013, shortly after her arrival on campus, President Gores has revitalized the strategic planning process. She announced her commitment to the process, including the work of the committee, and dedicated an all-university meeting at the beginning of her term to strategic planning discussion. A full day dedicated to planning and assessment was included in the 2013-2014 academic calendar, and the Strategic Planning Committee met in the spring semester and developed plans and a timeline for the 2014-2015 academic year. Subcommittees based upon the five strategic directions met, and the committee found there was also room for revisions within the current University Strategic Plan. The University Cabinet was able to take this information and discuss how to move forward with Strategic Planning. The work is slated to continue this fall, with broader membership from volunteers across campus by virtue of function and expertise contributing.

Suggestions made during the self-study process to expand and improve SMSU's strategic planning process included renewing the involvement of the full Strategic Planning committee, possibly developing Strategic Planning Subcommittees, continuing to include planning days in the academic calendar, and encouraging the participation of people at all levels of the university, including students, in the strategic planning process on an on-going basis. These suggestions are already in process. With these steps, SMSU has the opportunity to take its strategic planning process to an even higher, more effective level.

## CORE COMPONENT 1B: THE MISSION IS ARTICULATED PUBLICLY.

*1B1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.*

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the SMSU mission statement, vision statement, and list of guiding values are articulated publicly in a variety of ways. The mission statement, accompanying vision statement ("Southwest Minnesota State University is a university of choice"), and thirteen guiding values were all developed via the campus-wide Brown and Gold Task Force in 2007-2008.

The thirteen guiding values are as follows:

1. The primary focus of all activities is to facilitate the learning experience of our enrolled students. All faculty activities, both within and away from the classroom, are designed to enhance the learning environment.
2. It is essential for SMSU to remain current with technological advancements in delivering classroom and laboratory knowledge to assure maximum interest, impact, and retention by our students.
3. Our faculty recognize the evolving environment in which we all live and the need to ensure involving students with current information and developments from the world stage.
4. Student involvement in the learning experience is critical for retention, leading to our dedication to pedagogical improvements that have been shown to enhance the learning experience.
5. We are committed to being good stewards of our resources through demonstrating environmental and fiscal responsibility. Moreover, as responsible citizens and good



stewards of our resources, we foster actions, programs, and scholarship that will lead to a sustainable future.

6. We maintain and consistently seek to improve a comprehensive system of support services designed to assist our students in any way possible during their tenure at SMSU and on into the next stages of their lives.

7. We believe in the integration of campus and community. We are committed to being responsive to the needs of southwestern Minnesota and recognize that partnerships with community entities provide us with valuable talents and expertise.

8. We value a safe environment for intellectual expression and encourage open and civil communication.

9. We value a campus safe for all members of the university community.

10. We value maintaining and enhancing a physical design to provide access to all members of the university community.

11. We embrace diversity by developing a quality, comprehensive educational environment that fosters interaction among people of all religions, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and ages.

12. We foster cultural understanding on campus through social, educational, and administrative interaction with our diverse population of international students. We offer the opportunity to learn about different cultures through participation in our Global Studies programs.

13. We believe that the southwestern Minnesota region provides rich opportunities for learning that go beyond the traditional classroom and lab settings—community-based learning experiences. Therefore, we are committed to creating a variety of applied learning experiences that enhance students' practical problem-solving skills and strengthen their commitment to civic engagement.

SMSU's mission encompasses these guiding values that direct the operations of the University, whether the teaching of students, the furtherance of research, the recruitment of a diverse university community, or serving the regional interests of southwest Minnesota. These interests, while not a complete list, highlight the broad reach SMSU's mission achieves.

The mission, vision, and values are linked throughout the SMSU Web site from its primary locations on the [President's page](#) and in the [Academic Catalog](#). The vision and the values are easily found in conjunction with the mission statement on the university web site and highlighted in select university publications. The mission in particular is clearly represented through a number of additional means, such as in the strategic planning process and related documentation, and via the departmental annual reporting process. Using SMSU's mission statement as a basis, sub-units within SMSU have proceeded to develop their own subsidiary mission statements, unique to their particular sectors of the university. Mission statements have been developed by staff departments, such as the [Human Resource Department](#), [Career Services Department](#), and the [SMSU Library](#). Academic departments, such as the [Social Science Department](#) and [Science Department](#), have also developed mission statements. Program missions are also described in program review materials. Each of these subsidiary unit mission statements aligns with the overall mission statement of the university.

SMSU's mission statement is a central focus of campus activity and life. In order to make the mission more apparent, in 2012-2013, the mission statement was posted on the east and west doors of Founders' Hall (FH), on the main entrance to Charter Hall (CH), and on the entrance to the Bellows Academic (BA) building. By prominently displaying the mission in block letters at key entrances, SMSU students, faculty, and staff, along with visitors to the campus who use these main entrances,

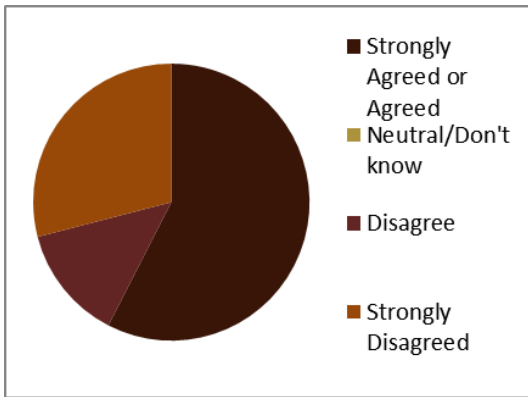
have the opportunity to read the SMSU mission statement each time they enter the facilities. By placing the mission statement in very visible locations across campus, members of the campus and visitors from the community and region will become very familiar with it and view it as a guide for all the campus undertakes.

**PRIDE IN THE SMSU MISSION**

Given the preceding examples, it is readily apparent that SMSU’s mission statement is articulated publicly. A poll of community members, faculty, students, administrators, alumni, and employees conducted for the purposes of the self-study effort in spring of 2013 demonstrates strong awareness of the mission and its influence on SMSU’s operations. (See [Introduction](#) and the survey questions and results in Appendix A for details.)

When the respondents to the poll were asked whether they were familiar with SMSU’s mission statement prior to reading the survey, 234 or 55.3% of the respondents indicated that they “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” with this statement. Only 55 respondents or 13% of the total respondents “Strongly Disagreed” (see Figure 1.12). Based on this response, it appears that many more of the respondents to the poll are familiar with SMSU’s mission than are not.

*FIGURE 1.12 OVERALL RESPONSE TO “I WAS FAMILIAR WITH SMSU’S MISSION STATEMENT PRIOR TO READING THIS SURVEY”*



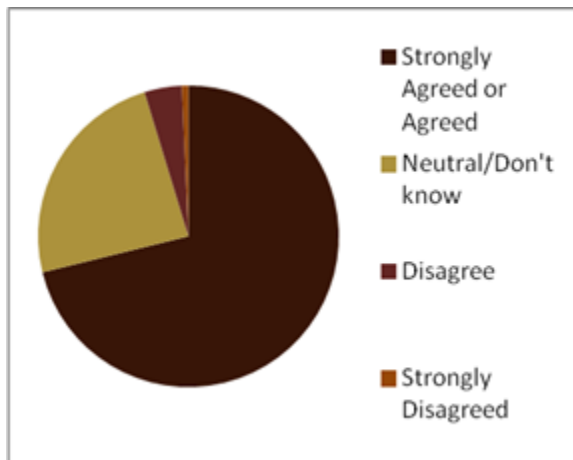
Respondents to the survey were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that SMSU’s mission statement is easily understood (Table 1.1). Among the respondents, 357 or 84.4% agreed with this statement. Only 3 respondents or .7% of the total respondents “Strongly Disagreed” with this statement. This question, in particular, appears to provide very strong evidence that SMSU has a mission statement that is easily understood by the general public.

*TABLE 1.1 OVERALL RESPONSE TO “SMSU’S MISSION STATEMENT IS EASILY UNDERSTOOD”*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do Not Know	Total Responses
#	113	244	33	24	3	6	423
%	26.7%	57.7%	7.8%	5.7%	0.7%	1.4%	100.0%

Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that SMSU's mission statement accurately represents the pursuits of SMSU. Among the respondents, 301 or 71.2% of the total "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" with this statement. Only 3 respondents or .7% of the total respondents "Strongly Disagreed" with this statement (see Figure 1.13).

*FIGURE 1.13 COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO "SMSU'S MISSION STATEMENT ACCURATELY REPRESENTS THE PURSUITS OF SMSU"*



As noted in Table 1.2, among 84 SMSU faculty members responding to the poll, when asked whether the current administrative structure (school divisions and reporting lines) effectively supports SMSU's mission, 50 of the respondents or 59.5% of the total respondents "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" with this statement. Only seven respondents or 8.3% of the total 84 faculty respondents "Strongly Disagreed" with this statement. When asked the same question, of the 82 SMSU administrators and staff members who responded to the poll, 60 or 73.2% of the total respondents "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" that the current administrative structure (school divisions and reporting lines) effectively support SMSU's mission. Only one administrator/staff member or 1.2% of the total respondents "Strongly Disagreed" with this statement. Though there is some disparity between faculty and administrative perceptions, overall there is strong support for how well the structure supports the mission. In addition, as noted in Criterion 1A2, a reorganization of the schools within the College of Business, Education, and Professional Studies occurred, with the addition of a School of Agriculture, has occurred since the survey was conducted.

TABLE 1.2 EMPLOYEE RESPONSES REGARDING AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT “THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE (SCHOOL DIVISIONS AND REPORTING LINES) EFFECTIVELY SUPPORTS SMSU’S MISSION.”

Audience		Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly	Do	Total
		Agree	Agree	Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Not Know	
Faculty	#	18	32	17	8	7	2	84
	%	21.4%	38.1%	20.2%	9.5%	8.3%	2.4%	100.0%
Administrators & Staff	#	13	47	16	2	1	3	82
	%	15.9%	57.3%	19.5%	2.4%	1.2%	3.7%	100.0%

As detailed in the above section of this report, SMSU’s mission statement is articulated publicly in a variety of ways. It is prominently displayed on the campus physical facilities and is found in multiple locations at the SMSU Web site. Utilizing these means, SMSU has been able to publicly share its mission statement quite effectively with the campus, the community of Marshall, and the surrounding service region. Per the results of the poll conducted in Spring Semester 2013, SMSU’s service area is quite aware and appreciative of the university’s mission statement and finds it to be very appropriate for the university.

*1B2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution’s emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.*

*1B3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.*

As described in Criterion 1A1, the mission, vision, and values were developed in 2007-2008 and are thus current, having been revised previously in 1993. The mission clearly states that SMSU is charged with offering “comprehensive degree programs” for connecting learners “in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world.” The strategic planning process further aligns and prioritizes the mission and values with concrete objectives that support the system-wide needs while focusing on SMSU’s target constituencies.

In addition, as noted in the “Changes since 2004” section of the Introduction, the mission was indirectly reaffirmed as a result of a study of higher education needs in southwestern Minnesota in 2011. At that time, then-President Danahar announced his retirement after having served ten years in office. The System Office of the Chancellor took the opportunity to engage an external consultant, MGT of America, Inc., a national higher education research and planning firm, to conduct a review of southwestern Minnesota’s higher educational needs and SMSU’s role in meeting those needs along with area two-year institutions. According to the consulting group’s final report, they were to “Examine strategies to better align programs, services and efforts of the two system institutions (SMSU and Minnesota West) whose primary responsibility is to serve this region.” The study’s purpose was to examine “administrative and organizational structures, including the current

institutional configuration, and other approaches that could include consolidation, administrative alignment, or other programmatic and financial opportunities to enhance or sustain programs and services in the region.” In other words, the consultants looked for efficiencies across the two- and four-year institutions and examined whether or not the regional two-year school could be aligned or consolidated with SMSU. The consulting group recommended against complete alignment at this time but suggested deeper academic collaboration and moving eventually towards shared services where possible. In making their recommendation, the consulting group noted the following points relevant to how well SMSU’s mission and scope are identified by its regional constituents:

- “Stakeholder commentary from across the region, and particularly in Marshall, suggest that Southwest Minnesota State has done a good job in engaging both the business community and local residents close to home (Marshall) in a variety of areas including social and cultural functions, community service, and academic program delivery.”
- “Employers and community leaders are passionately supportive of the higher education entities located in their respective communities, and appreciate the critical role each plays in the economic and educational well-being of their locale. A loss of one of these education sites would be a huge setback to the surrounding community in many ways.”

Of the consulting group’s suggested strategies, two speak to core points within SMSU’s mission:

- “Expand non-academic efforts to engage both the residents and the business community throughout the region”
- “More closely align the academic programs of the University to the economic initiatives and industry sector needs of the full 19-county region”

Specifically in regard to the second suggestion above, the group noted the need to work closely with business and industry but was also careful to state the following, affirming the foundation of liberal arts in the SMSU mission:

“Some have called for a downsizing of the current liberal arts curriculum at SMSU; however, it is an important and valued aspect of the University’s mission to engage the communities it serves. SMSU officials noted that the University recently completed a review and re-design of its liberal arts core. The new Liberal Education Program implemented this past fall semester, is based on a national survey of business, community, and campus leaders who identified what all college graduates, regardless of major, need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in the 21st Century. Thus, a continuous ‘rebalancing’ of the curriculum mix over time is a more reasonable and practical approach, that again establishes or sustains both community and business connections and meets the core educational needs of its students.”

The suggestions are in line with SMSU’s past efforts and are incorporated into the 2012-2017 Strategic Directions. The full [Southwest Minnesota Higher Education Study Report](#) can be found in e-resources and on SMSU’s [Strategic Planning web site](#).

**CORE COMPONENT 1C: THE INSTITUTION UNDERSTANDS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ITS MISSION AND THE DIVERSITY OF SOCIETY.**

*1C1. The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.*

From its publicly stated support of including diversity in its guiding values, Liberal Education Program goals, and academic programs, to its welcoming physical design, having been built barrier-free in the late 1960s before ADA, SMSU demonstrates a commitment to diversity in its many forms. The University recognizes and strives for the transformative educational experiences that can occur when bringing together students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds.

**PROVIDING FOR AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY**

*Guiding Principles and Values*

The relationship between SMSU’s mission and a diverse society is clearly stated in a number of guiding documents. Several of the University’s guiding values directly address diversity, specifically values 11 and 12:

11. We embrace diversity by developing a quality, comprehensive educational environment that fosters interaction among people of all religions, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and ages.

12. We foster cultural understanding on campus through social, educational, and administrative interaction with our diverse population of international students. We offer the opportunity to learn about different cultures through participation in our Global Studies programs.

Diversity awareness, recruiting, and support have been consistent components of SMSU’s strategic plan. For example, the [Biennial Strategic Plan from 2003-2005](#) reported on the following goal related to diversity and the progress made by 2005, described below in Table 1.3:

*TABLE 1.3 BIENNIAL STRATEGIC PLAN 2003-2005 DIVERSITY COMPONENT AND PROGRESS*

<i>Goal Two.</i> SMSU will create comprehensive learning experiences for its students
<i>Objective 2.</i> Explore options to expand cultural/diversity awareness. This may include expanding Study Abroad, supporting an Ethnic Studies program, developing a mentor program for minority and international students, and enhancing a Women’s Center in the new Student Center Complex.
<i>Related Progress Points Reported in 2005:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working to insure campus services, facilities and programs are aligned with and accessible to students with disabilities and international students (HLC Criterion 3)</li> <li>• A Women’s Center is planned for the new Student Center Complex</li> <li>• Grants are being sought to support Global and Ethnic studies programs and travel abroad</li> </ul>

The [2007-2012 Strategic Plan](#) (Table 1.4 below) contains similar goal and strategy language:

TABLE 1.4 STRATEGIC PLAN 2007-2012 DIVERSITY COMPONENT AND PROGRESS

<p><i>Goal Two.</i> SMSU will create comprehensive learning experiences for its students</p>
<p><i>Diversity-Related Strategy Statement:</i> 1) Increase cross-cultural interactions to promote understanding and appreciation within the campus community.</p>
<p><i>Relevant Objectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Actively seek participation from a diverse population of students, faculty, staff, and community members, and promote physical and social inclusiveness, particularly for physically disabled and international students.</li> <li>5. Continue to explore options to expand cultural diversity/awareness, develop and expand collaborative learning opportunities, study abroad programs, and international exchange programs.</li> <li>6. Develop a mentor program for minority and international students</li> </ul>

In the most current SMSU [Strategic Plan for 2012-2017](#), issues related to diversity and inclusion have taken on a more prominent role, as diversity is one of the five primary strategic directions, noted in Table 1.5 below:

TABLE 1.5 STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2017 DIVERSITY STRATEGIC DIRECTION

<p><i>Diversity Strategic Direction:</i> Build on existing strengths in creating an environment to celebrate the accessible and diverse nature of the SMSU campus community and encourage the growth of all groups on campus</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goal 1-Foster partnerships with groups and organizations across the region and state that create a climate that supports the understanding of diverse individuals and groups.</li> <li>Goal 2–Foster a campus climate that celebrates the interaction of diverse cultures from historical and current perspectives in all academic and student service programs.</li> <li>Goal 3–Maintain and expand existing activities and programs that draw internal and external groups to celebrate the richness of our diverse world.</li> <li>Goal 4 – Develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the University makes continuous and ongoing progress to ensure accessibility and to reach current and future Title IX requirements</li> </ul>

The SMSU strategic plans align with the system-level initiatives to raise the profile of diversity throughout MnSCU. The [2010-2014 MnSCU Strategic Plan](#) (which is very similar to 2008-2012 MnSCU Strategic Plan established by the previous chancellor) references diversity within the top strategic direction: “Strategic Direction 1: Increase access, opportunity and success” and first related goal: “Goal 1.1 Raise Minnesota’s participation and achievement in post-secondary education by meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and educational goals.”

*Diversity Plan, the Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogues Grant, and Ongoing Work*

In addition to guiding principles and values, in 2003 SMSU published [a five-year diversity plan](#) titled “Commitment to Diversity: SMSU Plan for Excellence.” The plan was aligned with the Biennial Strategic Plan at that time as well as the mission, goals, and vision statement in place in 2003 (which have since been revised in 2008). The 2003 diversity plan described the challenges related to increasing diversity at SMSU and set ambitious, specific strategies and goals related to diversity. Though in some cases extending beyond the original five year target, a number of those goals have been attained, such as the establishment of a Bridge program and SMSU’s collaboration with Upward Bound, and the goal to increase the number of students of color and culturally diverse students enrolled at SMSU from 7 percent to 10 percent, which was achieved in 2013. Despite staffing turnover and reorganization, the work outlined in the original diversity plan has continued to develop and evolve; as noted in the Introduction, creating a new diversity plan is a key task in the Strategic Planning Committee’s 2014-2015 priorities in order to address the emphasis on diversity in the new strategic plan and MnSCU directive as well as President Gores’ commitment to diversity.

From 2006 through 2010, the University was privileged to be awarded a Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogues grant, which ran for two two-year phases. The intent of the Difficult Dialogues work, according to the faculty group directing the grant, was “to create an inclusive campus environment steeped in respect for all voices and to influence equivalent attitudes within the larger community.” The first phase of the grant included hiring an outside consultant who designed and implemented a two-year plan to work with the campus community. As cited in the final grant report, goals and accomplishments during the first phase included the following:

*Completed in 1st Phase:*

1. Mission/Goals and Activities: Serve the needs of the Indigenous Nations and Dakota’s People’s population on campus and in the region. Activities: Support the Annual Conference hosted by the Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies Program at SMSU.
2. Create student awareness and dialogue on the damaging impact of racism and bigotry directed at Native Americans, the Islamic Population, and the GLBT community. Activities: Create new classes reflecting the subject matter: Homophobia and Sexualities; Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Breaking the Native American Stereotype. Host Speaker Series of Immigration Serve the needs of the Indigenous Nations and Dakota People’s Population promoting Indigenous authors, scholars, and artists. Successfully launched, published and distributed journal.
3. Educate the SMSU faculty on cultural sensitivity and awareness and encourage dialogue on this issue. Self-understanding and clarity were garnered surrounding the peculiar needs of the campus community and how to proceed in improving our level of intercultural competence.

*Completed in 2nd Phase:*

1. Continue creating student awareness and dialogue on the damaging impact of racism and bigotry directed at Native Americans, and the GLBT community, and the resulting issues of Genocide and Human Rights. Activities: Create new classes reflecting the subject matter: Expand courses previously developed in Phase I and incorporate new courses in Phase II. Develop “yoked courses” across disciplines with speakers.
2. Serve the needs of the Indigenous Nations and Dakota People’s Population promoting Indigenous authors, scholars, and artists. Activities: Continue the biannual journal: *Yellow Medicine Review: A Journal of Indigenous Literature, Art, and Thought*.
3. Continue to educate the SMSU faculty on cultural sensitivity and awareness and encourage dialogue of this issue. Bring in an external consultant to offer educational dialogue training sessions to dialogue team members.



While the Ford Foundation initiative and funding have ceased, the publication of the [Yellow Medicine Review: a Journal of Indigenous Literature, Art, & Thought](#) has been able to continue, with the support of the University. Since debuting with the Spring 2007 issue, YMR has published 14 issues with creative work from hundreds of indigenous authors. (A [useful description of the two phases](#), as well as the [final report](#) from which the excerpts above are taken and the [report appendix](#) with detailed syllabi, can be found in e-resources.)

While there have been improvements to diversity on campus and at the system-level, personnel from both faculty and administration across the levels are working to ensure that the issues related to diversity remain in focus. Concerns that diversity-related issues are being adequately addressed are shared across the entire MnSCU system. At the system-level, MnSCU has its own [Diversity and Equity division](#) and a [System Strategic Diversity Plan](#), responsible for concerns of students as well as employees. The InterFaculty Organization (IFO), representing faculty from all seven state universities in the MnSCU system, conducted a [Campus Climate study](#) over the span of two-years (2010-2012) involving a survey and focus groups of faculty in the system. As noted in the executive summary of their findings, “the central foci of the study were to identify what, if any, forms of inequality exist for women, faculty of color, and GLBT faculty.” The study found that diverse faculty report more negative experiences in their workplace than the general view and a higher incidence of “incivility and differential treatment,” some of which was severe.

The system-wide IFO Campus Climate study parallels many concerns voiced by faculty here. In 2011-2012, SMSUFA Faculty Assembly brought forward issues regarding diversity to Meet and Confer with the administration. In April 2012, a memo drafted by the SMSUFA Multicultural Issues Committee and endorsed by the Faculty Assembly was given to the administration. The memo described faculty concerns regarding cultural diversity and the institution’s responsibilities regarding diversity on campus, listing seven items including the diversity plan, cultural diversity office structure, need for more minority student scholarships, and a request to support an anti-racism team on campus, among others (the full text of the memo is available in [D2L documentation for the review team](#)). Though SMSU has participated in Difficult Dialogues and has made strides with its diversity planning, the University recognizes that there is much progress yet to be made.

#### *A Profile of Diversity within the Student Population*

As noted in Criterion 1A2, SMSU’s student profile includes a large number of students from lower-economic status and first-generation college students, as well as students with disabilities. The growing diversity of our region and state is also reflected in our first generation, students of color, new immigrant and underserved and underrepresented student body. In addition, Southwest consistently welcomes students from 22-25 countries from around the world. Figures 1.13 and 1.14 below display the number and the percentage of enrolled students of color and international students from 2003 through 2013 at SMSU.

FIGURE 1.14 NUMBER OF STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS 2003-2013

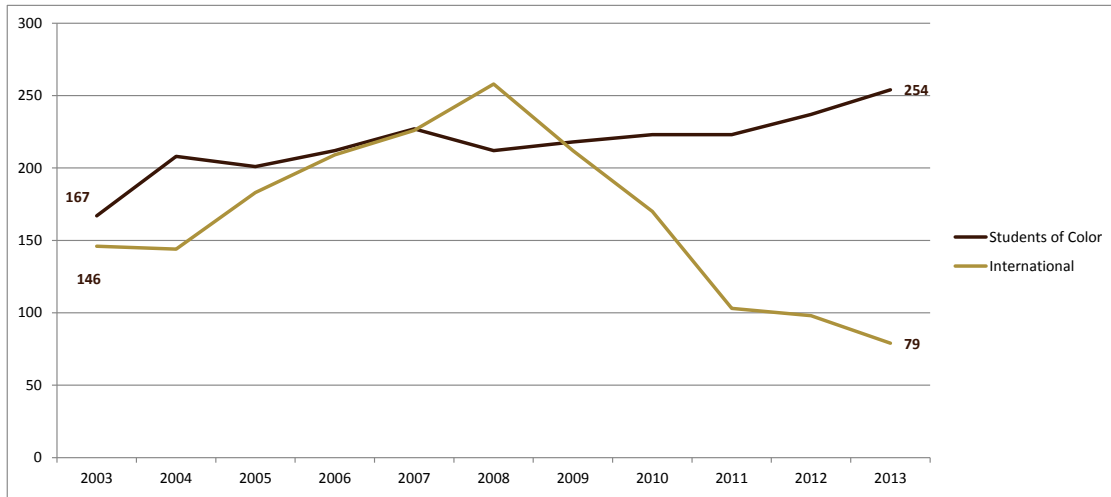
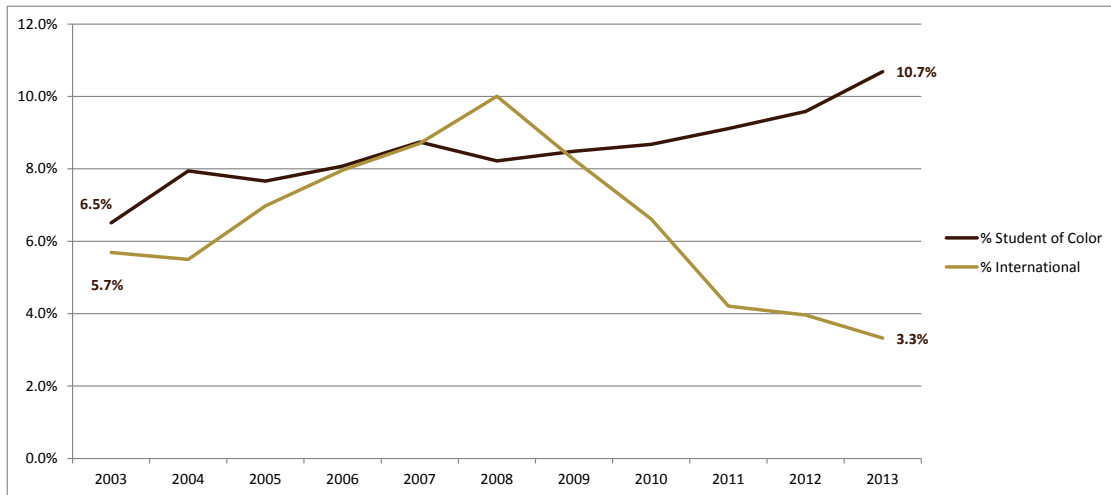


FIGURE 1.15 PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS 2003-2013



As is clear in the images, the number of international students reached a peak in 2008 but has declined. The number of students of color has fairly steadily increased over that same time period. While the same data is represented in Table 1.6 below (international students are labeled as “Non-Resident Alien” in this table), the table provides a description of racial/ethnic categories, showing that the numbers of American Indian and Hispanic students have slowly been rising over the past ten years.

TABLE 1.6 STUDENTS OF COLOR AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Racial/Ethnic Category	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Headcount</b>											
Am Ind/Alask	12	14	13	11	14	15	14	16	19	23	23
Asian	31	41	37	49	57	54	62	52	55	59	62
Black	100	117	108	106	104	94	89	108	101	97	113
Hawaii/Pac		2	1	3	5	6	5	3	1	1	1
Hispanic	24	34	42	43	47	43	48	44	47	57	55
Non-Resident Alien	146	144	183	209	226	258	212	170	103	98	79
Unknown	89	36	15	8	8	8	8	8	3	3	20
White	2,164	2,230	2,224	2,196	2,136	2,101	2,132	2,169	2,119	2,134	2,024
Total	2,566	2,618	2,623	2,625	2,597	2,579	2,570	2,570	2,448	2,472	2,377
<b>Percentage</b>											
% Student of Color	6.5%	7.9%	7.7%	8.1%	8.7%	8.2%	8.5%	8.7%	9.1%	9.6%	10.7%
% International	5.7%	5.5%	7.0%	8.0%	8.7%	10.0%	8.2%	6.6%	4.2%	4.0%	3.3%

1C2. The institution's processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

#### A BLUE PRINT FOR ACTION IN FOSTERING DIVERSITY

A number of offices on campus work to support the unique needs of students, as well as provide opportunities for university engagement with diversity. These include Disability Services, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and International Student Services.

##### *Disability Services*

Since its inception, Southwest Minnesota State University has been recognized as a leader in providing access and opportunity to students with physical disabilities. In particular, the design and structure of the campus accommodates students in wheelchairs, including the tunnels and walkways that connect the academic buildings and the residence halls. While other institutions are now catching up to some of the University's physical accommodations, most still do not provide interconnected access to the buildings.

Several of the University's guiding values refer to the continued focus on enabling persons with disabilities to achieve their higher education goals. In particular, values 9, 10, and 11 cite creating a safe campus for all, "maintaining and enhancing a physical design to provide access to all," and ensuring an "educational environment that fosters interaction among people of all religions, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and ages." In accordance with these values, Southwest Minnesota State University accommodates students with disabilities through the office of [Disability Services](#). Academic support services include accommodations for exams, textbooks/documents in alternate format, scribes, note-taking, interpreters, amplification, assistive technology, and equipment access.

Physical support services provided by the University include general physical therapy provided in conjunction with Exercise Science majors. Wheelchair and adapted equipment prescriptions for insurance purposes, and basic mechanical assistance for equipment is arranged through an off-campus provider. The Director of Disability Services collaborates with Admission, Residential Life, the Physical Plant, University Public Safety, Health Services, the Exercise Science department,

personal care assistance providers, the Southwestern Center for Independent Living, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that programs, services and activities of state and local governments be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. It also requires public entities to take appropriate steps to insure that communications, with applicants, participants, and members of the public who have disabilities, are as effective as communications with others. The Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator and Section 504 compliance officer, who is also the Dean of Students, manages issues and concerns of students who think they have not been provided reasonable accommodations or who believe that structural accommodations have not been made. The office coordinates with other offices throughout the University in an effort to meet these needs.

#### *Offices of Diversity and Inclusion and International Student Services*

The [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) and the [International Student Services](#) office have been restructured several times over the past decade in response to how to best address student needs while also dealing with diminishing fiscal resources and staffing changes. From the time of the last review in 2004 until 2008, services to support students of color and international students were provided by the Office of Cultural Diversity. This area had provided support services to students of color and international students as well as programmatic backing for academic departments and student organizations. Regional community input, support and attendance were highlighted.

In 2008, MnSCU encouraged colleges and universities to adopt new programmatic priorities emphasizing first generation, underrepresented and underserved populations and to selectively use the categories of minority, multicultural or students of color. In response, SMSU eliminated the Office of Cultural Diversity as it had been known in the past. International Student Services was separated into its own office reporting to the Dean of Students, and the Office of Cultural Diversity was placed within the Learning Resources department as part of the first generation, underserved and underrepresented umbrella in MnSCU's overall Diversity Plan. Learning Resources, which was the umbrella for a variety of areas, also included TRIO SSS, TRIO Upward Bound, Disability Resources, Educational Opportunity Program, and Access Opportunity Success (AOS). When the Office of Cultural Diversity was added, Learning Resources was renamed the Academic and Diversity Resources Department (ADR). The overall director of ADR representing all of these areas reported to the Dean of Business, Education, and Professional Studies.

At the end of the 2008-2009 academic year, the Director of ADR retired, and in 2009, SMSU's application for the federally-funded TRIO program was not selected to be funded. Both events caused additional restructuring, as did the departure of the director of the Office of Cultural Diversity. For one year, the Associate Dean oversaw the Office of Cultural Diversity. When the position of Associate Dean was eliminated, an *interim* director, now the permanent director, was assigned. The new director proposed the renaming of the Office of Cultural Diversity as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2012-2013. The current director is also in charge of the AOS program, although that is its own separate program apart from the responsibilities for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The other areas that had been under the umbrella of Academic and Diversity Resources were split out with separate reporting lines: TRIO Upward Bound now reports to Admissions; Educational Opportunity Program reports to the Dean of Arts, Letters, and Sciences; and Disability Resources, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and AOS report to the Dean of Students.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion works to provide an inclusive, quality and comprehensive educational experience for students from all religions, races, ethnicities, genders, ages, sexual orientation and countries by engaging the campus and surrounding communities to promote and advocate for cultural diversity and multiculturalism. The office's staff work with the campus community including academic departments, student organizations, residential life and Athletics to promote diversity through programming and student and academic support. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion involves the university in a host of activities and provides support services addressing the needs of this population as well as the entire student body.

The current director of Diversity and Inclusion has provided stability and direction to the office, in addition to the oversight of AOS. In conjunction with trying to be a more inclusive campus and because of his multiple duties, the director sought a central location where his staff could provide programming for students of color as well as the underrepresented population of the AOS program. In July of 2013, AOS and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion moved to [a new location in Commons East](#). Because many students use both departments, the new location provides easy access to both and is in the pathway of their daily activities. The new location is convenient for the students in the AOS Living and Learning community as well.

As noted above, as part of the 2008 restructuring, International Student Services (ISS), was moved out of the Office of Cultural Diversity and became its own program area. The ISS program provides travel assistance, orientation support, social and cultural support, programs for international students' adjustment and cultural acclimation, activities for the campus and region, as well as two major festivals: Fall semester's Art and Culture Show and Spring semester's International Food Festival. In addition, all Homeland Security requirements and student regulations are housed in this area. ISS has faced several transitions itself, with the retirement of the long-time coordinator of ISS and fiscal constraint on hiring qualified recruiters. International student enrollment has plummeted as the two primary countries from which SMSU enrolled students, Kenya and Nepal, have both struggled economically and politically. In addition, in both countries, the U.S. State Department has dramatically reduced the number of approved student VISAs. Resources to send admission personnel to recruit internationally have not been available. The University has been working to identify different methods of attracting international students, such as with targeted partnership programs, described further later in this chapter.

Despite many transitions and changes of location, all of the offices involved with working with our diverse student body continue to work with regional agencies, parents, faculty, staff and students to ensure that as many students as possible can achieve a university education and the rich experiences that accompany college life.

#### *Affirmative Action and Faculty/Staff Diversity Profile*

Southwest Minnesota State University maintains an up-to-date [Affirmative Action plan](#); a detailed [web page](#) ensures the plan is public. All policies on equal opportunity and affirmative action are consistent with MnSCU board policies, Minnesota Statutes, and applicable Federal laws.

SMSU has a commitment to affirmative action and proactively recruiting, hiring and retaining persons who are in the underrepresented groups. The Affirmative Action Office is responsible for

- assisting faculty, staff and students who believe they have been harassed or discriminated against because they are a member of a protected group.

- monitoring the recruitment and employment process for faculty and staff to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, as well as compliance with the Southwest Minnesota State University mission and strategic plan regarding diversity and affirmative action.
- development and monitoring of Southwest Minnesota State University Affirmative Action Plan. As part of the affirmative action plan, a utilization analysis of our current workforce is completed to determine whether women and minorities are underutilized within any of the job groupings of the University.

Underutilization is determined by comparing the number and percentage of women, minorities and people with a disability in each job group (Officials & Administrators, Faculty Professionals, Non Faculty Professionals, Technical/Paraprofessional, Office/Clerical, Skilled Craft and Service Maintenance) with their availability (the percentage of women, minorities and people with a disability assumed to be in a pool of qualified persons within an appropriate recruitment area). Underutilization occurs when the percentages of women, minorities and people with a disability in the University's workforce are lower than the availability percentages. The results of this analysis become the basis for establishing hiring goals for the various job groups.

Underutilization in women and minorities in Officials & Administrators, Faculty Professionals, Non-Faculty Professionals job groups have fluctuated back and forth over the past 10 years, being underutilized during one 2-year plan and not underutilized the next. There has not been a significant change in the number of diverse employees on campus. For the first time in the past 10 years, women were not underutilized in the faculty work group in the 2012 workforce analysis.

Southwest Minnesota State University's overall AA goal is to improve its representation of underutilized groups. In order to accomplish this goal, each new hiring opportunity is viewed as an Affirmative Action opportunity, and each hiring unit is expected to make a special effort to recruit applicants in areas where underutilization has been identified. Southwest Minnesota State University is also committed to hiring individuals with disabilities who can perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation. When full utilization for a specific job group has been met, SMSU will attempt to maintain a workforce that reflects the composition of the available pool of qualified persons within the recruitment area.

Despite our efforts, attracting and retaining faculty and staff from underutilized groups in our rural location remains a challenge.

#### *Diversity in Academic Offerings*

SMSU provides many meaningful opportunities to experience global, American, and regional diversity opportunities through academic coursework. As noted earlier, an extensive examination and revision of the Liberal Education Program (LEP) occurred since the last accreditation. One of the ten Liberal Education Program (LEP) outcomes is focused on diversity; diversity and global perspectives are also themes required in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MTC). When looking at diversity from a broad perspective, SMSU offers courses relating to multiculturalism, human diversity and the global perspective listed at all levels and across departments, as demonstrated in our academic catalog. Many departments sponsor speakers, presentations, and activities to supplement the work and themes being covered in the courses. (See "[Sample List of Diversity Presentations 2004-2014](#)" in e-resources for the review team.)

As noted in Criterion 1A2, the Global Studies program also offers exposure to diversity for SMSU students who participate in the clusters, seminars, and experiences. In addition to studying a different culture at length in the classroom work, the voyage portion opens students' eyes directly to sights, sounds, and people they might not otherwise have ever encountered. Students who participate in a cluster can return as Student Mentors on subsequent trips, helping their fellow students understand and navigate new territory.

In addition to individual courses or the Global Studies program, SMSU also offers several academic minors related to diversity studies that can be bundled with any major program on campus. Currently SMSU offers three such minors: Women's Studies, Hispanic Studies, and [Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies](#) (INDS, formerly called the American Indian Studies and Dakota Studies minor when it first began in 2002 through 2004). The [Women's Studies minor](#) and [Hispanic Studies minor](#) are interdisciplinary, with students able to choose courses from a variety of programs.

In the time since the last HLC review, the INDS program and associated extracurricular activities created a variety of experiences for students. When the INDS program was implemented in 2002, SMSU hosted an annual conference focusing on contemporary American Indian Topics and issues. These multi-day conferences brought in nationally recognized Indigenous scholars and community leaders and offered the campus community as well as region and upper Midwest an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions on diverse world views and educational pedagogy. In addition, the INDS Program, Oyate Club and the Office of Cultural Diversity collaborated with the 4 Dakota communities of Minnesota (Upper Sioux, Lower Sioux, Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community and the Prairie Island Dakota Community) as well as the Sisseton/Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation and the Flandreau Indian Community of South Dakota in sponsoring an annual Wacipi (Pow-wow). American Indians of all ages would come to campus and for a cultural celebration joining with the students, faculty and non-Indian community in a day of sharing and learning.

Since the retirement of the full-time INDS faculty member in 2008, the position has not been filled. The annual INDS conference and wacipi are no longer held. However, there continues to be University faculty and teaching staff involvement in reviewing, revising and advocating for the minor. In Spring 2014, a curriculum revision was approved to add classes to the minor, as just one course, INDS 100, Introduction to Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies, and two electives for this minor delivered by other departments on campus had been able to be offered in recent years. The revised minor is more multi-disciplinary; six of the required courses are from courses with prefixes other than INDS. In addition, the Oyate Club provides leadership in involving academic departments and other student groups in sponsoring activities and speakers including Billy Mills (the 1964 Olympic Gold Medal winner of the 10,000 meter run), Sheldon Wolfchild, Lower Sioux Dancers and American Indian Feasts.

#### *Partnering to Promote Diversity*

SMSU works with multiple partners in different formats to increase the diversity profile on campus and to support all forms of diversity among the student body.

One way in which SMSU addresses its role in diverse, multicultural and global learning environments is through the development of partnerships with other international universities. These partnerships are also helping to strengthen the numbers of international students on campus. Three different relationships have been developed within the last two years. In the summer of 2012, Southwest

Minnesota State University entered into a relationship with Adeseye Royal College, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. This is a comprehensive secondary school and college (equivalent to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades in the USA). Starting Fall semester of 2013, SMSU's first MBA cohort from Minghin University of Science and Technology, Taiwan, joined our university. This partnership looks forward to expanding to include a comprehensive exchange of students, faculty and ideas. Also in the Fall of 2013, Taylor's University in Malaysia and SMSU entered into an educational collaboration. Taylor's University has in place an American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) and partners with a number of universities in the U.S. Under the agreement with SMSU, Taylor's students may take their general education courses at Taylor's University, then transfer those credits and earn a degree from SMSU the final two years.

For the past six years, the SMSU Office of International Services and the Education Department has had a partnership with Udon Thani Rajabhat University in Thailand. Each year, a delegation of doctoral students and faculty from Udon Thani visit SMSU for three weeks. While at SMSU, the delegation take one master's level course, as well as tour area schools and meet with administrators, teachers and students to get a better understanding of the educational system in America. In 2013-2014, the exchange included two SMSU students student teaching in Thailand in the spring semester.

Closer to home, SMSU also partners with the [Upward Bound Program](#). The Upward Bound program provides a free college preparatory program for eligible high school students funded by the U.S. Department of Education and sponsored locally by SMSU. Interested 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students must meet criteria, which include coming either from a low-income or first generation college family status. SMSU offers a four-year TRIO Upward Bound/Talent Search scholarship for students from the program to continue their education at SMSU.

SMSU has a number of other scholarship partners whose funds are dedicated to students from diverse backgrounds. SMSU offers need-based scholarships as well as scholarships for students who are from specific geographic areas. One scholarship program, the Tolk Scholarship, assists first generation college students who have overcome extraordinary personal, financial or academic challenges to achieve success. There is a very significant scholarship program designed to assist Native American students, as well as a small scholarship to assist international students, who often do not qualify for others. In the past SMSU had an Access and Opportunity Scholarship that was targeted for students from Minneapolis and St. Paul; while that program was phased out by the donor, over the past decade, a number of students benefitted from it. SMSU also has several scholarships that support students with physical disabilities, to assist them in their transition to college life. The SMSU Foundation works closely with the Office of Financial Aid to ensure that all students have access to scholarship opportunities and to constantly grow the number of scholarships and scholarship dollars that SMSU is able to offer. In FY13, the SMSU Foundation alone awarded over \$800,000 in scholarships to SMSU students.

Scholarships with diversity criteria include but are not limited to the following:

- Buuck Family Foundation Scholarship – disabled students (preferably wheelchair-bound)
- Oscar & Cora Sather Scholarship – Native American
- LeAnn C. Tolk Scholarship - first generation, financial hardship
- Martin Luther King Memorial Scholarship – minority student
- International Student Success Scholarship – international student
- Bush Memorial Scholarship – need-based, Yellow Medicine county
- Foundation Regional Leadership Scholarship – Southwest Minnesota



A variety of other partnership efforts that influence diversity on campus abound. As mentioned above in Criterion 1C1, SMSU was fortunate to partner with the Ford Foundation in their Difficult Dialogues initiative for four years. Aramark, the campus meal/food vendor, has been and remains a partner with global education and diversity efforts. They are the primary employer of international students, have an active student advisory committee (which seeks out international and multicultural student members) as well as support international and cultural food festivals through the use of their facilities, staff, and expertise. Residential Life has had a commitment to diversity as evident through their house programming. In addition, Residence Life sponsors an Access, Opportunity and Success Living and Learning community (an entire house complex) focused on first generation students. The Women's Center continues to have a strong presence on campus after having been established once the Student Center was rebuilt after the fire. Gender issues and women's advocacy speakers and events are sponsored by the Center. Finally, the GOLD College engages our senior (although senior citizen status is not required for taking the courses) community of learners in structured courses in both fall and spring semester. Courses are taught by faculty, administrative faculty, and community members and are well received by participants from across the region.

#### *Opportunities with Diverse Student Organizations*

Southwest Minnesota State University also has active student groups whose emphasis and missions are to promote global awareness, multiculturalism and human diversity. These include:

- Black Student Union
- Club Latino
- GLBTA
- Hmong Student Org.
- International Student Org.
- Le Club Francais
- Model UN
- History Club
- Social Work Club
- Nepalese Student Assoc.
- Non-Traditional Student Org.
- Oyate Club
- African Student Organization
- Muslim Student Organization
- Spanish Club
- UGLYS (United Global Leaders Yearning for Success)

These organizations often work collaboratively in presenting major festivals, speakers, community services activities, cultural awareness and social events.

Overall, SMSU sponsors and advocates for diversity and is a hub of and for multiculturalism in the southwestern region of Minnesota. SMSU remains structurally positioned to provide and support diversity but has less than the optimal resources needed to fully fund academic, student support, and admission-related services. The loss of the Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies professor and the decision not to rehire obviously falls into this category. The revision of the INDS minor in Spring 2014 demonstrates the University's interest in retaining this program area. Though our affirmative

action plan is proactive, we continue to struggle with the recruiting and retaining faculty of color. The diversity plan renewal slated for this upcoming year will address these and related issues. Support for these efforts remain broad-based as evident from the above descriptions.

## CORE COMPONENT 1D: THE INSTITUTION'S MISSION DEMONSTRATES COMMITMENT TO THE PUBLIC GOOD

*1D1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.*

*1D2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.*

*1D3. The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.*

SMSU demonstrates through its mission, programming and collaborative efforts that it is committed to the public good and committed to meeting the needs of its regional constituencies. As a public institution, SMSU does not generate revenue for investors; however, SMSU is acutely aware of its biography as an institution created to serve the 19 county area of southwest Minnesota. Indeed, this commitment is nested within SMSU's mission, as it states that "Southwest Minnesota University prepares students to meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities." Moreover, several of the guiding values relate directly to the imperative to connect learning with the community. Value 7 states, "[w]e believe in the integration of campus and community. We are committed to being responsive to the needs of southwestern Minnesota and recognize that partnerships with community entities provide us with valuable talents and expertise." Value 13 emphasizes the deep learning that can occur outside of traditional classroom settings. Specifically it states "We believe that the southwestern Minnesota region provides rich opportunities for learning that go beyond the traditional classroom and lab setting to community-based learning experiences. Therefore, we are committed to creating a variety of applied learning experiences that enhance students' practical problem-solving and strengthen their commitment to civic engagement." As an educational center of gravity for the region, SMSU seeks to channel its efforts with these values in mind.

Consequently, SMSU strives to merge campus and classroom learning with community involvement. The results of the survey conducted by the HLC Steering Committee indicate that the public strongly agree that SMSU's three largest contributions to the public good relate to educating students for the community and beyond to the global community. Through its efforts to make higher education accessible across the region and in its commitment to civic engagement in all of its forms, SMSU has developed or partnered with numerous organizations to enhance the social fabric of our communities and region.

SMSU's educational impact on the region is pronounced, and the institution itself through its programming and partnerships directly engages in activities that promote the public good. SMSU's continuing commitment to the communities it serves is enacted through multiple means:

- Promoting higher education in the region and beyond
- Emphasizing civic engagement
- Enhancing students' experiences through service-learning
- Providing enrichment opportunities for the greater community
- Supporting a wide range of co-curricular activities
- Engaging in community and regional partnerships

Examples of each of these are described briefly in the following sections of this chapter. More detailed information about many of the examples can be found linked in e-resources or in other chapters as noted. While this list is not all-inclusive, the examples highlight the great efforts undertaken by SMSU to promote the public good.

---

### SMSU'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ACCESSIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION

One of the ways that SMSU demonstrates its commitment to the public good is through its distance-based academic programming. In providing access to higher education to the region and beyond, SMSU serves the needs of the public. The two primary means in which SMSU provides this access are through its distance learning opportunities and the College Now program.

#### *SMSU Distance Learning*

Distance learning opportunities offered by SMSU aid a variety of students, teachers, and two-year college faculty across the state. The different forms of distance learning are overviewed here; more information regarding distance learning can be found in [Criterion 3](#).

The Undergraduate Distance Learning Program, or 2+2 program, provides geographically place-bound students the opportunity to turn associate degrees into bachelor degrees. For the past 30 years, SMSU has used cutting edge technology of the times to deliver quality academic opportunities to students around the region and across the state.

Currently, the 2+2 program provides degree completion programs of distinction in Management and Early Childhood Education. Graduates of partnering community and technical colleges who have completed an A.A.S., A.S., or A.A. need only to apply for the corresponding bachelor degree in either Management or Early Childhood Education. SMSU is the only Early Childhood online option within the MnSCU system. The associate degree is transferred and the student embarks on an online degree program with a complement of online student services and amenities through the Office of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach and the pertinent academic department. The commitment to student service includes a dedication to academic advising and periodic on-site presence by faculty at distance site locations. Faculty teaching in the distance learning programs pursue ongoing professional development in online teaching. Student comments and testimonials have given evidence to the 2+2 programs' commitment to high quality student service and dedication to academic advising; for example, over 86% of 2+2 students answered positively in the Spring 2013 survey administered by the Office of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach about the quality of advising they received (the [full survey](#) is available in e-resources). By providing the opportunities of baccalaureate education to students at their home locations, SMSU is engaging students, providing access to quality academics and exemplifying its mission.

Graduate programs are also offered online. In 2011, SMSU successfully submitted a [substantive change request](#) to increase the percentage of distance programming. The change application included approval not only of the 2+2 online programs listed above but also for the Master of Science in Education, Management, Special Education, and Master of Business Administration. Employed, place-bound adults in rural Minnesota and adjacent areas continue to be underserved, and the degree programs included in the change request were designed specifically for them. Most students who enroll in these degree programs are located too far away from a four-year or graduate program to allow travel to a site. Most of the students are already employed and thus have time restrictions as well and need to enroll in programs that accommodate their work schedules.

For the past six years, SMSU has also been the sole provider, in partnership with MnSCU and with the support of a MnSCU grant, of [pedagogy courses for new college faculty in the MnSCU System](#) two-year schools. These classes are primarily taken by faculty who are required to complete them for the tenure process; however, other faculty also enroll, such as new university faculty members needing courses in basic pedagogy and adjunct community and technical college faculty who were encouraged by their dean to acquire more background in teaching skills. The courses carry graduate credit but do not currently apply to a graduate degree.

### *College Now*

Although the College Now dual credit program is thoroughly described in several other areas of the self-study (see the Introduction and [Criterion 3](#)), it deserves mention in this core component. College Now, through which SMSU offers college-level courses in high school settings with the high school teacher delivering the SMSU curriculum and being mentored by an SMSU faculty member, has provided access to higher education to thousands of students throughout the state (see Figure 1.9 College Now Enrollments by High School since 2004 in Criterion 1A2). Created to serve the state statute when the Minnesota Legislature created the [Post Secondary Enrollment Options program](#), College Now (formerly called the Challenge Program when the University was last reviewed by HLC) has grown to satisfy the high demand from high schools and parents. SMSU's College Now program was the first in many areas of the state; although now other universities and colleges are developing their own dual credit programs, College Now has a strong presence throughout the state. President Gores is the only University president to sit on the MnSCU Concurrent Enrollment Group studying concurrent enrollment needs within the System, and in March 2013, English Professor Amy Berry was appointed as the representative for four-year universities as the Four-Year Postsecondary Institutional Representative on the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnership's (NACEP) [National Accreditation Commission](#). SMSU ensures that the College Now courses meet higher education standards, and the program is accredited by NACEP.

---

## AN EMPHASIS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Since the last HLC review in 2004, much has changed regarding the integration of civic engagement throughout campus. Shortly before the 2004 visit, explicit civic engagement efforts were just beginning. In 2002, SMSU became a member of the Minnesota Campus Compact. In 2003, SMSU was a founding member campus of the American Democracy Project (ADP), sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Involvement with ADP ran through 2009, during which time an active interdisciplinary group of faculty committed to thoughtful integration of civic engagement in course instruction. The partnership with [MN Campus Compact](#), which also extended through 2009 and was renewed in 2013, has likewise had an extensive impact on the University, ranging from assistance with setting up infrastructure of support for civic and community

engagement, to development of a broad conceptualization of civic engagement, to providing a structure for ongoing assessment of process and outcomes related to civic engagement programming in academic and student service spheres. SMSU has been a lead campus member in MN Campus Compact with respect to being awarded grant funding for two comprehensive campus-wide assessments of civic and community engagement programming, in 2004 and 2009. SMSU has also been a participating campus from 2007-2013 in the [AAC&U – Core Commitments: Education for Personal and Social Responsibility](#) initiative. President Gores was recently elected to serve on the Board of the Minnesota Campus Compact, a term that began in July 2014.

Civic and community engagement have risen to prominence through influential changes in the mission and values and the University’s response to national best practices, including several of the high impact practices described by the AAC&U. Specifically, the new mission and values statements approved in 2008 include explicit statements related to the promotion of civic engagement, with the mission invoking the University’s mandate to help students become “engaged citizens” and with references to civic and community engagement in guiding values 5 (“responsible citizens and good stewards”), 7 (“integration of campus and community”), and 13 (“learning beyond the traditional classroom”). The LEP transformation further underscored the importance of civic engagement by including “practice of responsible citizenship in (their) local and global communities” as one of the ten LEP learning outcomes. And finally, the latest [Strategic Plan](#) includes an explicit focus on engagement in the “Community Partnership” Strategic Direction, Value 3: “Identify community-based projects and prioritize projects annually that can be completed in partnership between the identified community and SMSU through Service Learning or other campus based programs.”

All of these efforts are supported by the SMSU [Center for Civic Engagement](#), which is co-coordinated by two faculty members. A small group of graduate and undergraduate students staff the Center on a day-to-day basis. All work at the Center is guided by an interdisciplinary Faculty Advisory Committee for Civic Engagement, and through regularly affiliating with Student Affairs staff and community partners in the development of programs and delivery of services. The Center for Civic Engagement is structurally accountable to the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and thus serves interests of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Full details about the Center for Civic Engagement, including a full list of examples from both academic and student affairs, can be found on the Center’s web site; this site also includes a link to a [summary report of all civic engagement](#) activities at the University since 2002. Civic and community engagement are at the heart of how SMSU demonstrates its commitment to public good. All of the examples that follow in the remainder of this chapter tie back to the themes of engagement found in the University mission and values; many are supported directly by the Center for Civic Engagement or indirectly through the groundwork that the Center has done.

---

## SERVICE-LEARNING THAT IMPACTS COMMUNITY LIFE

The Center for Student Engagement provides a service-learning packet for faculty and for students, along with a sample student contract form and student reflection instructions that faculty can use. Service-learning occurs across the disciplines in courses at SMSU. Several prime examples include the Redwood River Mentoring and Monitoring Project and the Schwans Wellness Project.

*Environmental Science: The Redwood River Mentoring and Monitoring Project*

The [Redwood River Monitoring Project](#) is an ongoing and unique collaboration between SMSU and local secondary schools that began fall 2004 with a grant that allowed SMSU to purchase equipment

and water test kits. SMSU students take a 2-credit course (ENVS 115) in which they learn about water quality and how to analyze a variety of water quality parameters. SMSU students then travel to Marshall High School where they mentor three classes of high school Biology students. In turn, the high school students, upon mastery of the information, mentor three classes of 7th grade students (with guidance and oversight by the SMSU mentors). The following week all groups of students meet at the Redwood River to demonstrate what they have learned as they collect data at three sites on the Redwood River. As of spring 2013, a total of 2313 students and 9 different teachers have been involved in the project since it started in 2004. SMSU students gain valuable mentoring experience, and the high school and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students learn the material well when involved in this project. Post-assessment tests compared to pre-assessment tests show an increase in students' knowledge of 37-46%. Another benefit of the project is that SMSU students become more invested in the local community. For example, after working with this Redwood River project, several students have signed up for the Citizen's Stream-Monitoring Program (CSMP), a volunteer program through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. An additional benefit to the community is the development of a database of information on the local Redwood River, information that is shared with the state regulatory agencies and which can be used in management of state water resources. The Redwood River Mentoring and Monitoring Project is an example of SMSU operationalizing the public aspect of its mission, fostering the public good, and promoting a stewardship ethic that impacts the quality of life in southwestern Minnesota.

#### *Exercise Science: Schwan's Wellness Project*

The SMSU Wellness and Human Performance Center recently completed [a pilot fitness program](#) with The Schwan Food Company during the fall 2012 semester. The program matched Schwan employees with SMSU Exercise Science majors to achieve individual fitness goals. The purpose of the program was to help employees reach their individual wellness goals while giving SMSU Exercise Science students practical experience. This service-learning program provides students with an opportunity to put into practice some of what they have learned prior to entering into their internships. It is also an opportunity for The Schwan Food Company employees to improve their health as part of the company's health and wellness program.

#### *Service-Learning throughout the Curriculum*

In addition to examples described above, numerous faculty from a variety of disciplines regularly incorporate service into one or more of their courses. Following is a list of example service-learning projects recently taught:

*Accounting* – Students in an advanced accounting class are trained and supervised to provide Free Tax Assistance service as part of a United Way-sponsored tax clinic

*Psychology* – Students enrolled in Developmental Psychology may opt to volunteer at area sites for 20 hours as a means of adding depth to their understanding of developmental constructs, while addressing area needs. Students enrolled in General Psychology and Psychology Seminar may, for extra credit, become involved in 15-20 hours of Election 2012 processes (e.g., assisting with voter registration, canvassing, assisting with coordination of public forums for local candidates) as a means of gaining a better understanding of "efficacy/motivation for social change."

*Health and Wellness* (department title prior to the restructuring of academic unit) – Students helped organize and run the Mustang Rodeo Special Olympics events.

*Political Science* – Students assist with electoral processes during election years and conduct exit polling.

*Sociology*– Students enrolled in an online Social Problems course may opt to locate service opportunities in the Marshall area or broader SW Minnesota region as a means of increasing their understanding of factors that contribute to a variety of social problems covered in this course.

*Social Work* — Students assist with get out the vote efforts and homelessness awareness.

---

## ENRICHING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

SMSU provides for the public good through the many cultural enrichment opportunities it offers the region. Many of the academic departments at SMSU offer programs, presentations, and other opportunities for regional community members as well as University constituents. In addition to their separate activities, each spring many programs collaborate to host a Fine Arts Celebration, which includes end-of-the-year productions but also involves additional readings and events to highlight the fine arts. A brief sample that demonstrates the variety of these offerings can be found in the descriptions below from Theater, Music, English, Astronomy, and the Gold College (formerly called Senior College).

### *SMSU Theater Program*

The [SMSU Theatre Program](#) puts on a number of productions each year, including the following:

- an annual season of three main stage productions
- assisting the Drama Club student organization with two student productions each year
- several performances by the Take 2 Improv Troupe, in conjunction with events like Homecoming and the Fine Arts Celebration

Community members also occasionally participate in SMSU Theatre productions as actors, directors, and musicians. All told, between 1,500 and 2,500 community members attend and are involved in these performances each year.

In addition to those who attend and participate in performances, the SMSU Theatre Program and Drama Club provide services and outreach to a number of other organizations including the following: area K-12 schools; various Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops; Wee Care Preschool; SMSU Child Care Center; nonprofit service and performing arts organizations, such as New Horizons Crisis Center, the Land Stewardship Project, MASC (Marshall Area Stage Company), Prairie Dance Alliance; and area churches. In an average school year, the Theatre Program and Drama Club work with 10-20 such community partners. In a typical academic year, the Theatre Program offers services such as these 10-20 times, averaging one to two a month.

Through these community partnerships and activities, the SMSU Theatre Program contributes to the public good by enriching the cultural options in the region, building arts-related skills and knowledge among citizens, and providing support and resources for community members to undertake their own artistic expression.

### *SMSU Music Program*

The [SMSU Music Program](#) is committed to enhancing the musical opportunities of the students of SMSU as well as citizens of Southwest Minnesota and the tri-state region, allowing all to participate in music, enjoy performances, support music education, and learn more about music in their lives. The

SMSU Music Program provides no fewer than six choral concerts, four jazz ensemble performances, and three concert/symphonic band concerts each year. In addition, the ensembles at SMSU regularly perform outreach performances outside the Marshall area, both locally and throughout the state, as well as in South Dakota. The music faculty strongly believe that music making is a life-long pursuit. They encourage and model life-long music learning and participation by inviting community members to participate in ensembles at SMSU. By virtue of their rehearsing outside the traditional school day, the Southwest Minnesota Orchestra, the SMSU/Community Concert Band, and the Men's Glee Club have strong community participation.

The music program is committed to enhancing music education in the schools and communities in the region. The Southwest Minnesota Orchestra has presented children's concerts for elementary and middle school students around the region for the past four years. The band program has hosted numerous guest artists who, in addition to working with SMSU ensembles, have worked with band students around the area in clinics in Marshall, Pipestone, Montevideo, Redwood Falls, Granite Falls, and Litchfield. The music faculty regularly visit school music programs around the tri-state region and work with their musicians and directors to share rehearsal, practice, and teaching strategies while lending their objective opinions on areas in which they may continue to improve. For the past seven years, the music program has also hosted the Minnesota Area Conducting Workshop, a three-day intensive workshop in conducting technique, peer evaluation, and discussion on topics relevant to music educators. Over the past seven years, approximately 120 conductors and teachers have participated in these workshops.

### *English*

The English Department sponsors a variety of programs that invite the public's participation. The largest of these is [Marshall Festival](#), a three-to-five day celebration of writing that pulls in authors from around the state and country, with multiple readings and presentations going on each day and keynote readers in the evening. The Festival began in 1986 and takes place approximately every three to five years; the last Festivals took place in 2005 and 2010. Originally scheduled for 2014, the next Festival has been pushed back to October 2015, as it otherwise would have conflicted with the HLC site visit.

The English Department also hosts a series of Visiting Writers, who give public readings and meet with workshop classes. In 2013, the visiting authors also began giving readings at the Marshall-Lyon County Public Library over the noon hour, to involve community members who are unable to attend an evening event.

One of the projects taken on in collaboration with the SW/WC Service Cooperative is the annual [Creative Writing Contest](#) for students in grades 3-12 from their 18-county service region. Students submit creative work in three categories (poetry, fiction, and nonfiction). The first round of judging is completed by creative writing students from SMSU. They select the top tier of entries, and SMSU creative writing professors then judge those and select the top three places in each grade cluster. Students and their families are invited to a banquet hosted on the SMSU campus for the award-winners, and receive medals and gift certificates as prizes. The first place winners in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade division are also awarded \$2,000 scholarships to attend SMSU.



## *Astronomy*

SMSU has a long tradition of public outreach as well as service to our students through the use of a well-equipped [planetarium](#) facility. The planetarium was installed in 1974 and has been utilized well since then. The 60-seat facility underwent an extensive upgrade in 2009. The greatest numbers of visitors are K-12 students on field trips. Approximately 4,000 K-12 students visit each year. K-12 teachers seek to bring their students to the planetarium in an effort to supplement their science curriculum in a way that is not possible in a traditional classroom. Topics covered normally center around stars, planets, constellations, and night sky observing.

The planetarium also serves other groups as well. Throughout the year there is a series of public planetarium shows that attract people from all ages and draws people from 90-mile radius. Community groups also enjoy scheduling private visits to the planetarium. Of course, SMSU students are impacted by the facility as well. An LEP course, “Introductory Astronomy,” is offered each year and is a popular choice in the curriculum. Students learn aspects of the night sky such as seasons, celestial motion, constellations, celestial coordinate systems, stars, planets, galaxies, among other topics. The immersive nature of the planetarium lends itself well to this unique, high-impact learning environment. Approximately 1000 public visitors come to the planetarium each year.

## *GOLD College of SMSU*

SMSU’s [Gold College](#), formerly known as Senior College, reaches out to fill the intellectual, cultural and social needs of adults of all ages in Southwest Minnesota. Senior College provides lifelong learning opportunities to adults of all educational backgrounds.

Serving as an outreach program of the university, Gold College brings 300-350 adults of the region a series of classes, educational trips and social events that enrich their lives within the stimulating atmosphere of the SMSU campus. Participants attend from a 60-mile radius. Each Fall and Spring term, 12-14 courses are presented with a variety of topics in history, computer, music, science, literature, writing, art and various other topics. Gold College helps individuals to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing society by providing opportunities for students to improve their knowledge, and skills and by providing the intellectual stimulation necessary for good mental health. Adults and seniors benefit from these intellectual and cultural resources not often found in rural environments.

---

## CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: LEVERAGING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

SMSU offers an array of co-curricular opportunities that support the public good while also enabling students to further enhance their skills and experiences. While other aspects of the co-curriculum are described in Criterion 3, the focus in this section is on the contributions made to the campus and region. Much of the co-curricular experience is related to student clubs.

Over 80 different clubs and activities are offered at SMSU. Each club, when filling out its annual renewal application and appeal for funding, must report on the service activities they conducted the previous year. Club service can take on many forms, for example, hosting fundraisers for Relay for Life or collecting items for the local food shelf.

In addition to student clubs, other student organizations and University entities promote the public good, not only through community service but through other forms of service they provide. Below are examples of these different types of organizations; these are but a few of the many ways in which the co-curricular programming contributes to the public good.

### *Enactus*

Enactus deserves particular mention in regard to the commitment to public good. Enactus, formally known as Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), is one of the largest clubs on campus and the beneficiary of a one million dollar endowment from the Schwan Food Corporation. An excerpt of the mission of Enactus as stated on their website explains the focus of the organization: "A community of student, academic and business leaders committed to using the power of entrepreneurial action to transform lives and shape a better more sustainable world." Every year 30-50 students participate in a variety of local and international projects to gain hands-on experience and to create sustainable improvements in the welfare of others. Club membership is quite diverse, with members from areas such as graphic arts, sports management, education, theatre, and of course business majors.

Enactus has a local and global reach. For instance, in the Marshall, Minnesota, area the students set up a store for the alternative high school (MECLA) students. They tutored these students daily and assisted them in building up the business, which included used books and a coffee shop. A dozen SMSU students were involved in the tutoring and marketing efforts. This is just one example of the organization's local activities. For its global reach, the SMSU Enactus club has had many international projects over the years in countries that included Nepal, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cameroon, Nigeria, Germany and others. In the 2012-13 school year, 27 members of the club participated in at least one of the 3 trips to Jamaica. In Jamaica, the club helped restore a roadside rest stop that employs about 90 very poor people in the mountains. The club also worked with two orphanages, purchasing software and laptops to create computer labs with at least 10 computers in each location loaded with educational software.

In 2013, students from SMSU placed among the top 8 clubs in the United States out of the 500+ clubs that participate in a national Enactus-sponsored competition.

### *SMSU Veterans' Club*

The SMSU Veterans' Club helps make veterans' issues better known to the campus community and the community at large. The Veterans Club works to promote relationships with veterans in providing leadership, supporting diverse projects and fundraisers. The club has focused on supporting currently-deployed troops and older veterans in nursing home care.

The Veterans' Club works closely with the Veterans' Resource Center on campus, which provides information such as benefits for veterans and their families. The Resource Center offers a place for veterans, their family and friends to gather for camaraderie and friendship. However, the SMSU Veterans' Center is for anyone who supports or wishes to hang out with SMSU veterans.

### *Southwest Marketing Advisory Center (SMAC)*

The [Southwest Marketing Advisory Center \(SMAC\)](#) is not a student club but, according to its web site, is "a self-funded entity within the academic marketing program at Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU). Its mission is to service the marketing and research needs of Southwest Minnesota, while giving 'real-world' experience to undergraduate and graduate-level student

employees.” Directed by an SMSU Marketing professor, SMAC employs students to conduct a variety of marketing research for businesses who hire them. SMAC has successfully completed projects for organizations in Marshall, such as the Marshall High School, the Amateur Sports Complex, Marshall Community Transit, Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative, the Agricultural Research Utilization Institute, LifeWall Inc. and Papa Johns. On a broader scale, SMAC has worked on projects for the Agricultural Committee of the United States Senate, a pilot study for the Department Housing and Urban Development, the State of Minnesota, TruMod based in South Dakota, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and the Mountain Lake School District in Mountain Lake, MN, to name a few of the 450 completed projects to date. SMAC connects students with professional experiences on a daily basis; in doing so, SMAC also fills a need in the region for marketing research.

#### *Athletics Commitment to Serving Region*

The SMSU Athletic Department and its associated teams recognize and prioritize their commitment to the public good. Several of the [Athletic Department’s goals](#) directly address the importance of the community:

- Continue to provide successful programs presenting a positive image, while connecting with the local communities.
- Provide quality, championship-caliber athletic facilities for training and competition for the benefit and enjoyment of student-athletes, fans and regional communities.

The department accomplishes its goals not only by providing entertainment for fans and spectators but through the many service projects that the staff and athletes lead. The following are just some of the yearly [civic engagement projects SMSU student-athletes](#) are involved with:

- SMSU student-athletes correspond with more than 600 local elementary students as part of “Mustang Mail,” a pen-pal program
- Work-a-Thon -- Raking leaves for elderly individuals in the community
- Host the annual “Smokefest” -- Regional cooking competition
- Host the annual “AgBowl” -- Celebrating Minnesota agriculture
- Host the annual “Mustang Stampede” -- 5 & 10K walk/run
- Adopt-a-Highway program
- Teams read to elementary schools in Marshall and surrounding communities

The extent of SMSU Athletics’ efforts has not gone unnoticed. SMSU Athletics has been awarded the NCAA Division II Community Engagement Award of Excellence four of the past five years for the top civic engagement event of the year in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference.

In addition to the service work, Athletics also supports the region through its involvement with young athletes through numerous camps held at the college for kindergarten through twelfth grade students and through its partnerships with local schools and the Minnesota State High School League. SMSU lends its facilities to high school athletic events and is partnering with the local high school in the development of a track and field complex. The collaboration between SMSU Athletics with regional partners is a key element in the establishment of the Southwest Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (<http://smascmarshall.com/main/>).

## COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

SMSU continues to demonstrate its commitment to the region by providing space and services to external constituencies that work to meet the needs of region. In many cases the University has been innovative in organizing new groups to address unmet needs in the community, or to enhance the well-being of the area population. Continued support is provided by the university as it serves as fiscal agent, provides human resources, technology services and supervisory services. These partnerships include the following:

- **Small Business Development Center (SBDC)**  
The [SBDC Network](#) is a comprehensive small business assistance network serving the 18 county region of southwest Minnesota. Housed on the SMSU campus, the SBDC works closely with the Marketing Department, specifically the Southwest Marketing Advisory Center (SMAC). The SBDC is one of nine regional Small Business Development Centers in Minnesota.
- **Upward Bound**  
Described earlier in Criterion 1C2 as an example of a partnership focused on diversity, [Upward Bound](#) is a federally-funded TRiO program funded through the U.S. Department of Education and hosted by SMSU. The 6-week summer residential program engages local high school Upward Bound participants in a college experience. Program participants join Upward Bound during their early high school years and remain in the program until high school graduation. The program's primary objective is postsecondary enrollment and degree completion. Southwest Minnesota State University's Upward Bound Program was re-funded in June of 2012. So far, the Upward Bound program has had 45 graduates and 40 have gone on to post-secondary education.
- **History Center**  
The Southwest Minnesota Regional Research Center, simply called the [History Center](#) on-campus, began in 1972 as a joint venture of the Minnesota Historical Society and members of the History Department of Southwest Minnesota State University. As an official public records repository established to serve the 19 counties of southwestern Minnesota, it is one of eight regional research centers in the state of Minnesota. Recognized as an official public records repository, one of the major responsibilities of the archives is to preserve various types of documents and manuscript collections. The Southwest Minnesota Regional Research Center provides many service-related outreach activities, responding to over 500 reference requests each year.
- **Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership Program (MARL)**  
A public/private partnership, [MARL](#) provides a dynamic leadership development program for approximately 30 adult agricultural and rural leaders in Minnesota every two years. While it is privately funded, Southwest Minnesota State University administers the program, and the University of Minnesota Extension develops and coordinates the delivery of the curriculum. Participants engage in a series of nine in-state seminars, a national study tour, and an international study tour.

## CRITERION 1: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Strengths*

- SMSU exhibits a strong commitment to the public good and creates a positive economic impact on the region.
- SMSU is a hub for regional activities.
- SMSU develops programs appropriate for its mission and service region.
- Departmental and unit missions are in alignment with the University mission.
- Strategic planning is well organized to operationalize the University mission.
- The design of the Liberal Education Program supports the mission.
- SMSU's dedication to enacting the mission creates numerous leadership and professional development opportunities for students, faculty , and staff.
- The University mission has been maintained consistently through organizational and administrative changes.
- The College Now program is a leader in delivering high quality dual credit courses throughout the state and is accredited .
- The University maintains a strong tradition of supporting students with disabilities and first generation students.

### *Recommendations*

- Plan to mitigate possible effects of other institutions increasing their concurrent enrollment (dual credit) offerings.
- Better articulate and publicize program mission statements in order to promote how each program supports the mission of the University .
- Renew awareness of and investment in strategic planning by broader university community.
- Continue to develop partnerships throughout the region and with neighboring two-year institutions.
- Revitalize the diversity plan and implement strategies to retain diverse students, faculty, and staff.
- Continue the work that has begun with reviewing global experiences and considering how well the global aspect of the mission is enacted.
- Continue to review and act upon opportunities to connect students' academic work to their professional development, such as through increased internship partnerships, advisory boards, or other methods.

## CRITERION 2

### INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

*The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.*

**CORE COMPONENT 2.A: THE INSTITUTION OPERATES WITH INTEGRITY IN ITS FINANCIAL, ACADEMIC, PERSONNEL, AND AUXILIARY FUNCTIONS; IT ESTABLISHES AND FOLLOWS FAIR AND ETHICAL POLICIES AND PROCESSES FOR ITS GOVERNING BOARD, ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY AND STAFF.**

SMSU operates with integrity as it carries out its mission. In addition to following SMSU's own policies, SMSU operates under the purview of the system-wide policies established by MnSCU. A list of SMSU policies are easily found together on one [web page](#) linked off of the "Administration" tab and are categorized into academic, fiscal, general, personnel, student, and information technology policies; links to the [Student Handbook](#) and the [MnSCU Board Policies and Procedures](#), the two other primary governing sets of policies, are also referenced on this SMSU policy web page (<http://www.smsu.edu/nca/view.cfm>), as are the [policies of the Minnesota Management and Budget](#) state office. MnSCU Board Policies and Procedures provide a basic, shared foundation across the System for items such as a [Code of Conduct](#) for employees and trustees, auditing, and system-level rights and responsibilities of students and expectations of student conduct. The contracts and plans between the University/MnSCU and its employees (described in the [Introduction](#)) also provide another layer of guiding principles that enable the University to operate with ethical and responsible conduct. These contractual guidelines spell out the relationships between employees of the institution; the agreements address terms and conditions of employment, as well as responsibilities of shared governance. Essentially the agreements with the various bargaining units provide a system of checks and balances that help ensure fair practices. More examples of each of these types of policies and how they enable SMSU to operate with integrity follow below.

#### INTEGRITY IN THE ACADEMIC FUNCTION

The primary purpose of higher education is its academic function. A number of processes, policies, agreements, accrediting guidelines, and procedures related ensure that SMSU operates with integrity related to this function.

##### *Curriculum Approval Process*

In its academic function, the University is guided by a collaborative process between the faculty and the administration. The [IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement](#) spells out all of the obligations and responsibilities of both the faculty and the administration related to the development of curriculum and the delivery of academic programs. The contractual guidelines describe a process that helps to ensure that programs and courses are appropriate per the University's mission and resources. The

I/O-MnSCU Master Agreement guarantees faculty the primary authority over curriculum; faculty, through the established undergraduate and graduate Curriculum Committee processes and procedures and via their agreed-upon departmental processes, develop new classes and programs and make changes to programs and courses as needed. Normally, curricular proposals originate with faculty, programs or departments. However, proposals may also originate from students, administrators or special committees.

Regardless of how a curriculum proposal originates, all curriculum proposals must pass through a structured curriculum review by faculty first before moving on for administrative approval. [Curricular change proposals](#) must be designated to be either of “Major Significance” or “Less than Major Significance.” All Liberal Education Program-related/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum proposals are considered to be of Major Significance and must first be reviewed by the Liberal Education Committee (LEC) for a recommendation before being sent on to the undergraduate Curriculum Committee. All curriculum proposals of Major Significance (such as new programs or changes to majors or minors) must be reviewed by the appropriate Curriculum Committee (undergraduate or graduate), which forwards the proposal to the whole Faculty Assembly with either a positive recommendation, with no recommendation, or with reservations. The Faculty Assembly then votes on the curriculum proposal. If the Faculty Assembly approves the change, the proposal is then sent on to the Office of Academic Affairs for administrative action, generally routed first to the appropriate Dean’s Office. The administration marks the proposal as

- 0 Approved
- 0 Recommendation for approval
- 0 Recommendation for disapproval with explanation
- 0 Returned to F.A. with recommended revision

If disapproved by the administration, the proposal may be brought to Meet and Confer for further discussion. Some changes might have to undergo further approval by the System Office or HLC before implementation.

Changes of Less than Major Significance, such as course title or catalog description, need only go before the relevant Curriculum Committee, which reports their actions to the SmSUFA Executive Committee. Changes of Less than Major Significance are then sent on to Academic Affairs for the same four types of recommendation listed above, and disapproved changes may also be discussed at Meet and Confer. This curriculum approval process ensures several things: it enables the shared governance outlined in the contract; it ensures that both faculty and administration are aware of changes and major programming initiatives, helping to keep the communication between faculty and administration open; and it helps the University operate efficiently by ensuring no course bloat, as one of the items on the proposal form asks whether similar courses are taught elsewhere on campus. An excellent example of the process can be found in the description of the LEP transformation in Criterion 3. (See [Policies A-001 Curriculum Approval](#), [A-001.1 Process of Curriculum Approval Proposals of Major Significance](#), and [A-001.2 Process of Curriculum Approval Proposals of Less than Major Significance](#) for the full description of the process.)

### *Policy Review*

SMSU is governed by a number of policies from a variety of levels: federal and state policies and legislation, MnSCU System policies, University policies, and departmental/office policies. All SMSU policies can be found under the “Administration” tab of the [website](#); as stated earlier, this website includes a link to MnSCU System Office policies as well. SMSU must follow policies the MnSCU System

Office mandates, such as the [Minnesota Transfer Curriculum \(MTC\)](#) policy. SMSU has also developed its own policies (academic, fiscal, general, personnel, student, and information technology policies) guiding its local operations. The [Internship Policy](#) demonstrates how SMSU has developed an institution-wide policy and how departments have refined that broader policy for their particular areas or have used the policy to develop agreements with corporate internship partners.

Revision of state or system-wide policies occurs at a statewide level, often guided by task forces with representation from campuses. All SMSU policies are reviewed on an ongoing basis, depending on the type of policy. Some policy reviews, often related to personnel or financial policies, are mandated by the System Office. All units across campus are involved in any institutional policy review via the Meet and Confer process.

The review and revision of institutional SMSU academic policies in particular present another example of the shared governance process between the administration and the faculty. Academic policy review can be initiated by either the faculty or the administration. If initiated by SmSUFA, generally the proposed policy has been discussed and revised by one of its primary committees, usually the Academic Affairs committee, and brought before the SmSUFA Assembly for a vote before being sent on. Once approved, the SmSUFA Executive Committee carries proposed changes forward to Meet and Confer. Members of the administration may also bring forward recommended policy changes to Meet and Confer. After discussion at Meet and Confer, if needed, the proposed changes are taken back for further review by the respective units involved until the next Meet and Confer, following that back-and-forth process until revisions are acceptable, although the administration does have the ultimate authority on determining when the policy revision is complete. While SmSUFA and the administration are primarily responsible for academic policies, other bargaining units also have the opportunity to discuss academic policy changes at their respective Meet and Confers.

Review of all policies is continual, with constant review and revision across all categories of policies, as noted above. While review occurs throughout an academic year, policies are posted annually on August 1, to coincide with the academic catalog posting schedule. In regard to academic policies in particular, the Dean of ALS spearheads an ongoing concerted effort to ensure that all officially posted academic policies are in compliance with federal or state regulations, are up-to-date, accurate and/or relevant. This review project also includes creating required or mandated policies needed in order to stay in compliance with federal, state or MnSCU regulations that did not exist previously as well as removing policies that are no longer needed for any purpose. All additions, updates, changes and edits are channeled through proper shared governance and collective bargaining pathways. Below is a list of academic policies that have been created or revised in the last two years and policies created since the last HLC review in 2004:

***LIST OF POLICIES EDITED/WRITTEN AND APPROVED DURING 2012-2013; 2013-2014***

1. Drop/Add/W policy (11/17/12)
2. Repeat (11/17/12)
3. Credit for Prior Learning Policy and Procedure (3/13)
4. Dean List (Student Handbook and new Policy) (2013)
5. Definition of Credit Hour (new) 2013
6. Student's Rights in the event of Change in Instructor (2013)



7. Alcohol
8. Minor Policy (2/13)
9. Final Exam Policy (9/23/13)
10. First Part of A-005 Satisfactory Academic Progress (9/23/13)
11. Delete Wisconsin Vo-Tech Transfer policy (9/23/13)
12. Curriculum Process: A-001/001-1 and 002 (4/28/14)
13. Deleted A-003 Academic Standing (3/24/14)
14. A-004 Academic Program Planning (3/24/14)
15. A-004.1 Academic Program Planning Procedures (3/24/14)
16. A-006 Faculty Workload (new name: Faculty Non-Contractual Reassigned Time/Extra Duty Day(s)) (4/28/14)
17. A-008 Internships – Pending
18. A-011 Conferring of Degrees (2/24/14)
19. A-014 Graduation with Honors (3/24/14)
20. A-024 Student Advisement (no need for A-024 .1-.6) (3/24/14)
21. A-028 Emerita/us Status (3/24/14)
22. A-045 Graduate Faculty Appointment (4/28/14)
23. Adult Education Professional Development – Pending
24. Make-up Work and Missed Class Policy and Form (Policy 2013 and Form 2014)
25. Transfer (December 2013)
26. Disruptive Classroom Behavior Management (4/28/14)

***POLICIES THAT DID NOT EXIST IN PRIOR TO PREVIOUS HLC REVIEW***

A-045 Graduate Policy

A-046 Amnesty

A-047 Minor Degree Policy

A-048 Dean's List

A-049 Definition of Credit Hour

A-050 Credit for Prior Learning (050.1 Procedure)

A - Make-up Work and Missed Class and Form (still need number assigned)

A- Transfer (needs number)

A- Disruptive Classroom Behavior (needs number)

This continual review of policies through the Meet and Confer discussions helps to verify that the University is acting with the best interests of all of its constituencies in mind, and that the University's processes and procedures are up to date and in accordance with system- and federal-level requirements.

*Guidelines for Distance Learning, Online Programs, and Concurrent Enrollment*

In addition to foundational policies and employee contracts that help ensure fair and ethical practice, other guidelines or agreements address several specific educational endeavors. SMSU, in accordance with its mission and strategic objectives, provides educational opportunities to students off-campus, primarily through 2+2 agreements, online graduate programs in Education and Business, and the College Now concurrent enrollment (dual credit) program in which students earn college credit for classes delivered in a high school setting. Each of these arrangements has its own set of agreed-upon policies and contractual obligations that have been vetted by the System Office, and each is further described below.

Both the 2+2 and online graduate programs were recently reviewed and accredited by the HLC in 2011. The [HLC evaluation](#) found "high quality standards" in place and appropriate methods for ongoing monitoring of quality. Articulation agreements for the 2+2 programs lay out the expectations and curriculum for the involved programs, ensuring that students receive the classes expected and that SMSU is held accountable for its promises. The degrees offered in 2+2 programs and their participating partner schools can be found on the [Office of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach website](#); the Early Childhood program offers further support with [linked articulation advising guides](#) from this site. Full text of articulation agreements are found locally in the respective Dean's office, and a searchable database of all articulation agreements can be found on the [MnSCU System Office's transfer website](#). The online graduate programs function in accordance with the same graduate policies as the on-campus graduate programs (see [Policy A-045 Graduate Policies and Procedures](#)). Both programs continue to operate according to the standards described in the [2011 substantive change request](#).

SMSU's dual credit program, currently called College Now (CN), is the longest running concurrent enrollment program in Minnesota. In 1985 the Minnesota legislature passed the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act (PSEO), [Minnesota Statute 124D.09](#), allowing high school juniors and seniors to complete college coursework while still in high school. High school students may either attend classes on the campus of a college or university, or by enrolling in classes offered by a college or university while remaining in their high school setting. CN thus operates under the umbrella of state legislation. As a leader in the development of dual enrollment in Minnesota, SMSU reviews the processes and offerings of CN in an ongoing basis. Since 2004, many improvements have been made in how SMSU delivers and supports the college programming in the high school setting, including the allocation of dedicated personnel to oversee the program and a committee structure to provide input from faculty involved. Current information regarding the CN program is available on its [program website](#). A primary indicator of the integrity in SMSU's CN program is that it has been accredited since October of 2010 through the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). In addition to following NACEP accreditation standards, all CN courses are subject to SMSU program, departmental, and University policies. For greater detail regarding College Now, see [Criterion 3](#).

*Academic Progress, Academic and Judicial Appeals, and Early Alert*

All students at SMSU are held to the standard for adequate academic progress, described in [Policy A-005 Satisfactory Academic Progress](#) and in the [student handbook](#).

Students who do not meet the required minimum GPA are put on academic warning and given a semester to improve their semester GPA; students who fail to do so are given an opportunity to go before the academic appeals committee, should they choose to, and present their case for why they should not be suspended for two semesters. Students who successfully appeal or who sit out for two semesters of suspension and return are on academic probation and must maintain a GPA of 2.10 or higher each semester and have a 70% completion rate until they are off probation and in good standing. The policy was last modified in spring of 2012, as the System Office mandated that all institutions include all credits being attempted as part of the financial aid consortium process to count in GPA and completion rate.

Likewise, an appeal process exists for students who disagree with the evaluation of their work given by a faculty member or who have been accused of academic dishonesty. Students may appeal their grades or, in the case of academic dishonesty, request a hearing about the complaint. The process is outlined in the SMSU [Policy G-005 Academic Appeals](#), the procedure for which is also fully described in the [Student Handbook](#). (See also Criterion 2E below for more information about academic dishonesty.)

In addition to the academic expectations and appeals process, students are held accountable to the SMSU [Code of Conduct](#) described in the Student Handbook, along with their student rights and responsibilities as members of the campus community. The University maintains a University [Judicial Affairs Program](#) as well as the academic appeals process described above. The purpose of the Judicial Affairs Program is to provide a campus grievance mechanism for any person who believes that any Southwest Minnesota State student (whether living on or off campus) has violated his or her individual rights, community expectations of behavior or a campus code of conduct. The [Student Handbook](#) fully describes the expectations of SMSU students and the Judicial Affairs process.

In order to help as many students avoid the kinds of situations which lead to academic warning or other problems with engagement at the university level, over the last ten years the University has implemented several versions of an [“early alert” process](#) in which faculty and other advisors are able to notify the Advising Center, and now, the new Office of Student Success, about concerns regarding specific students; students are then contacted and offered guidance and help. The early alert service has gone through several transformations as it has been tested and refined over time.

First piloted in fall of 2004, the Director and Associate Director of the Advising Center sent out emails multiple times during the semester asking faculty to send them “alerts” for any students about whom they had concerns, such as grades, attendance, personal problems, or other behavioral issues. An Early Alert Referral Form was also posted online. In the fall of 2007, in an effort to streamline some services and cluster the smaller Advising Center with a larger department, the Advising Center was moved and reorganized; the Associate Director of the Advising Center position was cut, and the Advising Center was moved over to the Registration Office, and became part of the Registration and Advising Office. The Director of Advising continued to take Early Alert referrals, but the referrals dropped markedly because, due to low staffing, the service was not advertised, though still utilized by faculty who knew the process. However, the University recognized that the service was still very important to faculty and to students. In 2011, in an effort to boost retention, the Office of Student Success was established by *interim* President Wood, and this office first piloted and then instituted a campus-wide early alert system which addresses not only academic but other types of concerns faculty and advisors might have. Faculty are asked to notify the office of any perceived social, academic, personal, attendance, financial or behavioral issues students might be having during week 3 and again during week 7 of each semester. Once the survey has been submitted, the Office of

Student Success follows a three-step intervention process (email, phone/text, postcard) to connect with these at-risk students and help them to succeed. Additional outreach is also made to advisors, International Student Services, Athletics Department, Office of Diversity & Inclusion and the PSEO coordinator for enhanced support. The Office of Student Success serves as a central location where students can get feedback and help beyond their immediate advisor. While more closely aligned with retention and advising concerns, it provides another example of how SMSU keeps students' interests at the forefront and provides an additional avenue to ensure that students are treated fairly and in accordance with established policies.

More detailed information on advising at SMSU can be found in [Criterion 3](#).

### *Technology and Integrity*

One aspect of fair and ethical policies and procedures related to the academic function that has changed considerably since the last round of accreditation are those policies related to technology. In terms of the academic function of the University, policies related to acceptable use of technology, data privacy, instructional technology, and the decision-making process surrounding investment in technology help ensure that the University allocates and utilizes educational technology appropriately.

The foundation of information security policy across all units of MnSCU is defined by the Board of Trustees in Board Policy. The Board of Trustees has established three policies in this area. These Board Policies are: a) [5.13 Information Technology Administration](#), b) [5.22 Acceptable Use of Computers and Information Technology Resources](#) and c) [5.23 Security and Privacy of Information Resources](#). These policies are clearly outlined on [SMSU's Information Technology web site](#). The MnSCU system has also developed procedures and guidelines that stem from these policies. Procedures support the information security policy by providing more detail on how to meet key aspects of the policy goals. Guidelines provide additional requirements and recommendations to follow as part of a specific area of information security.

Pursuant to these MnSCU system policies, procedures and guidelines, the University has developed institutional-level policies addressing information security and computer network system use. In addition, operating procedures and guidelines have been established to help ensure the University adheres to the MnSCU policies procedures and guidelines. To help with the development of internal University policies and practices, the University has created an Information Security Team (IST) that is representative of the faculty and administrative departments that are in a position to handle potentially confidential information. The IST was created in 2008 after the Meet and Confer process revealed the preference for an advisory group. The IST works with the CIO to develop procedures, guidelines and standards that address compliance with MnSCU System and University information security policies. The IST is also charged with making recommendations on training and awareness programs that pertain to information security. The team meets as needed; an example of their work is the password standard that was developed and implemented.

MnSCU ensures that employees have a core level of understanding on information security issues through the provision of a required training course for new employees. This course is entitled "Public Jobs, Private Data." When the course was initially developed, all current system employees were required to take the course. A wide variety of Information Security Training Courses geared for information technology employees are also provided. SMSU has also had an information security assessment conducted by MnSCU information security staff in 2007-2008 and a follow-up visit in

2012. In 2013, MnSCU implemented a new Vulnerability Management Program. The new program has several requirements for MnSCU institutions to implement and maintain to minimize risk in the area of information security.

In conjunction with MnSCU procedures, guidelines and directives, the University has also implemented a consolidated access point (CAP) infrastructure to provide enhanced information security. The CAP infrastructure requires all persons that handle sensitive student data on a regular basis to have their workstations be included in a secure network VLAN. Access to data bases maintained by MnSCU that contain sensitive data is channeled through the CAP infrastructure. Similar security steps are taken with networks and workstations used to support such activities as payment card industry (PCI), banking, and financial aid transactions.

The Technology Resource Center (TRC) serves as the front door to the SMSU campus community for the University's Information Technology Services (ITS) division. Among its roles, the TRC serves as the ITS help desk or service desk. The TRC is led by a Technology Resource Center Manager that reports directly to the Chief Information Officer. In addition two graduate assistants—one focused on general technology support services and the other on instructional technology support—have offices in the TRC. The TRC employs several student workers that are hired to provide technology support for the entire campus community. There are also numerous student workers that serve as computer lab staff. All students hired by SMSU ITS are required to sign a confidentiality policy including an acknowledgement of disciplinary action that they would be subject to should they violate it.

As the front door for ITS, the TRC provides support for faculty, staff and students with a variety of questions and issues. Should the TRC staff not be able to address a specific matter internally, ITS has a ticketing system to escalate issues to the appropriate professional staff member(s). The TRC Manager is able to track the progress of issues resolution and engage ITS department leadership as necessary.

All students are informed about the University's policies regarding "unauthorized distribution of copyrighted material" as mandated by the federal government. An [annual notice](#) is sent out each year and information is also in the student handbook. The University has a [written plan](#) on how to address incidents. The issue is also covered by Residence Life during the opening week orientation for new students. In addition, faculty and students receive instruction in the use of the course management system, Desire to Learn (D2L). Faculty are provided various opportunities through ongoing optional training offered by the TRC and on Professional Development days at the start of each semester. Students receive initial training as part of their orientation to campus activities and an online orientation course. Individual faculty establish the guidelines for acceptable use of D2L functions within their class, such as whether discussion posts will be moderated or removed. For website-related issues such as developing individual web pages, faculty can request individual sessions with the Web Services office.

The University has an open process related to student and faculty technology needs. The Student Association participates in the Student Technology Fee annual process. The Student Technology Fee Committee is responsible for recommending allocation of funds gathered through the Student Technology Fee. The Committee solicits proposals from the campus community each year using an [online form](#). Proposals from the campus community and projects submitted for consideration by ITS are ranked by Committee members, made up of 15 persons: 6 student members, 3 SMSUFA faculty representatives, 2 MSUAASF representatives, the Coordinator of Computing Services (ex officio; non-

voting), the SMSUSA President (ex officio; non-voting), one representative from Administrative Services Staff (ex officio; non-voting) and the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs (or designee) (ex officio, non-voting). The committee is chaired by one of the student members. The Student Technology Fee recommendations are brought to the Student Senate for their endorsement as a matter of practice each year. The Committee recommends to the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs allocations based on established criteria. In this manner, great care is taken to be certain that student voices and preferences are heard, in addition to faculty and staff-favored initiatives. ([Full text of the fund request process](#) can be found in e-resources.)

## INTEGRITY WITH REGARD TO PERSONNEL

Fair and ethical policies and processes for personnel are ensured through the work of the Human Resources office and via the contractual processes described in the relevant employment agreements. On the SMSU campus, there are eight categories of employees. Five of the eight are represented by collective bargaining:

- Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), of which the Southwest Minnesota State University Faculty Association (SmSUFA) is the local representative body
- Minnesota State University Association of Administrative and Service Faculty (MSUAASF)
- Middle Management Association (MMA)
- Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE) and
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Council 5.

The remaining three categories consist of labor plans:

- MnSCU Administrator Plan
- Commissioner's Plan (formerly titled Confidential Plan)
- Managerial Plan

All contracts/plans are available in Materials Set Ii and can also be found on the [MnSCU](#) and [Minnesota Management and Budget](#) web sites. ([http://www.hr.mnscu.edu/contract\\_plans/index.html](http://www.hr.mnscu.edu/contract_plans/index.html)).

Each of the bargaining units has a regularly occurring Meet and Confer with the administrative unit in order to review any on-going issue or new initiatives. The collectively-bargained contracts describe the terms and conditions for the relevant employees and the institution, depending on which bargaining unit the employee belongs to. For example, per each of the unions' contracts, specific grievance policies and procedures, seniority guidelines, hours of work/load, overtime/overload, paid and unpaid leave and layoff/retrenchment are outlined that the employee and the University must follow.

Graduate assistants present another category of employees at the University. While SMSU's number of graduate assistants is fairly limited, it has grown since the last HLC review. Currently, SMSU hires on average 35-40 graduate assistants; this represents an increase since the last HLC review, as in 2007, for example, there were only 18 graduate assistants. The number of graduate assistants is generally evenly split between the two graduate programs of study in Education and Business. Graduate assistants work across campus in a variety of offices, with about half working for Athletics but others working in areas such as Graduate Studies, Civic Engagement, IT, and the Alumni Office.

All graduate assistantships are governed by a [hiring procedure](#) (see also more detail on the [Business Services website](#)).

#### *Performance and Promotion*

Performance reviews of non-faculty employees are to be conducted annually. An [evaluation form for classified employees](#) is located on the [Human Resource Department's website](#). Classified employees may appeal their performance rating or they can provide a written response to the appraisal. A non-faculty employee can receive a promotion through a reclassification of their current position if there have been substantive changes in the responsibilities and scope of the position. Another way for an employee to receive a promotion is by applying for a position in a higher classification/range through the search process.

MSUAASF employees are also evaluated annually using the "[Administrative Performance Evaluation](#)" forms found on the Human Resource Department's website. As noted in the Introduction, annual review of SmSUFA faculty performance is explained in the [IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement's](#) description of the "Professional Development Plan" and "Professional Development Report" process, which also carry contractual dates for reporting and for administrative response, which goes into each faculty member's personnel file. The IFO contract's [Appendix G](#) provides an extensive list of acceptable scholarly and creative accomplishments that faculty may include in their reports. The IFO contract describes the full process for faculty promotion and tenure, outlining each step and contractual dates of obligation by both the employee and administration for applying and responding. Administrators are evaluated according to the guidelines outlined in [Policy P-006 MnSCU Administrator Evaluations](#), involving an oral and written evaluation.

#### *Employee Conduct Training*

In addition to the separate bargaining unit contracts, all SMSU employees are bound to MnSCU policies for employees, including the [Code of Conduct](#) for employees and trustees, FERPA, and Minnesota data privacy laws. All MnSCU employees are expected to take [online course training modules](#) regarding aspects of this code of conduct and federal and state law; the modules include Employee Code of Conduct, Public Jobs: Public Data, and Sexual Harassment Prevention Training. The Human Resources Department tracks the training and annually sends out reminders to employees who have not completed the training. As of Fall 2013, 61% of SMSU employees have completed the Sexual Harassment Prevention training, 84% the Data Security training, and 73% the Code of Conduct training.

#### *Affirmative Action and Discrimination Policies*

SMSU makes a clear commitment to Affirmative Action on its [Affirmative Action Office Website](#):

Southwest Minnesota State University is committed to providing equal education and employment opportunities to all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, disability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or membership or activity in a local commission as defined by law. Hiring is conducted within guidelines set by the state and system.

The Affirmative Action Office is responsible for:

- assisting faculty, staff and students who believe they have been harassed or discriminated against because they are a member of a protected group,
- monitoring the recruitment and employment process for faculty and staff to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, as well as compliance with the Southwest Minnesota State University mission and strategic plan regarding diversity and affirmative action, and
- development and monitoring of Southwest Minnesota State University Affirmative Action Plan.

In addition, SMSU follows Title IX regulations as to prohibiting sex discrimination. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. Sex discrimination includes sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is the policy of Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU), in accordance with federal and state law, to prohibit unlawful discrimination as outlined in [MnSCU Board Policy 1B.1 Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination in Employment and Education Opportunity](#).

#### *The Hiring Process*

The Human Resources office oversees the procedures for hiring new employees, in accordance with all federal standards and legislation. For all hires at the University, a search committee is established; for hires such as faculty members or a new administrative assistant for a department, the search committee is either primarily made up of colleagues within the area along with a representative from outside the department and/or student representative. For hires which affect the broader University, such as for a Dean or other administrative positions, broader representation from the bargaining units is sought. For the recent presidential hire, the search was conducted by the Chancellor at the System Office, and for this position, the search committee included community members and was chaired by a president from one of the other six state universities. Overall, no matter the position being searched, the search process is thorough and involves feedback at each step of the process, first by the committee members to the HR director, and then by the campus communities involved in the search when the finalists are public and campus visits take place.

#### *Consortium Personnel*

Several areas of the University have cooperative agreements with other non-profit institutions which include some shared positions. [SAMMIE](#), the Southwest Area Multi-County Multi-Type Interlibrary Exchange, is a consortium of 197 libraries in the southwest region of Minnesota established by state law to promote cooperation across all types of libraries. SMSU Library provides office space for SAMMIE; in exchange, the Library receives weekly reference support from their librarian. A second consortium, the Southwest/West Central Higher Education Organization for Telecommunications and Technology ([SHOT](#)), is one of six regional consortia that make up “The Learning Network of Minnesota,” the core telecommunication network infrastructure that supports public higher education in Minnesota, according to the MnSCU web site. SHOT’s consortium agreement was developed pursuant to the Joint Exercise of Powers Act (Minnesota Statute, Section 471.59). In addition to supporting the network infrastructure, SHOT provides such network-based services as video conferencing, web conferencing and telephony. SMSU serves as the fiscal host for the SHOT consortium, which has existed since 1994. One half of the SHOT Executive Director’s assignment is earmarked to serve as SMSU’s Chief Information Officer. This arrangement has been in place since the 2007-2008 academic year. SHOT and SMSU have also shared a Network Services Specialist position equally since 2000. In addition to the two shared positions identified, SHOT has two full time positions, an Operations Coordinator and a Network Services Technician, that support its operations.



## INTEGRITY RELATED TO FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

SMSU operates within the policies and procedures set by the MnSCU Board of Trustees as well as policies and procedures established at the institution level. The System Office and all 31 institutions must follow all federal and state laws, rules, and regulations that pertain to higher education and operations of a state agency.

### *Purchasing/Contracting and the Campus Service Cooperative*

SMSU spends over \$9 million annually on services, supplies, and repairs and maintenance. The University must follow state rules and regulations as well as MnSCU policies and procedures. The purpose of the Purchasing Department is to provide the campus community with responsible purchasing in accordance to set policies and procedures. This may include timely purchases of goods and services at the lowest possible cost while keeping close consideration of quality, quantity and delivery. Purchases at different thresholds require bids, quotes, and/or approvals by various individuals dependent of the total cost. Purchasing is decentralized for the most part but the University Purchasing Director is available to assist all departments with bidding, contracting, and with other questions and concerns regarding purchasing. More detail can be found at the [Purchasing website](#).

The Campus Service Cooperative ([CSC](#)) is a strategic initiative out of the MnSCU System Office that began in 2011. The two purposes of the CSC are to help MnSCU institutions share service delivery, such as payroll processing and direct student loan processing, and “Strategic Sourcing.” Strategic Sourcing is a disciplined, efficient, and modern approach to the way that MnSCU institutions purchase the more than \$500 million of goods and services by all MnSCU institutions annually. It is a fact-based approach to vendor management, driven by metrics and benchmarks, that helps to save money across the system. Through strategic sourcing, system-wide contracts are negotiated to provide products and services at the best possible cost. A leadership committee made up of eight presidents and three vice-chancellors guides the CSC efforts.

### *Financial Statements, Internal Audit, Internal Controls, and Budgeting*

Each year, administrators and employees responsible for the preparation of the annual financial statements must review and sign a *Code of Conduct Certification* certifying that they understand their responsibilities under the code. SMSU has received unqualified opinions from the external auditors for the financial statement audits in each of its annual audits. SMSU has not had any serious deficiencies or material weaknesses noted. Financial statement preparation is a combined effort of the individual MnSCU institutions and the MnSCU System Office Financial Reporting Team. The SMSU Senior Accounting Officer in charge of the financial statements on campus has always been very conscious of due dates and often is ahead of the calendar in regards to completing required items. She is very often a go-to person for System Office personnel in regards to financial statement practices.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Internal Audit division’s executive director reports directly to the Board of Trustees through the chair of the audit committee and does not report directly to the Chancellor or any other staff within the System Office, providing a safeguard against undue influence. The system-level Internal Auditing division provides expertise in auditing,

accounting, internal controls, and financial risk management, as well as promotes best practices and advocates for improvement and accountability. Internal Audit designs audits of different functions within the Colleges and Universities each year. SMSU is accountable to participate in the audits and to correct any actions or activities that are deemed to need correction. The audit plan for fiscal year 13 included audits of banking and cash controls, document imaging, and purchasing cards. The MnSCU Internal Auditors track all internal audit findings and follow up with the individual institutions regarding the compliance with the audit findings. SMSU currently has six unresolved audit findings, five from the fiscal year 2012 payroll audit that have had satisfactory progress on the campus but are awaiting system office action for resolution and one finding from the purchasing card audit that has an action plan with a resolution date no later than February 1, 2015. Any suspicious or known fraud incidents are reported through appropriate channels, described on [MnSCU's Internal Auditing website](#), and then if determined that an investigation is needed, Internal Auditing is contacted.

Internal controls documents describe the functions within the Office of Business Services, Human Resources, and Financial Aid that impact the financial reporting process. These documents detail the steps to conduct various financial processes, list any risks involved in the processes, and identify systematic and mitigating controls for each process. Degrees of risk are identified for each process. The documents are to be reviewed and updated as processes change. The documents are used in financial audits to verify that processes are actually performed as listed in the documents.

University budget information can be found on the [Vice President for Finance and Administration website](#). Each year a balanced budget must be submitted to the System Office and a system-wide budget completed per [Policy 5.9 Biennial and Annual Operating Budget Planning and Approval](#). Consultation must take place with students per [MnSCU Board Policy 2.3](#), and [Procedure 2.3.1 Consultation](#) must be conducted for such items as overall budget, tuition and fee changes, student wage rates, and room and board rate changes. The budget is discussed with all union constituencies at Meet and Confers. More information regarding the budgeting and allocation process can be found in [Criterion 5](#).

SMSU [Procedure F-001.4](#) governs the assessment of student fee collection and disbursement, which must also follow the MnSCU Board policies 5.11 and 5.12 and related procedures. Fees currently charged to students can be found on the Business services webpage "[Schedule and Explanation of Fees](#)." While most of the fees are allocated to the areas noted in the fee schedule, the Student Activity fee and Technology fee have prescribed processes to distribute those funds with participation from the student body. The Student Activity fees are distributed by the Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee after approval by the President. The Technology fee committee must be made up of more students than faculty and staff. The Technology Fee Committee votes on how technology fees will be used each year.

#### *Financial Aid*

The mission of the Student Financial Aid Office is to provide fair, equitable, and unbiased service to students seeking financial aid. This mission supports the mission of the University by helping students find financial means that enable them to enroll in and complete their academic programs.

The office guarantees delivery of federal and state financial assistance to students within rules and regulations established by the respective departments of education. The Student Financial Aid Office coordinates all federal, state, and institutional financial assistance, including grants, scholarships, student employment, and student loans.

#### *SMSU Foundation*

The SMSU Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation with appropriate policies, annual independent audits and reviews governing its relationship with the University, including a standard contract agreement between the University and Foundation. The Foundation and its affiliated boards including the Alumni Association and Mustang Booster Club are committed to building meaningful, positive, high-trust relationships. Those relationships include, but are not limited to alumni, parent, community, and corporate donors and friends. The SMSU Foundation is committed to operating with the highest ethical standards by adhering to the Donor Bill of Rights policy developed by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, the American Association of Fundraising Counsel (now called The Giving Institute), and the National Society of Fund Rising Executives (now called the Association of Fundraising Professionals). See [Criterion 5](#) for more information about the SMSU Foundation.

---

### INTEGRITY IN SMSU'S AUXILIARY FUNCTIONS

As defined by HLC, auxiliary functions entail those “activities and services related to but not intrinsic to educational functions.” All such auxiliary functions must demonstrate integrity in their operations at the University. The primary auxiliary units at SMSU include Athletics, Housing, Dining Services, the Bookstore, and Public Safety.

#### *Intercollegiate Athletics*

The SMSU Athletics Program prides itself in competing at the highest level of NCAA Division II, while being committed to NCAA rules and regulations. SMSU Athletics adheres to all [NCAA compliance procedures and reporting](#). An Intercollegiate Athletic Advisory Committee, chaired by the Faculty Athletics Representative and made up of members from across the University community (4 faculty, 2 MSUAASF, 1 MMA/MAPE/Confidential, 1 Council 6, 1 student, 1 SAAC, 1 Booster, 1 At-large from community, and 1 Alumni Association) serves in an advisory capacity to the President and the Athletic Director (A.D.) in matters relating to intercollegiate athletics. The committee meets as needed to advise the President and A.D. on such matters as policies, procedures and programs that affect student-athletes, the athletic staff, the University, alumni and general public. While in the past, the committee met sporadically to respond to any emerging concerns, in 2013 the committee convened with new goals including meeting once a term or more as needed, increasing communication, and offering periodic student-athlete awards.

#### *Housing, Dining, and Bookstore*

All students living in the residence halls must first apply and then sign housing contracts. Residence Life policies and procedures are public on their [web site](#), and [“A Guide to Community Living”](#) informs students about living in the residence halls. Residence hall policies are enforced by Resident Assistants (RAs) and the Residence Life professional staff. Each residence hall elects its own House

Council, and residents can vote on some house policies as well, such as on quiet hours or spending of house funds. While all residence hall students are members of the Residence Hall Association (RHA) through fees included in room and board costs, each House Council president is the hall's representative on the RHA. The RHA elects student officers and committee chairs, who helps shape programming and enforce policies in the halls and the Foundation Apartments. The [Foundation Apartments](#), which are not owned by the University but through a unique collaboration between the SMSU Foundation, the City of Marshall, Bremer Bank, and the SMSU Department of Residence Life, also employs RAs and its policies are subject to RHA oversight. RAs are chosen through a rigorous [process](#) involving recommendations from faculty and staff each year.

Dining services and the bookstore operate through contractual agreement with the University. Currently Aramark is the dining services provider, and Barnes and Noble College Bookstore took over the relocated bookstore space after the Student Center was rebuilt following the fire in 2003. Other contractual providers on campus include PepsiCo, which has exclusive rights on campus. Large contracts such as these must start with a Request for Proposal (RFP) that is sent on to specific vendors, posted on the SMSU website and MnSCU's website along with the State of Minnesota's site for contracts. Once proposals are received, a committee must review the proposals to determine which one best meets the criteria set forth in the RFP; cost alone is not the only determining factor on the vendor chosen. Contracts tend to be for no more than five years although exceptions are sometimes given for these larger contracts with extended renewal periods, but any deviation from five years must be approved by the MnSCU Vice Chancellor for Finance, the Chancellor, and/or the MnSCU Board of Trustees dependent on the total dollar value of the contract.

#### *Office of Public Safety*

The [Office of Public Safety](#) follows procedures established by state and federal law, MnSCU guidelines, the SMSU Student Handbook, and labor bargaining contracts. Southwest Minnesota State University's Annual Security Report and Fire Safety report and statement of Campus Security Policy is prepared, published and distributed in accordance with the requirements of the Campus Security Act of 1990, the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998, the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, and all implementing regulations issued by the U.S Department of Education ([34 Code of Federal Regulations Part 668](#); hereinafter the "Regulations"). The report is published annually and available on the Office's web site (the [2014 report](#) linked here will be updated by October with final 2014 statistics). SMSU Public Safety believes strongly in transparency; although only required to post annual crime statistics for the past three years, Public Safety keeps all statistics on the web site [from 1998 to the present](#), dating back to the current Director's arrival. Also found on the well-developed Public Safety web site is complete information about all parking and traffic regulations, including an appeals process for tickets.

Public Safety works closely with the local police department, and Public Safety staff undergoes annual training. While the System Office requires one emergency drill per year, SMSU conducts two-to-three each year. The Director of Public Safety reports to the Vice President for Finance and Administration.

## CORE COMPONENT 2.B: THE INSTITUTION PRESENTS ITSELF CLEARLY AND COMPLETELY TO ITS STUDENTS AND TO THE PUBLIC WITH REGARD TO ITS PROGRAMS, REQUIREMENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF, COSTS TO STUDENTS, CONTROL, AND ACCREDITATION RELATIONSHIPS.

In the last ten years, the University has transitioned from print documentation to web-based information. The University continually reviews its practices to ensure that its information is clearly and completely available. The Office of Communications and Marketing (formerly known as University Relations) generates most mass communication to the public via website, radio, television, mailings, publications, and annual reports. They publish an annual Fact Book and aid the Office of Admission in creating promotional material. Some offices, such as the Office of Admission and the Athletics Department, additionally create their own publication material. All University-related media, however, must adhere to the [SMSU Style Guide](#) and [Social Media Guidelines](#) established by the Office of Communications and Marketing, which were established to make information about SMSU clear and uniformly identifiable. The Visual Identity Standards Manual is currently being revised. The Publications Editor monitors documents created by SMSU departments and continues to educate departments and staff about the policies.

### THE SMSU WEB SITE

The University's Web Services Office likewise has a set of [web policies](#) available for all departments and staff to use, as well as [instructions](#). While the Web Services Office is responsible for the SMSU web site as a whole, individual departments must maintain their own web pages, although help is available through the Office of Web Services as needed. Web Services provided an open training session on departmental web sites, updating, and consistency issues in Spring 2014 that was well received. The Technology Accessibility Taskforce also works to ensure that information is accessible for all audiences as part of ADA compliance.

Over the last ten years, the Office of Web Services has overseen many enhancements to the public display and utility of information regarding SMSU. In 2009, the web site underwent a complete redesign, and for its efforts, the Office of Web Services won five top awards from a leading educational web design organization, [eduStyle, in 2010](#).

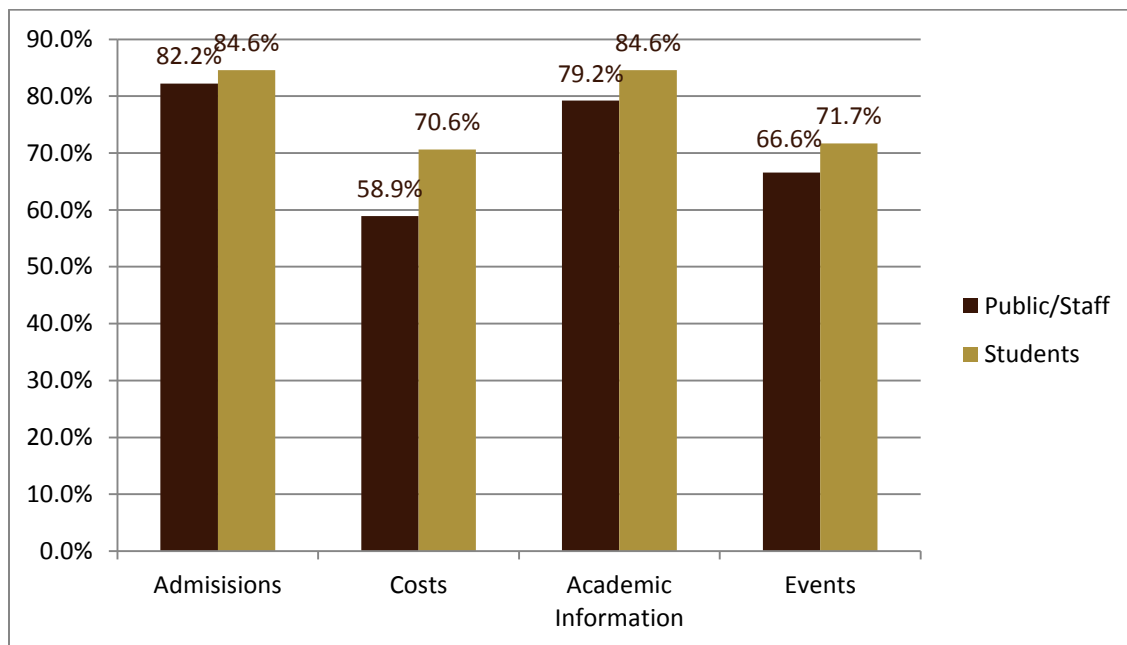
Some examples of the SMSU web site's improvements include

- the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog are fully online
- the creation of SMSU Today as a central location to post campus announcements and news
- a "Web Alerts" system which notifies students and other University members about cancelled classes or other concerns
- the addition of mobile-enhanced applications since students prefer to access this information via mobile devices

Given the complicated architecture of the web site, concerns frequently arise about whether certain topics are easy enough to locate. These concerns are used to refine the web site. An example is the addition of the academic calendar to the “quick links” list located on the SMSU home page.

A series of questions on the HLC Self-Study Survey of University community members asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed about the ease of finding information on the web site (the full survey, administered in Spring of 2013, is described in the [Introduction](#) and is available in Appendix A). Figure 2.1 below, showing the combined percentages of agree and strongly agree responses, indicate that most community members and students can easily find what they are looking for on the web site:

*FIGURE 2.1: RESPONSES OF PUBLIC/STAFF AND STUDENTS ASKED WHETHER THE INFORMATION INDICATED ON GRAPH WAS EASY TO LOCATE ON SMSU'S WEBSITE. PERCENTAGE REFLECTS SHARE OF THOSE STRONGLY AGREEING OR AGREEING WITH QUESTION.*



Although the University was without a web designer for an extended period of time due to the resignation of the former web designer and difficulty in filling the position, plans underway before he left continue to move forward. Because of the constantly evolving nature of the web and viewers' expectations, there are current plans to redesign the website after committee input, moving to a completely CSS-based platform in order to maximize accessibility and incorporating more video. According to the former web designer, good web sites are adequate for about six years; thus, despite the award in 2010, SMSU's site is soon in need of review. Creating better portals for different University populations, developing more apparent links for providing feedback about the site, renewing a Web advisory group with membership from across campus, and extending the use of Google Analytics to understand users' approaches to the overall web site and department-specific trends are other areas of potential improvement.

---

## PROGRAMS AND REQUIREMENTS

The Academic Catalog is the ultimate source of program and graduation requirement information. Since 2010, the catalog has been available fully and only [online](#), and it is now updated annually; the 2008-10 catalog was the last printed two-year catalog. PDF copies are retained for archival purposes. Converting the catalog into a fully online document was a large undertaking by the Registrar, and her efforts set an example for the rest of the MnSCU system institutions.

While the Academic Catalog houses all requirements for all programs, the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) is the primary online tool students and advisors use to make certain all requirements in their specific pursuit of a degree program are being met. The DARS implementation began in spring of 2000 shortly before the previous round of accreditation but had only been in use across campus for less than a year when the previous review team was here in 2004. DARS tracks a student's progress towards degree; students log in to eServices to access their own DARS, and advisors also can access each of their students' DARS reports. The DARS has been improved over the years by adding more dashboard features and color-coding, making it even more evident when requirements have been met (green) or are yet to be accomplished (red). The student petition form is now directly linked into the DARS form, making it easier for students to navigate the petition process. All program requirements have been coded into the DARS system, but as programs change, the DARS coding must also be changed. DARS program requirements are keyed to the Academic Catalog year in which a student began coursework at SMSU.

The DARS system also helps to generate degree checks for graduating seniors, and transfer students' previous coursework is loaded into DARS, clearly marking which courses transfer into which requirements.

Transfer students can find information about which of their classes will transfer by using the "[Transferology](#)" [web site](#) (formerly called "U Select") offered as a link from the SMSU web page on information for transfer students. Using this site they can input information about the courses they have taken from any number of institutions to see what is automatically transferable and what might have to be petitioned. As part of a "Smart Transfer" initiative started by the System Office in 2010 and further prompted by legislation requiring ease of transfer within the state system, SMSU complies with System requirements regarding the sharing of course outlines and other necessary information to ease transfer for students. A new [Transfer Credit policy](#) relating System Office requirements to local requirements was approved through the Meet and Confer process in 2013-2104.

Transfer students who are part of a 2+2 program follow the articulated requirements for transfer and acceptance into the designated program. All detailed articulation agreements can be found on the [MnSCU web site](#). The full text of articulation agreements can be unwieldy for students, but the Office of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach maintains listings of the different 2+2 partnerships on their [web site](#) and links to easy-to-use [advising guides for the Early Childhood Education 2+2](#) programs. The Distance Learning web site also links to many useful services and information needed by distance students.

College Now program and course requirements are available on the University's [CN web page](#), along with all needed information for students, high school teachers, and SMSU faculty liaisons. Students

and their high school faculty can find videos explaining SMSU e-services and registration, links to library services, and the SMSU Student Handbook.

Prospective students and their parents can find information on [admission](#) through a primary tab at the top of the web site. Viewers are funneled to different types of information depending on whether they are pursuing graduate or undergraduate coursework or if they are interested in PSEO, College Now, or distance learning opportunities. Requirements for admission to each type of program, along with related information such as financial aid, scholarships, or general information about campus, is easily found through the links from the Office of Admission's portal site.

---

## ACCREDITATIONS

The University notes its accredited status from the Higher Learning Commission on its "[Accreditations](#)" web page and on a [page dedicated to the university-wide accreditation](#) (along with the self-study process), where it displays the HLC logo and direct link to the HLC.

The University is also accredited or holds special certification from the following organizations:

- the National Association of Schools of Music
- the Minnesota Board of Teaching
- the American Chemical Society (will cease when B.S. in Chemistry ends)
- the Council on Social Work Education
- National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP)

These accredited or certified relationships are listed on the [dedicated web page](#) noted in the paragraph above. The links to both of these pages can easily be found via the main "Administration" tab at the top of the home page or linked from the "About" page. Some departments associated with these accreditations or certifications make the relationship clear on their departmental web pages as well.

In addition to these accreditations, SMSU is currently pursuing accreditation for its RN-to-BSN program from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The program, which began in 2013-2014, is required to have students enrolled for at least one year before an evaluation is conducted; thus the CCNE accreditation review will be in process during Fall 2014. SMSU is also engaged in the candidacy process for accreditation from the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education.

---

## COST TO STUDENTS

As noted above, the Office of Admission's web pages link directly to the main page for Financial Aid. The SMSU Financial Aid office strives to deliver valuable information to the public and one of the most used tools is the website. The [SMSU Financial Aid office website](#) is monitored constantly to make sure it provides all current and prospective students with up to date information about the costs of attending SMSU, financial aid programs available, and on-campus employment opportunities for students. The [Net Price Calculator](#) is included on the site as required by Federal Regulation, and all students who receive an award notice from SMSU also receive a link to the [Financial Aid Shopping Sheet](#) hosted by the [U.S. Department of Education](#) ([http://collegecost.ed.gov/shopping\\_sheet.pdf](http://collegecost.ed.gov/shopping_sheet.pdf)).



The Financial Aid Shopping Sheet provides information to students on both possible forms of Financial Aid and Costs. Many links on the Financial Aid site connect to pages on the University's Business Services site to help direct students to the appropriate offices for help.

---

## FACULTY AND STAFF

The online directory lists all employees of the University and is easily searchable by department or individual. It is updated annually. In addition to the directory, the [Academic Catalog](#) lists the faculty associated with each department or program at the beginning of each discipline's catalog entry. These faculty listings are hot links to the online directory. Each department or office on campus also lists its employees on their web page. Employees are responsible for updating their profile page to include information such as where they received their degrees. However, not all employees fill out the additional information on their profiles. This can make it difficult for students and the public to recognize the achievements of faculty and other employees of the University. Previously, up through the 2006 print Academic Catalog, a full listing of faculty, the year of their hire, and their degrees awarded was maintained in the print version of the Academic Catalog, along with similar information for staff, a listing of emeriti, and presidential award recipients (an award which ceased in 2000). While the directory utility and cross-linked web pages make it easier to locate and contact employees, the University is exploring how to address the issue of lack of profile information.

---

## CONTROL

SMSU is one of seven state universities in the MnSCU system. (See further description in Criterion 2C below.) SMSU's relationship to MnSCU is clearly indicated at the bottom of every web page, along with a link to the MnSCU home page.

Conversely, MnSCU maintains an [Accountability Dashboard](#) for all of institutions within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. The Accountability Dashboard is designed to track progress in reaching the system's strategic goals and to encourage continuous improvement of each institution in the system. The Dashboard contains links to the following types of data, which SMSU reports to MnSCU annually: Composite Financial Index, Enrollment, Facilities Condition Index, Licensure Exams Pass Rate, Student Persistence and Completion, and Tuition and Fees.

### CORE COMPONENT 2.C: THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE INSTITUTION IS SUFFICIENTLY AUTONOMOUS TO MAKE DECISIONS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE INSTITUTION AND TO ASSURE ITS INTEGRITY.

*2C1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.*

As noted earlier in this chapter and in the Introduction, SMSU is one of seven state universities, part of the 31-institution Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU). The Minnesota Senate and the House of Representatives oversee the MnSCU System's operations and finances, per

[Minnesota Statute Chapter 136F](#). The System is governed by a 15-member Board of Trustees appointed by the governor and approved by the Minnesota State Senate. The [roster of Trustee members](#) include one representative from each of the state's eight congressional districts; four at-large members; and one student from a community or community and technical college, one student from a technical college, and one student from a state university. The Board has policy responsibility for System planning, academic programs, fiscal management, personnel, admission requirements, tuition and fees, and rules and regulations.

The [Board of Trustees operates under an extensive code of conduct](#) that addresses:

- Authority to act
- Informed decision-making
- Support for Board decisions
- Official spokesperson
- Conflicts of interest
- Prohibited activities

In addition, as noted in 2A, there is an Office of Internal Auditing; according to the MnSCU website, the Office of Internal Auditing's mission is "to provide independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve the operations of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Internal Auditing helps the Board of Trustees, Chancellor, presidents, and all other levels of management accomplish their objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes."

The MnSCU System Chancellor, according to the MnSCU website, "is responsible for providing academic leadership to the system's 31 colleges and universities, ensuring effective and efficient management and operation of the system, carrying out board policies, recommending operating and capital budgets to the board, and planning for the current and long-term educational needs of Minnesota."

Southwest Minnesota State University is led by President Connie J. Gores. The President serves as the chief executive officer and is responsible for leading the faculty, staff, and students in developing and implementing the University's mission.

The President is the primary spokesperson for the college or university and regularly consults with students, faculty, staff and members of the community. Duties and responsibilities of the President include providing innovative educational leadership, allocating campus resources, employing personnel, following system policies and procedures, and implementing the system's strategic plan.

*2C2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.*

*2C4. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and expects the faculty to oversee academic matters.*

SMSU's [Student Handbook](#) (PDF available in Materials Set II) provides students with information on opportunity for involvement in University governance and also describes student access to the Board of Trustees through the Minnesota State University Student Association, as recognized by the Board. SMSU Student Association representatives meet and discuss with SMSU administration on a regular basis.

As described in several previous sections of this chapter, through the SMSU Faculty Association (SmsUFA), the faculty meet to discuss and approve academic policies and procedures and engage in Meet and Confer with the local administration. At the state level, the [IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement](#) outlines rights of the IFO Board to a Meet and Confer process with the Board of Trustees. As described in Criterion 2C1 above, the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, Chancellor, and University President demonstrate how the institution is empowered in its daily operations, while being held accountable to MnSCU and state strategic directives, policies, and mandates.

*2C3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests, or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.*

The [Board of Trustees' Code of Conduct](#) explicitly addresses Conflict of Interest and delineates required actions for trustees with any potential conflict of interest. In addition the Code specifically prohibits 1) use of position to secure benefits, 2) disclosure of confidential or protected communications, and 3) use of influence.

The HLC Self-Study Survey of all constituent groups conducted in Spring 2013 found that there was widespread understanding that SMSU is a MnSCU institution and that the President of SMSU is accountable to the Chancellor of MnSCU and to the System's Board of Trustees.

The supporting information for this component is available on the MnSCU system website's [Board of Trustees pages](#) and the System's general "[About Us](#)" page.

Policies and procedures ensure that the governing board:

- 1) preserves and enhances the institution
  - a) [MnSCU Policy 1C.1 Board of Trustees Code of Conduct](#)
    - i) See especially Subpart B. Informed decision-making
- 2) listens to, takes into account interests of internal and external constituencies
  - a) [MnSCU Policy 2.2 Student Involvement in Decision-Making](#)
  - b) [MnSCU Policy 3.1 Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- 3) is independent
  - a) [MnSCU Policy 1C.1 Board of Trustees Code of Conduct](#)
    - i) See especially Part 3. Conflicts of Interest
- 4) delegates authority to SMSU's administration
  - a) [MnSCU Policy 4.2 Appointment of Presidents](#)
- 5) expects faculty to oversee academic matters
  - a) [MnSCU Procedure 3.22.1 Course Syllabi and Course Outlines](#)
  - b) [IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement](#), Article 6, Section B. Meet and Confer

**CORE COMPONENT 2.D: THE INSTITUTION'S POLICIES AND PROCEDURES CALL FOR REASONABLE ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE BY ITS FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF.**

Freedom of expression as a core value of this institution is reflected in the University's guiding values, as stated in Value 8:

“8. We value a safe environment for intellectual expression and encourage open and civil communication.”

In addition, as a MnSCU institution SMSU adheres to the Board of Trustee's policies. Under [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (MnSCU Policy 3.1) the first three points address the freedoms of learning, expression, and association. The SMSU Student Handbook references [these rights](#) and also provides information on the [procedure to address grievances](#).

Students with complaints about any aspect of the University may follow the clear process outlined in the Student Handbook. The Deans' administrative assistant sends a campus-wide email notifying all campus constituents about the complaint policy and procedure each semester. The Academic Deans' Office maintains a record of these student complaints. Since 2008, the year a more detailed complaint log was established, no complaints regarding academic freedom or freedom of expression have been received. (See SMSU [Policy G-011 Institutional Record of Student Complaints](#); see also Appendix B Federal Compliance for more information about this process.) The complaint log, which contains confidential student information, may be viewed by HLC reviewers when on campus.)

As described in Criterion 2A, SMSU follows the MnSCU Board's [Policy 1B1. Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination in Employment and Education](#). Periodic publications such as the [Oct. 13, 2013 notice in SMSU Today](#) remind students and staff of the University's equal opportunity and nondiscrimination policy. This yearly notice also links to the University's Affirmative Action page, which provides procedures for addressing complaints and lists the MnSCU policies related to complaints of discrimination or harassment.

As reflected in the MnSCU Board policy on Student Rights and Responsibilities, the freedom of association is also guaranteed. Student clubs supported by the Student Activity Fee Committee (SAFAC) represent a wide variety of activities and interests on campus, exemplifying the institution's commitment to freedom of association for all. [Campus organizations](#) include Oyate (Native People/Nation), Muslim Student Organization and several Christian student organizations, Nepalese Student Association and several nationality-based student clubs, SMSU Feminists Club, and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Ally (GLBTA) club.

Political clubs are also supported through SAFAC. Political debates and discussions can tend to the volatile and raise concerns regarding the University's political neutrality. As stated in the [Policy on Political Events](#), SMSU “encourages open and vigorous discussion of political ideas while maintaining its political neutrality.” While not related only to political events, the [Freedom of Expression procedure](#) was developed to guide students and faculty interested in planning or participating in public forums and other activities or events.

SMSU’s faculty value their right of academic freedom and accept the inherent responsibilities as stated in their union’s contract with MnSCU. The Master Agreement between the Inter Faculty Organization and MnSCU recognizes the value of Academic Freedom in [Article 4](#), with the agreement “to maintain and encourage full freedom, within the law, of inquiry, teaching and research.” Faculty rights, responsibilities and obligations are outlined in Section C of Article 4 of the agreement. The [contract between MSUAASF and MnSCU](#) also provides for academic freedom in Article 4, mirroring much of the same language as in the IFO contract. The contracts contain grievance procedures to address any concerns. While the faculty handbook lists suggestions for what topics a syllabus should include, faculty create and develop their own syllabi, in keeping with agreed-upon departmental requirements for courses. Faculty also guide and conduct academic assessment.

[MnSCU Policy 5.22 Acceptable Use of Computers and Information Technology Resources](#) acknowledges academic freedom as it relates to access to information and resources. As stated in both the policy and the related procedure, “nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to expand, diminish or alter academic freedom.” (See also [5.22.1 Acceptable Use of Computers and Information Technology Resources Procedure](#).)

Over the years, a number of forums and events help to demonstrate the way in which academic freedom and freedom of expression have been supported at SMSU. For example, in the recent past several organizations held joint debate and discussion “Vote Yes/No” forums, with representation from all sides, before a statewide vote on a marriage amendment to the Minnesota state constitution. A similar panel discussion on climate change also presented information from a variety of perspectives. Student clubs frequently facilitate candidate debates. The Difficult Dialogues project (see [Criterion 1C](#)) brought a number of speakers to campus, as has the Office of Civic Engagement, for example bringing former Senator George McGovern, whose presentation focused on ending hunger, as the Convocation (freshmen kick-off) speaker in 2006.

As demonstrated below in Table 2.1, in response to the 2013 HLC Self-Study Survey statement “The SMSU community is open to the expression of diverse opinions,” a high percentage of all University constituents strongly agree or agree with the statement. 77.4% of on-campus undergraduate students agree and strongly agree. Certain populations without much direct contact on campus, such as employers, were more likely to state that they did not know. The highest combined rate of disagreement, 22.6%, comes from the SMSU faculty. (All HLC Self-Study Survey data is available in Appendix A.)

**TABLE 2.1 RESPONSE TO STATEMENT “THE SMSU COMMUNITY IS OPEN TO THE EXPRESSION OF DIVERSE OPINIONS”**

Audience	Community							Undergraduate		Graduate
	Overall	Marshall	Alum	Employer	Faculty	Staff	Parent	On Campus	Off Campus	
Strongly Agree	16.8%	13.5%	18.9%	11.2%	16.3%	14.9%	12.5%	25.8%	26.9%	25.8%
Agree	45.4%	54.7%	51.5%	31.5%	35.0%	55.4%	56.3%	51.6%	23.1%	38.7%
Neither Agree/Disagree	17.0%	17.0%	14.8%	15.7%	26.3%	18.9%	12.5%	12.7%	15.4%	19.4%
Disagree	7.5%	7.2%	8.3%	3.4%	16.3%	6.8%	18.8%	3.4%	0.0%	3.2%
Strongly Disagree	2.5%	2.2%	2.4%	2.2%	6.3%	1.4%	0.0%	1.4%	7.7%	0.0%
Do Not Know	10.8%	5.4%	4.1%	36.0%	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	5.1%	26.9%	12.9%

Clearly, freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning is integral to this institution as evidenced in policies and procedures and as actively practiced, and is valued by University members. Freedom of expression is also enacted daily through departmental or club sponsorship of forums, programs, and speakers, the faculty New Works programming, and annually through the Undergraduate Research Conference's demonstrations of student research. However, support for a strong, shared statement affirming academic freedom specifically at SMSU was voiced at the all-University discussion on this criterion draft. A more prominent statement, developed with all constituencies, and published on the website and in the student and faculty handbooks, would make this evident to all.

## CORE COMPONENT 2.E: THE INSTITUTION ENSURES THAT FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF ACQUIRE, DISCOVER, AND APPLY KNOWLEDGE RESPONSIBLY.

Students have many opportunities to “acquire, discover and apply knowledge responsibly” outside the classroom through applied experiences such as the Research Chefs Association Culinology® Student national competition, SMSU and MnSCU Undergraduate Research Conferences, presentations at national conferences, work at the SMSU Marketing Advisory Center, and other opportunities.

As described elsewhere in this report, faculty are supported in similar endeavors through contractual professional development funds and Faculty Improvement Grants. MnSCU offers online resources [through the web](#). In addition, IFO faculty are able to spend concentrated time on research and/or continuing education during sabbatical leaves. Staff professional development (for members of MSUAASF and AFSCME) may be supported either through area/department funds or from grants available through SMSU's Human Resources Department.

*2E1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.*

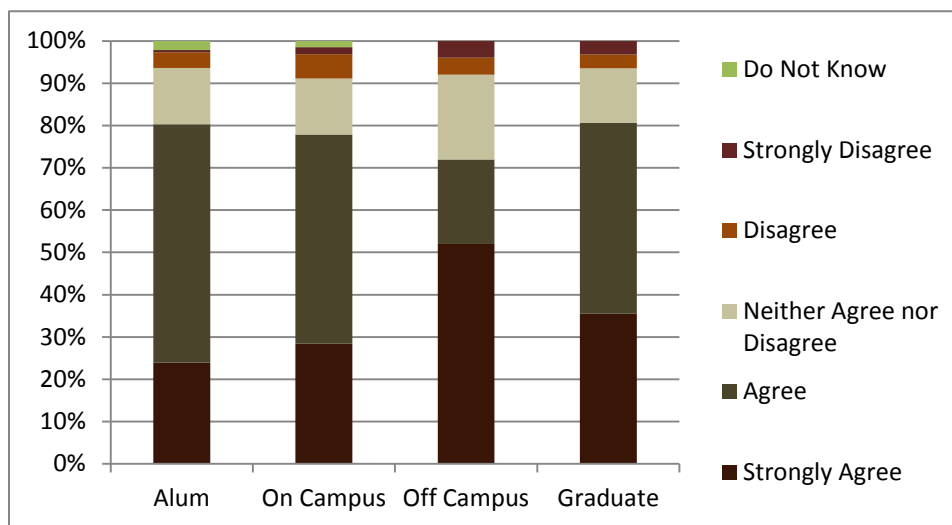
In addition to the Academic Honesty policy and procedures as noted below in 2E3, the University supports the integrity of research by faculty, staff and students through the Institutional Research Board (IRB). The IRB has policies and procedures in place for research involving both [human](#) and [animal](#) participants. The IRB is a committee of faculty and administration who review University research activities involving human or animal participants to ensure that it is being conducted ethically. The IRB is composed of one (non-voting) dean; three SMSUFA members that include one science faculty; and one MAPE, AFSCME, or MSUAASF member. Faculty are appointed to serve a term of one year. The IRB committee thoroughly reviewed and revised the IRB Policy for Research Using Human Subjects and developed a Policy for Research Using Animal Subjects referenced above. Originally passed in 2006 after committee members researched best practices, revised policies went through faculty and administration approval and went into effect on October 10, 2010. The number of reviews completed varies each semester, but averages approximately 25 for each semester.

SmSUFA faculty design professional development plans addressing the five criteria listed in the IFO contract with MnSCU. One criterion is scholarly or creative achievement or research. Plans are reviewed and may be commented on by department colleagues. The college deans provide guidance and support for research and scholarly practice. As described in the Introduction, the contract

requires the department to provide comment on faculty plan outcomes to the deans at the end of the academic year. The purpose is to guide and support all faculty, but particularly tenure track faculty, toward their creative and research goals.

As role models to their students, faculty are expected to uphold high standards for ethical research. As indicated on the HLC Self-Study Survey, alumni and students perceive their faculty to indeed practice good academic behaviors; while off-campus students have a slightly lower rate of agreeing, perhaps due to not seeing the faculty members in person, consistently between 70 to 80 percent of students and alumni agree and strongly agree with the statement noted in Figure 2.2 below that “My professors practice(d) what they preach(ed) with regard to academic behaviors and standards.”

*FIGURE 2.2 RESPONSE TO STATEMENT “MY PROFESSORS PRACTICE(D) WHAT THEY PREACH(ED) WITH REGARD TO ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS AND STANDARDS”*



When all four student groups were asked if their major degree programs challenged them to collect and analyze data and also to solve problems through critical thinking, responses to the question were overwhelmingly either in agreement or strongly in agreement. 117 out of 182 alumni surveyed indicated that SMSU prepared them well when addressing ethical conduct in the workplace. This result is comparable to that of employers of SMSU graduates who overwhelmingly agreed that these graduates follow ethical standards in the workplace. (All HLC Self-Study Survey data is available in Appendix A.)

*2E2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.*

SMSU provides guidance to students in the ethical use of information resources in myriad ways throughout their work at the University.

The Liberal Education Program (LEP) leads in this effort. As described in [Criterion 3](#), the revision of the liberal arts curriculum that took effect in 2009 includes LEP 100, First Year Seminar (FYS). All incoming freshmen take this first year seminar course preferably in their first semester at SMSU. The LEP committee has developed a [FYS Instructor’s Manual](#) describing the shared objectives of the class,

and a seminar was held in May 2013 for all FYS faculty to help them learn and discuss their common approaches to the objectives. Two of the four objectives are

- An introduction to critical thinking. This includes the ability to construct arguments, evaluate claims and evidence, and consider multiple points of view.
- An introduction to research skills and informational literacy, including use of our library's collection of books, periodicals, and online resources.

FYS faculty are asked to schedule three sessions on information literacy. Building on the scaffolding approach, the FYS Instructor's Manual states: "To help ensure proper incremental development of information literacy skills during a student's first two years, all LEP 100 courses will request library instruction. Each section of LEP 100 will get the same library instruction. These information literacy skills will be developed further in ENG 151 and ENG 251. Some information literacy instruction will take place at the library, although additional information literacy instruction materials may be provided by the library but led by instructors in their regular classrooms."

The focus on core skills, including information literacy, continues in the major, as each degree program must identify and pass through the LEC a core skills-focused class. Finally, the LEP 400 Contemporary Issues seminar class, the LEP capstone, also includes a focus on the core skills in addition to its creative thinking outcome. These elements of the LEP curricular structure ensure that students receive guidance and instruction in the ethical use of information no matter their major, and regardless of whether they transferred in after completing general studies elsewhere, as the major core skills course and LEP 400 are graduation requirements.

The [Academic Honesty Policy](#) is also addressed in FYS. The classroom discussion is to cover plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, tampering, and assisting in the dishonesty of others.

Critical thinking and citation practices are explicitly covered and reinforced in these LEP courses: English 151 and Speech 110, required of all students, and the sophomore-level or above writing-focused class, consisting of either English 251 or Philosophy 303.

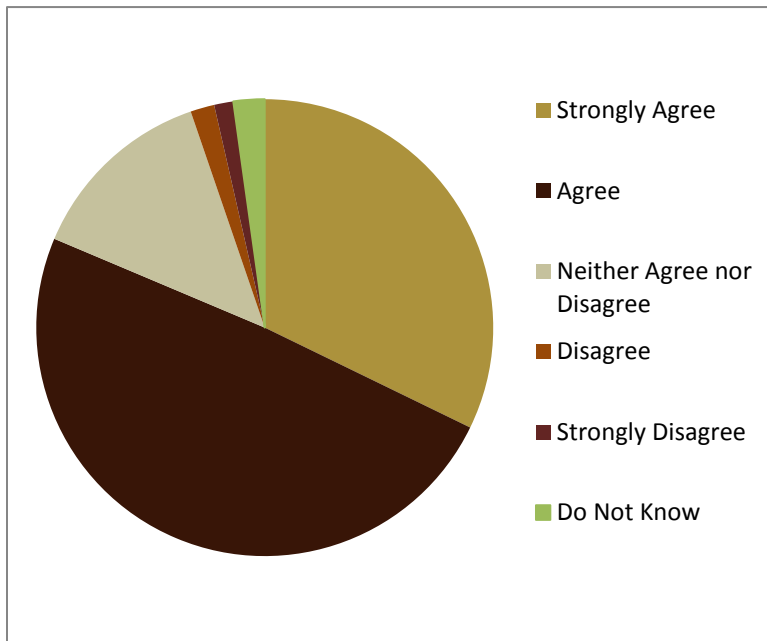
In addition to the LEP coursework, students receive guidance through their major programs. While the type of information and research expectations naturally vary among disciplines, all programs must culminate with a capstone course in which students are expected to demonstrate their mastery over these elements within their discipline. (See program review and assessment information in [Criterion 4](#).)

In support of students' coursework, the Library, Writing Center, and Speech Center provide additional guidance on appropriately citing referenced works. All three services work with students to help them recognize how to properly cite sources and incorporate source material into their texts. The Writing Center has a [policy regarding academic dishonesty](#); if Center consultants suspect plagiarism, there are specific guidelines on how to address the issue with students. Reference is made to the University's academic dishonesty policy, and the consultant is to report any incidents to the Writing Center Director.

The HLC Self-Study Survey demonstrates that alumni and current students very strongly agree that they are instructed in reliable and ethical ways of conducting research, as evidenced in Figure 2.3.



FIGURE 2.3 AGGREGATED RESPONSE ACROSS STUDENT GROUPS (ALUMNI, ON/OFF CAMPUS, & GRADUATE) TO STATEMENT: "I AM/WAS INSTRUCTED IN RELIABLE AND ETHICAL WAYS OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH."



### 2E3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

As noted in the response to Criterion 2D, SMSU values the academic freedoms of inquiry and expression. The University has policies and procedures in place to protect these freedoms. In our required First Year Seminar classes for freshmen, critical thinking and information literacy are part of the curriculum. The Liberal Education Committee has developed the manual for FYS instructors noted in 2E2 with recommended structuring of the course to cover information literacy and critical thinking skills.

The [Faculty Handbook](#) encourages faculty to address plagiarism and academic honesty in course syllabi. The University's [Academic Honesty policy](#) clearly states expectations and ramifications related to academic dishonesty. Graduate students are held to the same academic honesty standard, as noted in [Policy A-045 Graduate Policies and Procedures](#). For all concerns regarding academic honesty, there is a procedure in place that also helps to track enforcement, especially of serious cases: incidents are documented and forwarded to the Deans' Office, and sanctions are clearly stated. There is also an opportunity for students to appeal findings ([Procedure G-005 Academic Appeals](#)).

In addition to instruction by faculty, all students are informed of prohibited conduct, academic dishonesty, and the appeals process through the [Student Handbook](#).

## CRITERION 2: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Strengths*

- Clear contractual guidelines and policies exist to guide SMSU in its daily operations.
- University constituents are represented and involved in the development or revision of policies through strong shared governance processes such as the various Meet and Confers.
- The HLC survey results indicate that necessary information for students and the public is clear and easy to find on the web site.
- The University retains its autonomy in the MnSCU system while contributing to system-wide initiatives and complying with system-wide requirements.
- The DARS system, in addition to the online catalog, has made program requirements clear for both students and advisors.
- SMSU follows commonly accepted and ethical practices in financial and academic administration of the University.
- Students have strong grounding in ethical academic and research practices.

### *Recommendations*

- Clearly display information about departments, program accreditations/certifications, and organizational structures on the University web site. While the SMSU web site has won awards in the past, the website and other online media need continuing support and resources in order to keep up with this main artery of communication.
- Examine the University web site to ensure that links exist between policies or the Student Handbook descriptions and the departments/offices that are relevant to those policies. (Example: The Public Safety page and Residence Life page could link back to Student Handbook rules and regulations.)
- Explore how to best address the lack of profile information related to faculty since the changeover to the online directory system.
- Provide more information on the SMSU website regarding its relationship to the MnSCU Governing Board and MnSCU responsibilities where useful in key locations.
- Consider creating a clear, direct statement regarding freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning, developed in consultation with all constituencies and consistent with the existing procedure, labor contracts, and Student Handbook, which could be affirmed and prominently placed on the website and in appropriate print materials.
- Continue to emphasize ethical research practices to students and build understanding of academic honesty and integrity.

### CRITERION 3

## TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

*The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.*

Southwest Minnesota State University offers a range of degree programs and options designed to fulfill the needs of southwest Minnesota and students who attend SMSU from other parts of Minnesota, other U.S. states and several other countries. One hallmark of SMSU's approach to this part of its mission is to recognize needs in the region and design programs to fulfill these needs. The RN-to-BSN program is only the latest example of this creative energy. From 2-year Associate's degrees through Master's level degrees, SMSU offers the following distribution of degree options:

Associate in Arts	1
Associate in Science	4
Bachelor of Applied Science	4
Bachelor of Arts	19
Bachelor of Science	33
Graduate Certificate	1
Master of Business Administration	1
Master of Science	3

Courses and programs are offered in a variety of formats as well, including on-campus, hybrid, and online courses, 2+2 undergraduate degree programs in partnership with a number of community colleges, dual credit arrangements with high schools across the state, and online, cohort-model, and learning community graduate programs. In keeping with its mission, the University strives to offer programming that is accessible and meets the needs of its regional stakeholders. Continuing to do so with constricted funding has been a challenge, but the University continues to meet that challenge by growing new programs where appropriate and collaborating interdepartmentally as well as with other institutions, the System Office, and regional organizations. Emphasis has been placed on growing these kinds of collaborations as the University moves into the future, as evidenced in the Strategic Plan's directive on community partnerships and President Gores' focus on the theme of "Meaningful Partnerships and Engagement."

The University is careful to ensure quality across all of these initiatives. Quality of the programs is monitored through processes such as program review, ongoing assessment efforts, and program accreditations. The revised Liberal Education Program (LEP) provides a high quality foundation for SMSU students, a foundation further guided by the [AAC&U's high impact practices](#), many of which are embedded into the LEP. SMSU's faculty are highly involved not only in developing curriculum but in shaping policy and engaging in campus governance; they take the rights and responsibilities of

providing quality instruction very seriously. SMSU also offers a variety of student support services that help students throughout their time at the University, with services targeted to the different populations' needs.

### CORE COMPONENT 3A: THE INSTITUTION'S DEGREE PROGRAMS ARE APPROPRIATE TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

*3A1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.*

SMSU ensures that its degree programs are current and appropriate for undergraduate and graduate education in several ways. The initial curriculum design and approval process, annual data collection and periodic program review process, and the annual department report process (see [Criterion 4](#)) all provide checkpoints for appraising program offerings in light of accepted standards. For the curriculum design and program review processes, programs are expected to compare their course offerings and requirements with similar programs at other MnSCU institutions in particular and with national expectations. Furthermore, some programs undergo accreditation or certification processes from national organizations and/or require students to meet licensure standards or pass certification tests. All students must meet graduation requirements pertinent to their degree programs. In addition to the measures listed above, currency is also supported via the annual faculty evaluation process. All of these aspects related to currency and appropriate levels of performance are described in detail below.

#### CURRICULUM DESIGN AND REVIEW PROCESSES

The curriculum approval process, described in the Introduction and [Criterion 2A](#), is the first step in making certain that courses and programs are appropriate to the level of degree. SMSU has two separate curriculum committees, one for [undergraduate curriculum](#) and one for [graduate curriculum](#). Creating a separate graduate curriculum committee was recommended by the 2004 HLC reviewers and established shortly thereafter. Each of the curriculum committees reviews all proposed classes and programs, scrutinizing the proposed syllabi and requirements. Only graduate faculty and a librarian are allowed to serve on the graduate curriculum committee. In the case of new programs, once the proposed program has been approved by SmSUFA and the SMSU administration, a new program application must be made to the System Office; depending on the type of new program being proposed, it might also need to go through the HLC substantive change process. These external reviews provide another initial layer of examination for currency and appropriateness.

The program review process is an important source of ongoing evaluation of currency and appropriateness. The two key elements in program reviews at SMSU are the annual collection of data and the periodic evaluation, which includes a self-study and outside consultant evaluation. SMSU [Policy A-004.1, Academic Program Planning and Review Procedures](#), describes these processes; this policy was initially adopted in November 2002 and was updated in 2007 and again in 2013, reflecting SMSU's ongoing attention to the importance of program review and its refinement of the processes. The [Data Management and Institutional Research \(DMIR\) Office](#) plays a key role in distributing data to the departments. A large share of DMIR's functions were previously in the Office of Research and Institutional Grants (RIG). RIG distributed an annual "Datum," a collection of key data points for the overall university and for each department. Upon retirement of its director in

2005, the University opted to create a Chief Information Officer (CIO) position to lead RIG's functions and future information technology services planning and operations (as described in the Introduction). Concurrently, the previous Computer Services department was reorganized into a new [Information Technology Services division](#). Recognizing the growing importance of data-driven decision-making and data management, the DMIR office was created within Information Technology Services and an Interim Director was named during the 2007-2008 academic year. Upon the offering of an early separation incentive program across the University during the 2009-2010 academic year, the Interim Director and the DMIR Research Analyst both retired at the end of that year. Prior to their retirement, a new Director of Institutional Research & Reporting Services was hired. While DMIR continues to exist, the Director himself now reports to the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. The office is also staffed by two Database Programmer/Analysts who report to the CIO. The Office provides each program data in areas that include demographics, enrollment, and fiscal resources. In addition, each program is required to assess the effectiveness of its academic offerings through measurable learning outcomes and report on those in its annual report. This annual data collection constitutes part of each program's ongoing assessment activities; this process is described more thoroughly in [Criterion 4](#).

The periodic review process also helps to ensure that courses and programs are operating at the level appropriate for the degree being awarded. The periodic program review is conducted on a five-year cycle. The periodic review includes components focused on the curriculum, students and faculty, distance learning, service to the campus, and other relevant aspects of the program's activities. To complete the self-study portion of the review, all of the program faculty must work together to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their program and consider what improvements they might need to make. In addition, faculty must identify, with the approval of their academic dean, an outside reviewer who will study their draft report, interview students and faculty, and review the physical resources available to the program before submitting a separate report with their evaluation and recommendations. The program faculty then submit a written response to their academic dean. The response addresses in detail the recommendations of the outside reviewer and describes strategies they plan to implement as a result of the self-study process. For more information on the periodic review process, see [Criterion 4A](#).

While program review documents indicate that SMSU's programs compare favorably with comparable programs at similar institutions, faculty members are expected to identify areas for improvement and adjust their curricula accordingly. For example, the Music program made several changes related to the performance of its students at the appropriate level of rigor based on its last self-study, which was conducted not only for University program review purposes but as part of the Music program's accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music ([NASM](#)). Following the self-study, the music theory curriculum was made more rigorous. In addition, the courses were altered to create greater continuity in course structure between the freshman and sophomore year. Finally, a fifth theory course was added that is dedicated to the study of Form and Analysis. Previously, the review found, this content was covered in a less effective way as part of a four semester sequence.

In addition to the program review process, programs are encouraged to align their courses of study and their educational standards with those set forth by their disciplines' professional organizations. This occurs when designing a new program; for example, the curriculum for the Exercise Science degree was designed, in part, to prepare graduates to be eligible to take and pass the [American College of Sports Medicine \(ACSM\) Health Fitness Specialist \(HFS\)](#) certification exam. This exam is an

industry standard for credentials in the field and requires a baccalaureate degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in exercise science, or equivalent. The Communication Studies program is an example of how an existing program uses evolving national standards to refine its offering in an on-going fashion: the program relies in part on curriculum recommendations from the [National Communication Association](#) in designing and refining their course offerings and evaluation standards. The revision of the writing courses in the Liberal Education Program provides another example, as the new curriculum design was informed by national standards set forth in the [Council of Writing Program Administrators' "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition."](#)

## PROGRAM ACCREDITATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND LICENSURE

Several programs on campus are required to or choose to go a step further through program accreditation, approval, or licensure requirements. The Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in Music are fully accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. The Council on Social Work Education accredits SMSU's Bachelor of Science in Social Work. During the 2014-2015 school year, the RN-to-BSN program will be pursuing accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, the first year that the program is eligible. The Chemistry program is currently approved by the American Chemical Society, meeting their requirements for rigor; the University will be notifying the ACS of the discontinuance of the B.S. in Chemistry and will not ask for continued acceptance given that change.

Social Work and Education majors must pass exams in order to be licensed as social workers or teachers in the state of Minnesota. Both programs prepare students for licensure through their program requirements. Students graduating in Social Work take merit exams after leaving the University but before being allowed to practice. In 2008, a survey of two cohorts of Social Work alumni showed that 60% were licensed as social workers at the bachelor's degree level, and the remaining 40% were working in areas which would require them to have passed a merit exam in order to work in that specific field. The area of practice can vary; as noted in Table 3.1, alumni had passed merit exams in the wide variety of areas listed:

TABLE 3.1 CURRENT FIELDS OF PRACTICE FOR TWO COHORTS OF SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES 2008\*

Current fields of SW practice at work	Responses	
	N	Percent
Crisis Intervention/Information & Referral	10	9.9%
Family Service	8	7.9%
Education/Training	6	5.9%
Mental/Behavioral Health or CMH	10	9.9%
Child Welfare/Child Protective Services	8	7.9%
Alcohol, Drug or Substance Abuse	6	5.9%
Health/Medical Care	7	6.9%
Group Services	5	5.0%
Housing	4	4.0%
Grief/Bereavement	3	3.0%
Violence/Victim Services	4	4.0%

Public Assistance/Public Welfare	2	2.0%
Aging/Gerontological SW	4	4.0%
Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities	5	5.0%
Community Planning	2	2.0%
Income Maintenance	3	3.0%
Corrections/Criminal Justice	4	4.0%
Adult Protective Services	3	3.0%
Rehabilitation	3	3.0%
School Social Work	3	3.0%

---

\* Respondents may have more than one field of practice

Education students in particular must pass a series of tests at several stages in their educational journey en route to licensure. The Education Department, in addition to aligning their program standards with recommended professional guidelines, must also comply with rules established by the [Minnesota Board of Teaching](#). Given the regularity with which the Board of Teaching revises its requirements, this means the Education faculty and the students they advise are in a virtually permanent state of adjustment to remain in compliance at all times. The Education Department also sets its own standards for admittance into their teacher education programs, including minimum scores on the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations ([MTLEs](#)) Basic Skills Tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, and students must meet minimum standards ('C' or better in all education courses, completed all coursework toward their degree, have a cumulative GPA of 2.8, and have no incompletes) before they can move forward to student teaching.

Currently, prior to licensure, candidates are required to pass MTLE tests in Pedagogy and in Content in each area of licensure. The Board of Teaching decided to require the MTLE exams in Fall of 2010, as these exams are intended to be aligned to the MN standards, rather than using the Praxis tests that are used by about 37-38 states for licensure. The state is still in transition regarding this change, with passing scores on the Praxis Basic Skills tests still being honored through December 2015 (passing scores on the Praxis Content and Pedagogy tests were allowed through August 2012). Since the MTLEs have been implemented, they have been surrounded by controversy as there was very little practice information available for the first two years, and the Board of Teaching set the pass rates at 1 standard deviation higher than what the assessment company experts recommended. This has resulted in very low pass rates around the state, and in May 2013 the legislature required that a task force be developed to look into all of the issues surrounding the MTLEs. The Basic skills tests were the object of a good deal of study by a state task force this past year, and were shown to be biased against several groups of students such as students of color and non-native English speakers; work continues at the state level regarding how to address these issues. In addition to the MTLE exams, candidates are now also required to complete the [edTPA](#) (Teacher Performance Assessment) during student teaching before they can receive licensure. The EdTPA is scored by Pearson, as part of a collaboration with Stanford. SMSU is working to identify how to best help students prepare for the edTPA; as a new exam, the edTPA rubrics have changed every semester until the past year, the scoring range changed as well, and Minnesota has yet to set their own recommended score.

While changing state standards and exams create challenging conditions, the SMSU Education Department remains accountable to those standards and reviews pass rates for patterns or issues that need to be addressed, for individual students as well as across the programs. The Department

shares the assessment tools and results with all affected departments on campus through their Campus Liaison meetings. The assessments and results are also a key topic with the Teacher Education Advisory Committee, which involves current students, alumni, university supervisors, mentor teachers, and area school administrators; in addition to sharing results, this committee gathers input on areas of strength in SMSU candidates and areas of need.

Sample tables of results showing the [MTLE score pass rates for the last four years](#) and the 2013-2014 [edTPA scores by content areas](#) is available in e-resources. The table displays the complexities of breaking down the results. A number of SMSU programs perform at or above the state average (marked in yellow on the table), although there is no consistent pattern to the results. Currently in regard to the Basic Skills tests, SMSU students are below the state average, but scores have been improving each year. The state averages on the Content and Pedagogy tests also include programs that are Masters plus licensure, which skews the test comparisons somewhat, making it difficult to compare to SMSU's undergraduate population's scores. More detailed reporting from the MTLE and edTPA databases is available from the Education Department.

---

## FACULTY REVIEW AND CURRENCY

The annual faculty review process includes within it assurance and evidence that faculty are keeping current in their areas of expertise and in what they teach in their classrooms. Per the [IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement](#) regarding evaluation (as described in the Introduction and [Criterion 2](#); the full contract is also available in Materials Set II), all fixed-term and tenure-track faculty members must annually set goals and then report at the end of the year on their progress on their goals in five criteria areas; the third criterion is "Evidence of Continuing Preparation and Study." The IFO contract describes several forms of evidence for this criterion, including "remaining current in one's professional discipline and/or special field of study," "engaging in structured study leading to development of experimental programs, curricular proposals or revisions, and ongoing revisions to course syllabi or instructional methods," and "reflecting currency in the discipline or its pedagogy." Thus this annual process specifically addresses currency. The Deans read and respond to every faculty member's initial plan and progress report.

Courses and programs are on the whole consistent with current expectations in each academic discipline. The combination of annual data collection by each program with the 5-year program review cycle also provides faculty members in each program with the opportunity and the means by which to ensure that each program keeps up with changes.

### *3A2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.*

Closely related to the description above in Criterion 3A1 regarding how the University ensures that levels of performance by students are appropriate to the degree awarded, each program has learning goals appropriate for the level of degree indicated. SMSU offers undergraduate and graduate degrees and one Master's level certificate in Autism. As noted in the Introduction, one concern described in 2004 was the lack of separation between undergraduate and graduate processes and policies. Following that review, SMSU created a separate graduate curriculum committee. Thus all new courses are now reviewed by the appropriate undergraduate or graduate curriculum committee via the curriculum proposal process described in [Criterion 2A](#) and referenced in [Criterion 3A1](#). More specifically regarding learning outcomes, course outlines including learning goals and typical assignments are required documentation in this process, and the appropriate curriculum committee



reviews this material and further discusses the proposal with the applicant or departmental representative as needed. In the case of 400/500 level classes in Education, students taking the courses at the 500-level must meet higher standards for graduate-level credit and complete additional assignments. Further, the University has also since updated its graduate policies (see [A-045 Graduate Policies and Procedures](#)); the Graduate Council Committee facilitates the work related to these policies. In addition, the periodic program review process and ongoing program assessment efforts ([Criterion 4](#)) help assure that appropriate learning goals for all programs are in place.

*3A3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).*

Regardless of location or delivery method, an SMSU course is guided by the content and learning objectives intended for that specific course, and in keeping with a program's goals. Different methods might be used to achieve the course goals, but an online section, for example, will meet the same learning outcomes as a face-to-face section of the same class. An online section might utilize videos and required discussion board postings and interactions compared to in-class discussion in a physical classroom setting. SMSU has a variety of tools available, most notably the Desire2Learn ([D2L](#)) course management system for use by all sections regardless of distance or on-campus setting, and Adobe Connect, which has replaced the interactive television (ITV) system used for distance learning in the past. Beyond the institutional measures in place to ensure consistency, such as the curriculum proposal and assessment processes described earlier, a number of faculty interested in teaching online participated for several years in a book club dedicated to the topic of online teaching, helping the university to develop a core of faculty who understand the complexities and challenges associated with teaching across different modalities. (A [list of the books read and additional information](#) is available in e-resources.)

In addition to delivering courses in face-to-face traditional settings on its campus, SMSU reaches out to students across the region through off-campus and distance learning programs. The following programs are delivered to students at remote sites either online, through learning communities, hybrid courses, or through special arrangements:

- Undergraduate programs in Early Childhood Education and Management through Distance Learning (2+2) and the RN-to-BSN program
- Graduate programs in Business Administration and Education
- College Now (SMSU's dual credit/concurrent enrollment program)

Within each of these programs, learning goals have been constructed appropriate to the level of the degree program, as with any on-campus program, and strong effort is being made to ensure that all learning goals are achieved no matter the delivery method or location. The successful [2011 Change Request](#) for expanding online education documents much of the distance education efforts; more information on each is described below.

---

## UNDERGRADUATE DISTANCE PROGRAMS

2+2 programs, also known as Undergraduate Distance Learning, provide students the opportunity to take additional courses to earn a bachelor's degree. Since the last HLC review in 2004, SMSU has added more partnerships with community and technical colleges within the state, for example with

Mesabi Range Community and Technical College in northeastern Minnesota, and Dakota County and Hennepin Technical Colleges in the Twin Cities, giving their graduates the opportunity to continue their education toward a baccalaureate degree. Currently SMSU partners with [nine two-year institutions to offer the 2+2 bachelors program in Management](#) and [11 two-year institutions for the 2+2 bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education](#).

Students in 2+2 programs first complete an associate of arts, associate of science, or associate of applied science from approved technical and community colleges. The junior and senior years are completed by enrolling in SMSU major classes. All classes are now delivered online. This represents a shift from an earlier interactive television (ITV) approach that was used until 2008. The shift from ITV to a web-based delivery approach was driven both by cost factors and by quality considerations. Operating the ITV system required the live presence of a tech support staff member for each class meeting—in both or all locations. Since many of the ITV courses met in the evening, this represented a significant outlay of resources. At the same time as the cost was becoming significant, the quality of online meeting software and its ease of use made this option more attractive. The combination of higher ITV costs and better online quality eventually resulted in the change of delivery platforms. 2+2 courses are planned and delivered by the relevant SMSU academic departments, with off-campus courses following the same learning goals and objectives as on-campus courses. The same curriculum as outlined in the academic catalog is followed for the online programs as for the on-campus programs.

The Dean of BEPS meets regularly with the distance learning coordinator to monitor the consistency and quality of all programs. The coordinator also checks in with administrators and students of the two-year schools when she visits campuses to ensure that they are happy with the quality of distance learning programs.

In 2013, SMSU began offering an RN-to-BSN degree. This particular program is designed for working RNs. The SMSU Nursing Program courses are predominantly online with on-campus experiences included in several nursing courses. Courses meet the intended learning outcomes, which have been developed also to meet the standards for accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). SMSU is pursuing [CCNE accreditation](#) in Fall 2014 (the first year for which it is eligible to do so).

---

## GRADUATE DISTANCE PROGRAMS

The different graduate programs at SMSU utilize a variety of methods to ensure that the University meets the needs of its constituents throughout its broad geographic region, with each program meeting the same learning goals as its on-campus counterpart.

SMSU offers a cohort-model MBA in which all of the students enroll and graduate together, typically from off campus (although an on-campus MBA is offered as well). Each of the eight required core courses in the program is regularly taught both on campus and through web conferencing, specifically Adobe Connect. Courses taught in either format are identical in all respects except for where the students are physically located. The four elective courses are taught online. Because students often work together in teams on class projects, the cohort approach guarantees that students share similar learning experiences and gain contacts and relationships that could be of value to students in their professional careers.

The Education Department offers several graduate programs. The Master of Science in Education is offered both on-campus and via distance learning modes, depending on the program. Six emphasis areas are offered: Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Mathematics, Reading, Sports Leadership, English, and Teaching, Learning, and Leadership. The English emphasis is fully online; the Math emphasis offers its core courses online and the Math emphasis courses on campus in the summer. The remainder are all hybrid programs, with course meetings on campus and on the D2L course management platform.

The Teaching, Learning, and Leadership emphasis is also delivered via a learning community format. The learning community studies together for two academic years, meeting an equivalent of twenty times, or ten weekend meetings each year. The classes meet 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturdays and 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. Students are expected to implement strategies and activities which were covered in class or in readings into their classes each month, and they have to report back to their cohort groups, called Advisory groups and Job Alike groups, about those implementations. During the month they are also required to read and reflect on one book and multiple articles. Just as the on-campus students in the program do, they prepare multiple group presentations over the four terms, are responsible for development of a portfolio that demonstrates how each has met the National Teaching Standards and the SMSU Leadership standard, have a final portfolio review in their last term, and prepare a presentation of their Action Research, which is presented at the annual learning community research conference at SMSU. Students use D2L, Google Docs, and Wiki as sites for hybrid activities that occur between meetings. Meeting dates are determined by the members of the learning community and usually are scheduled during the academic year, August through June. The learning community locations change as needed every two years depending on demand. [SMSU's Statement of Affiliation Status \(SAS\)](#) reflects these learning communities as "additional locations," although they are not campuses, merely meeting sites for the groups, and change periodically.

SMSU also offers a Master of Science in Special Education. Students in the program have the following licensure options: Developmental Disabilities, Early Childhood Special Education, Emotional Behavioral Disorders, and Learning Disabilities. Students can also choose a licensure-only option or a Master Level Certificate in Autism. All Special Education core classes are taught as hybrid classes with Saturday meeting times in addition to the required online coursework.

The Master of Science in Physical Education: Coaching of Sports is a fully online program that advances the knowledge, skills, and educational philosophies of students who are interested in the coaching profession. Every course complies with the coaching standards of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education ([NASPE](#)) and features project-based-learning. Students must complete two practicum experiences to document their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world settings. As they progress through the program, students must assemble a portfolio of their work to demonstrate that it conforms with NAPSE standards.

As noted in the Introduction, SMSU also offers three graduate courses to two-year college faculty in the MnSCU system focused on teaching and learning strategies for adult learners and assessment and evaluation methods. These courses are offered online or in an "Institute" format. The Institute format consists of a blended course delivery system, with students attending two long weekends face-to-face with readings and assignments prior to class, assignments and activities during the face-to-face session, and significant work assignments following the Institute time. Students can choose to take one or multiple courses during the Institute. These courses count as graduate credit but are not currently able to be applied to a graduate degree.

## COLLEGE NOW (DUAL CREDIT/CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT)

As described in Criterion 1 in the description of SMSU's enrollment profile, SMSU has a significant interest in dual credit throughout the State of Minnesota. SMSU has been offering concurrent enrollment courses since 1984; the College Now program (CN; formerly called Challenge until 2009) is the longest running dual credit operation in the State of Minnesota, and SMSU is known throughout the state as a leader in this area. The high school students taking SMSU classes are subject to the same learning objectives and grading criteria as all other college students. HLC has recognized the growing importance of dual credit in the revised criteria for accreditation and through its work on the national study describing institutional practices related to dual credit ("[Dual Credit in U.S. Higher Education: A Study of State Policy and Quality Assurance Practices](#)" published in February 2013). Each SMSU CN course retains course objectives and learning goals consistent with its on-campus equivalent. Given the emerging impact of dual credit courses nationally and the impact on SMSU's FTE, more depth and context regarding CN is described below.

### *History and Definitions*

In 1985 the State of Minnesota passed a bill creating the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program, which allows Minnesota high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors to take college-level courses that apply to both high school graduation requirements and a college degree. Since 2012, eligible high school sophomores may take certain Career and Technical Education courses as well. Additional information regarding [Minnesota's Postsecondary Options program](#) can be found on the state's Department of Education website. As of 2013-2014, over 80 Minnesota institutions of higher education including two-year community and technical colleges and four-year state and private colleges and universities participated in the program.

SMSU makes a distinction between students who choose to leave high school to come to SMSU to take classes and those who take their coursework within their high school setting and classroom. SMSU uses the broader "PSEO" acronym only for those [students who leave their high school to take courses at SMSU](#), in courses with other SMSU students. Any public, nonpublic, home school or American Indian-controlled tribal contract or grant student classified as a junior or senior and accepted by a post-secondary institution may enroll either full- or part-time in courses at SMSU. Students participating in cultural exchange programs are not eligible. A total of 763 PSEO students enrolled at SMSU between 2000 and 2014. Approximately 34% of these PSEO students subsequently matriculated as regular students to SMSU. Yearly PSEO- to regular-student matriculations ranged from 9 to 27. PSEO students are subject to the same faculty-stipulated expectations as every other member of the course. In other words, PSEO students have the same assignments, take the same exams, and participate in the same class activities as "regular" college students. PSEO students are assessed the same as their class cohorts. Faculty do not differentiate between PSEO and other students in their classrooms for assessment purposes. Institutional data, however, show that PSEO students maintain considerably higher SMSU GPA's (average=3.1) compared to SMSU undergraduates (average=2.89).

SMSU also delivers college courses in the high school setting in what the University calls its "[College Now](#)" (CN) program. While technically this is a specific type of PSEO program under the state definition, generally University members do not use the "PSEO" label to refer to these students. CN classes have been accepted all over the United States and the world, from such institutions from the University of Minnesota to Harvard, Yale, and Oxford. As of 2012-2013, SMSU partnered with 97 school districts, offering 425 courses around the state and generating 30,403 credits from 4,736

unduplicated students. These statistics represent an eight percent increase (2,408 additional credits) from FY12. The program revenue has continued to increase as well, as reflected below:

- FY10 \$1,246,043
- FY11 \$1,217,658
- FY12 \$1,314,242
- FY13 \$1,418,071

In August 2009, SMSU's CN Program applied for national accreditation with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships ([NACEP](#)). The Program received its notice of accreditation approval in October 2010. NACEP accreditation represents a significant transformation for the program both in policy and function. Due to the rigorous accreditation process, SMSU has enhanced the integrity of the program, increased staffing, and improved offerings to better serve our partnering schools.

#### *Ensuring Consistency through Teacher Training and Mentoring*

The [CN Handbook](#) describes the requirements and expectations associated with the CN program. Each academic program ensures that the requirements, grading standards, and other course elements are the same whether the course is taught on campus or through CN. However, given the nature of dual credit, in which the course is delivered in a high school setting, methods used to achieve the learning goals will differ, and in most cases, students in the high school setting will likely experience more clock time in the course compared to a college section. In order to maintain consistency, SMSU faculty mentors work closely with their assigned high school instructors, and the CN program provides additional professional development for the high school instructors.

CN classes are taught by qualified high school teachers and supervised by SMSU faculty members. SMSU faculty are the teacher of record. All high school faculty must undergo a screening process as determined primarily by the relevant SMSU academic department and secondarily by the CN Director (see also Criterion 3C2). Each high school CN teacher is supported by an assigned SMSU faculty mentor. SMSU faculty mentors have historically worked closely with their high school counterparts to help each teacher navigate the requirements of the high school while delivering the SMSU curriculum. A change in the faculty assignment and compensation model has helped to standardize expectations across the University. As described in the Introduction, prior to 2011, faculty load was determined by the number of students assigned to the faculty member, rather than the number of high schools and thus teachers that the faculty member worked with. For every 50 students enrolled, the SMSU faculty member assigned to work with them received three credits of load. For example, an SMSU faculty might have worked with five schools that each enrolled ten students or with two schools that each enrolled 25 students. Regardless, the faculty member was expected to work with each high school teacher individually. Beyond the minimum expectations of the CN program to visit each school site at least once and preferably twice, it was up to the departments to determine how to support the high school students and teachers, depending on what was appropriate for the discipline. For example, SMSU English faculty would teach a lesson in the classroom when they visited and they co-graded two of the required papers for every student in the English composition courses, in order to make certain that the grading was appropriate for college-level writing expectations. In addition, they reviewed all final grades.

In 2011, the faculty assignment and compensation model was changed to assign faculty by number of schools and courses worked with rather than number of students enrolled, creating a model based on faculty mentoring of the high school instructor rather than working directly with students. This

necessitated changes in some departmental requirements for what their SMSU faculty provided. In the English example, while English faculty still grade some of the student papers, they now grade only a selection as part of a norming session with the high school teacher, as well as provide feedback on any paper or question a high school instructor has. This shared faculty mentor model has decreased the disparities that arose when assigning work load by student rather than by school. In response to a proposed decrease in CN compensation as one aspect of the budget solution for current biennium, the compensation was further refined and agreed to in Summer of 2014 when a graduated system was approved. Though overall lower compensation rates than in the past, the new model provides a higher compensation rate for working with high school instructors who are new to CN compared to working with a seasoned high school teacher.

To ensure quality of classroom instruction by CN high school teachers, SMSU faculty mentors engage in a variety of methods. The faculty member is responsible for overseeing the teacher and the course from a distance including site visits, virtual site visits, regular communication via Facetime, Skype, e-mail, phone and so on, approval of course syllabi, and sample checking of tests, papers, and other coursework. CN high school instructors must agree to take part in the mentor relationship. New CN teachers are required (since 2012) to attend an orientation workshop, part of the one day College Now Summer Workshop (described further below). Furthermore, CN teachers are encouraged to engage in at least two significant professional development activities each year. In order to encourage such professional development, where possible, the CN program or individual departments and SMSU faculty have aided high school instructors, for example, paying for registrations for science teachers to a conference in the Twin Cities, or taking a high school instructor along to a conference, such as Sociology has done. As schools in MnSCU increase their involvement system-wide in dual credit, discussions about collaborating on offering professional development are emerging. Enhanced training and professional development opportunities are a priority for the future. While departments on campus hosted CN teachers in meetings by discipline occasionally in the past, a CN Multidisciplinary Workshop was offered in August 2012. Due to the overwhelmingly good response, this workshop was expanded to a one day “institute” in Summer of 2013 with more workshop choices and peer networking opportunities. The workshop was expanded to include both new and experienced CN teachers and provide a venue for discussion of content and exchange of ideas and pedagogies that enhance student learning. (The [schedule for the 2013 CN Summer Workshop](#) is available in e-resources; the schedule for the 2014 workshop, in progress as of the publication of this self-study, will be added.)

The [CN website](#) has been developed and continues to grow. It now contains a wide variety of resources in electronic format. Resources for students, teachers, high school administrators, and supervising faculty are clearly and logically organized for ease of access and function. Enhanced online resource pages were created for several courses to improve information options for high school teachers, including the following examples for [English 151 and Lit 120](#). CN surveys are conducted via SurveyMonkey that is linked from the SMSU CN website.

#### *Resources and Support for the Program*

The growing size and importance of CN has been met with increasing resources. While originally registration was handled by staff in the Office of Extended Learning and Academic Outreach and each academic department then made the necessary faculty mentor assignments, the growth in the program and the desire to pursue NACEP accreditation led the University to appoint a faculty member to direct the program for a half-time reassignment in Summer of 2008. Duties and expectations continued to grow. The appointment of a full-time CN Director was made in January

2011. The size and importance of the program clearly necessitated a full-time director. Collection of accreditation materials, maintenance of records, and continual assessment collectively will be enhanced under the supervision of the director, creating a stronger presence in the state. Based on the growth and success of the CN Program, an additional staff person was hired at the end of the 2012-13 school year to continue to grow the program, improve registration and day-to-day operations, and solidify the program as a national leader in concurrent enrollment.

A CN Committee started Fall 2012 to provide the director with additional support, guidance, and ideas. Previously there had been several CN task forces over the years, but the standing committee status of the advisory committee will ensure stability and ongoing feedback to the program. The committee is made up of the CN Director, five faculty from different programs with experience in and knowledge of CN offerings, and one additional appointee. The charge of the Committee is to discuss common problems and issues related to the CN Program. These topics include but are not limited to those arising with teaching, CN administrative oversight, the compensation model, academic standards, access to library research, assessment, the plan to offer AA degrees via CN, and on-campus training of CN teachers. Beginning in Fall 2014, this committee will work under the umbrella of the new Enrollment Management Committee, a newly-formed all-university group that will lead retention and recruitment efforts across campus.

In addition to the formal support described above, the CN program has also benefited from working closely with the library and Registrar's Office, ensuring that all CN students have SMSU IDs and full access to library materials. Students and high school instructors also have access to direct library support and tutorial sessions as well. CN classes that are able to visit campus meet with a librarian for a library review; SMSU librarians have even provided live webinars on library information for schools at a distance. SMSU faculty and their high school teachers can also utilize Desire2Learn (D2L) for course management software if they choose to do so. Students with disabilities have access to many of SMSU's disability services including certain auxiliary aids, support services, and consultations on academic and programmatic access issues. The SMSU Writing Center has also been able to expand into online tutoring, and any student, including CN students should they choose, is able to access this resource. Programs are seeking other methods of involving CN students and teachers on campus. For example, the Science Department brought in 120 CN science students to attend presentations at the annual Undergraduate Research Conference; this was an option extended to schools that were able to find funding to bring their students to campus.

Over the past few years, comments made by principals, counselors and teachers consistently agree that the CN offerings raise expectations for students and provide rigorous college coursework. The CN program has set goals for the future as well, including the following:

- Increase conversion rate of CN students to SMSU full-time students through promotion of College Now scholarship and public relations efforts
- Identify additional opportunities to better serve the 19-county region of southwest Minnesota
- Expand assessment of high school teachers as well as CN students
- Determine viability of expanding CN to more high schools throughout Minnesota
- Identify additional SMSU courses (and associated faculty) to be part of the CN program
- Become Minnesota's concurrent education program of choice

Annual reports for CN are included each year in the ALS Annual Report and are also available [in D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#).

**CORE COMPONENT 3B: THE INSTITUTION DEMONSTRATES THAT THE EXERCISE OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY AND THE ACQUISITION, APPLICATION, AND INTEGRATION OF BROAD LEARNING AND SKILLS ARE INTEGRAL TO ITS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.**

*3B1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.*

*3B2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.*

The Liberal Education Program ([LEP](#)), SMSU's revised general education program that replaced the previous version in 2008, was deliberately designed to mesh with SMSU's mission and is rooted in a philosophy and approach developed from the ground up by the SMSU faculty. Mandated by HLC to review and revise general education in 2004 (see the Introduction), the University's development of the LEP has been through the initial transformation process, which lasted five years from inception to completed program; implementation, several years in which the University went through some growing pains as it moved from the ideal and abstract to actual courses and procedures to put the program into action; and the maintenance and assessment phase in which it is currently engaged, as it continues to address and improve upon the original LEP formulation.

**CREATING A LIBERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (LEP) ROOTED IN SMSU VALUES**

Following SMSU's 2004 HLC review, the Faculty Assembly engaged in a thorough revision of the then-called Liberal Arts Core (LAC) program that formed the foundation of each student's education. Members of the [LAC Transformation](#) Committee were drawn from both colleges and represented a broad cross-section of the faculty. The committee engaged in a thorough exploration of general education programs in the United States, both their historical development and the ongoing discussion of general education's place in the academy. The committee collaborated with the Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, visiting the Center, and Center employees came to SMSU as part of the process. Resources from the Association of American Colleges & Universities, HLC, numerous professional meetings and other authorities also informed the committee's discussions of how best to construct the new program. Making the program consistent with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum ([MTC](#)) required by MnSCU complicated the committee's work and created disagreements within the faculty about how best to comply with the MTC without dramatic changes to course loads in various academic departments.

The Transformation Committee first proposed the learning outcomes that provide the basis for the LEP. Faculty discussed each and voted these forward before beginning work on the curricular structure to support the outcomes. In May 2008 several members of the LAC Transformation Committee attended a week-long AAC&U workshop focused on general education and, assisted by AAC&U mentors and faculty from other institutions, developed an outline of a curriculum proposal to be considered by the faculty as a whole. Ultimately, the committee proposed to the Faculty Assembly



a comprehensive redesign of SMSU's general education program, which was renamed the Liberal Education Program (LEP). After a series of open meetings focused on parts of the proposed structure and curriculum, an amended proposal was prepared and sent to the faculty in January 2009, and, again after much discussion and debate, the final structure was adopted at the end of April 2009. Much of the history regarding the transformation process can be found in the two progress reports submitted to the HLC (in Appendix A and also found on [SMSU's HLC website](#)).

The LEP comprises ten learning outcomes, with related sub-goals, in the areas of liberal arts disciplines, communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, physical and social world, human diversity, moral judgment, citizenship, lifelong learning, and mind, body, spirit. These ten outcomes reflect SMSU's mission to prepare students "as engaged citizens in their local and global communities" and degree programs that are "taught in the liberal arts tradition." Further, the outcomes support the thirteen guiding values identified by the Brown and Gold Task Force that align with the [University mission and vision statement](#). (See also [Criterion 1A1](#) for a full history of the mission revision process that took place in 2006-2007.) The LEP applies across the colleges and schools, not only because all students must fulfill the first two years of general studies coursework in keeping with the dictates of the MTC, but because the new LEP encompasses the full undergraduate experience, with book-end classes that introduce and then ask students to reflect on liberal education, as well as other upper-level LEP requirements necessary for graduation.

---

## LEP CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK

The LEP encompasses not only the first two years of required MTC courses with which it aligns, but also extends into upper division requirements in which the core outcomes of written and oral communication and critical thinking, including information literacy, expected to be reinforced.

The alignment of the MTC to the LEP can be seen in the [curricular grid](#) passed by SmSUFA. As the implementation work of the new LEP began, the System Office required that the system-wide MTC be transparent to all students, in order to ease transfer; thus, the LEP outcomes are embedded into the MTC requirements. All students, in fulfilling the MTC, are meeting many of the ten LEP outcomes in doing so. (See the [SMSU academic catalog online](#) for an interactive version of the MTC requirements.)

All incoming first-year students (with the exception of some transfers) are expected to take LEP 100 First Year Seminar, which focuses on the critical thinking outcome as well as introduces the importance of the liberal education program, in their first year at the University. LEP 100 classes are taught by faculty from all different disciplines, based on a theme each faculty member selects that lends itself to critical thinking and that the LEC has approved (see [list of LEP 100 courses](#) in e-resources). All students are expected to take their first writing class requirement during the first year as well. By the end of the second year, all students are to have taken their SPCH 110 Essentials of Speaking and Listening class. In this manner, all students should have foundational experiences with the core skills of communication and critical thinking, and the introduction to information literacy that accompanies these courses.

The three upper-division requirements are

- 1) a core-focused class in the major
- 2) a major capstone course
- 3) the LEP 400 Contemporary Issues Seminar, the LEP's interdisciplinary capstone course, which emphasizes the creative thinking outcome.

Each SMSU degree program is required by the Liberal Education Program to designate an upper-level required course in the major that revisits the key skills of critical thinking, oral communication, written communication and information literacy. The faculty chose to require this designation, not to add another course to the major, but to ensure that each of these crucial skills would be explicitly addressed at least once in the major courses. The faculty recognized that most upper-level courses require these skills, but not all courses deal with them directly. Some programs have designated a course in another discipline, like ENG 360, Scientific & Technical Writing. Several other programs, including Accounting, Marketing, Political Science, Psychology, Biology and Chemistry, have designated their major Capstone courses for this purpose. ([The online catalog features a drop-down menu](#) that displays the approved capstone and major core skills-required courses.) Thus it is possible for the major capstone to double-count as the core-focused required class in the major. In addition to revisiting the core skills, most major capstone courses require students to engage in research relevant to their major or their professional interests. History, for example, requires a two-semester sequence in which students explore topics of interest to them and, using accepted historical research methods, develop individual research projects, many of which are presented in the Undergraduate Research Conference.

The LEP 400 Contemporary Issues Seminar is taught by faculty from across the disciplines, and is team-taught by faculty from different disciplines when requested. As with the LEP 100 course, sections of this course are likewise themed and approved by the LEC (see e-resource files for [a list of past course themes](#)). Because the course emphasizes the creative thinking outcome, instructors propose broad themes that require students to engage in problem-solving. Students also reflect on all ten LEP outcomes and how the outcomes have emerged over the course of their education thus far. The addition of this 400-level interdisciplinary liberal education capstone is an affirmation of the importance of liberal education to the University's mission.

---

## LEP OVERSIGHT AND SUPPORT

As finally enacted by the faculty, the LEP is overseen by a committee co-chaired by an elected faculty representative and the Dean of ALS. The remainder of the committee represents both SMSU colleges, the library, and the Educational Opportunity Program. This Liberal Education Committee (LEC) oversees the creation of new courses required by the program, acts on petitions for exceptions to the program, coordinates scheduling of faculty members to teach the new courses, and manages assessment of the ten LEP outcomes.

The University has supported this revision into the LEP in a variety of ways. The faculty as a whole have provided many service hours throughout the process. In addition to the membership of the Transformation Committee members and the Liberal Education Committee (LEC) which took its place, faculty from all departments attended numerous open sessions and all-university discussions throughout the process, continuing now with the assessment work. The faculty have been very vested in the program, recognizing its significance. The administration funded a half-time faculty release for a faculty member to serve as the Faculty Co-Chair of the LEC (reduced beginning in Fall 2014 to one-quarter time). Then-President Danahar told the faculty to develop the curriculum that enacted the outcomes and philosophy and that the administration would find the funding to support the new structure. Subsequent administrations have followed through on that pledge, working to determine how the new curriculum affected staffing in the different departments and including teaching LEP classes as a consideration in departmental position requests. The assessment budget will have included funding for duty days for each initial LEP outcome assessment team, and duty

days were funded for an LEP 100 instructor workshop that took place after the LEC reviewed the first several years of that course and brought together the instructors to develop better shared practices among them. As described further in [Criterion 4](#), SMSU is joining the AAC&U's "Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project," becoming one of ten higher education institutions involved in a pilot project testing the AAC&U Value Rubrics over the next two years. A grant from AAC&U is supporting these efforts; a faculty member is reassigned to oversee the project, and faculty from across campus will be involved in contributing assignments and artifacts.

As described in the sections above, the revision and implementation of the LEP has been a very public and University-wide endeavor. Further articulation of the LEP's intent and outcomes continues to take place with the ongoing work of assessment teams dedicated to each outcome (see [Criterion 4](#) for this discussion), annual advising training for all faculty and advisors, LEP 100 classroom discussions on the importance of liberal education and why students are required to take the curriculum, and upcoming review of the LEP 400 course now that it has been taught for several years.

*3B3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.*

All students experience the ten LEP outcomes described above, outcomes which address the skills listed in this subcomponent. While the LEP outcomes are largely associated with the required MTC courses in the first two years, these outcomes are also present throughout the curriculum of most degree programs. The LEC [surveyed](#) faculty to identify which courses from all programs and all course levels reflect elements of the LEP outcomes. The findings from this survey are being distributed to each of the LEP outcome assessment teams, so that they can pursue additional assessment evidence beyond the MTC and LEP 100 and 400 classes. In addition to coursework, several of the LEP outcomes are intended to be reflected in co-curricular experiences as well; Student Affairs offices began addressing LEP outcomes in their annual assessment planning processes in summer of 2012 (again, more information can be found in [Criterion 4](#)).

SMSU's efforts in helping students in all programs develop these educational skills extend beyond the LEP indicators. Every program's program review and assessment data, found in [Criterion 4](#), addresses these same components. The annual Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), described in [Criterion 1](#) and below in [Criterion 3B5](#), has grown each year and encompasses work from 17 different programs across campus. Many of the high impact practices endorsed by the AAC&U, which have been embraced by SMSU in the LEP and many degree programs, reflect this subcomponent as well. The first-year seminar, writing-intensive classes, diversity/global learning, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone courses all serve to help SMSU students enact the liberal education foundation noted in the University's mission.

*3B4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.*

As described in [Criterion 1C](#), the mission, values, strategic plan, and LEP outcomes all support diversity in many forms at SMSU. Diversity-related courses are in place, via the educational framework of both SMSU's LEP and the system-wide MTC, which each include a human diversity and global learning component; this component is consistent with the University's mission to prepare students as "engaged citizens in their local and global communities." Within the MTC, students may

choose from a list of approximately 13 different courses to fulfill the diversity requirement and 28 global-themed courses. The courses are offered in a breadth of areas including History, Literature, Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies, Sociology and Speech. There is at least one course in Education with a diversity topic, but it is ineligible for the MTC because of a MnSCU rule that Education-prefix courses cannot be used to fulfill MTC requirements. Results from the [MnSCU Consortium question on the 2013 NSSE](#) indicate that when presented with the statement “Faculty use examples of experiences from various racial or ethnic groups in their courses,” 73% of first-year students and 67% of seniors agree with the statement, a slight increase from the 2011 NSSE and closely matching the state-wide numbers of 74% and 72% respectively. All students can choose to further pursue their diversity and global interests through the Global Studies program offerings, and conversely, partnerships with several international universities provide roadmaps for their students to continue coursework at SMSU (described in [Criterion 1C](#)). SMSU is home to a broad array of co-curricular activities that bring together students from diverse backgrounds or share information about cultures different from that of Southwest Minnesota. While serving primarily the southwest region of the state, SMSU has a diverse student population, as described in Criterion 1; the chart in that chapter demonstrates the diversity of SMSU’s student population specifically in terms of IPEDS categories. SMSU international students pay in-state tuition rates but receive no financial aid. As described in Criterion 1C, the University takes seriously the need to retain diverse staff and students and recognizes that diversity is an important component of education. Coursework, co-curricular activities, and the conversations one hears walking down the halls all demonstrate the attention to human diversity at SMSU.

*3B5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution’s mission.*

Per SMSU’s mission and position within the MnSCU system, teaching and faculty attention to students are considered priorities, but scholarly endeavors are also required per the [MnSCU-IFO contract](#). SMSU faculty carry a 24 credit, generally 4-4, course load. Faculty are required to write Professional Development Plans (PDPs) each year or every two-four years after tenure and promotion, in which faculty address how they intend to achieve the five performance criteria of teaching effectively (or other assignment), scholarly or creative achievement or research, continuing preparation and study, contributions to student development, and service to the university and community. In the PDP process at SMSU, faculty can designate what percentage of their total work each of these efforts will take. The contract provides for a broad range of scholarly contributions (see [Appendix G of the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement](#) for a list of examples).

Faculty members and students across the campus are actively engaged in scholarship and creative work. Recent examples include articles published in scholarly journals such as the *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *Journal of Differential Equations*, *Science Educator*, *Consciousness and Cognition* and *Revista de Estudios Sociales of the Universidad de los Andes*; books or book chapters including creative work such as Prof. Neil Smith’s *All the Young Warriors* and Prof. Judy Wilson’s *Trespass* as well as contributions to books that included *Philosophy and Breaking Bad*, *Applying Core Ethics to Business*, *East Asian Social Movements: Power Protest, and Change in a Dynamic Region* and *Mnopedia*, the new online encyclopedia of Minnesota. Faculty across campus attended and presented at numerous professional meetings. Closer to home, SMSU’s [Faculty New Work presentation series](#) brought our own researchers and writers before our students and other members of the campus community. Recent topics included “E-Publishing” by Prof. Neil Smith, “Seeking Jane Austen” by Prof. Jim Zarzana and “Storytelling Disclosure in Corporate Campaigns” by Prof. Rick Herder.

As described in Criterion 1 and referenced in Criterion 3B3 above, SMSU students take part in an annual Undergraduate Research Conference ([URC](#)) that began in 2006 and has grown every year. On December 4, 2013, 223 SMSU students participated in the eighth annual Undergraduate Research Conference. Student presenters delivered 48 oral presentations and 98 posters. Another nine students showed their original art. Participating students represented all parts of the academic community, including Accounting, Ag Business, Art History, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Exercise Science, Political Science, Theatre, Environmental Science, Professional Writing and Communication, History, Psychology, Sociology, and Creative Writing. Selected campus presentations were included in the Minnesota Undergraduate Scholars Poster Session in the Rotunda at the Minnesota Capitol in February 2014, and at the Minnesota Undergraduate Scholars' statewide URC held at MSU Moorhead in April 2014. In addition, Accounting, Education, Science and other programs host poster sessions for student research projects in late April and early May. In just seven years, the URC has grown from a few dozen projects by science students to more than 200 students from all corners of the campus.

Another example of student engagement in research is the Culinary @ students' participation in the national [Research Chefs Association Culinary @ Competition](#). In the last several years, SMSU teams have won first- and third-place honors while competing against programs which are much larger, older and better-financed. The creative work of students can be witnessed through multiple examples: Hospitality students have planned and prepared dinner theatre meals in conjunction with main-stage theatre productions for ten years, winning high praise from theatre-goers; the Theatre program produces three main stage and at least one blackbox presentation each year; and radio/TV students have produced and broadcast more than 120 original programs, including live sporting events, newscasts and interview programs, with the KSSU Radio and KSSU TV stations maintaining regular broadcasting schedules with programs developed and produced entirely by the student staff.

### CORE COMPONENT 3C: THE INSTITUTION HAS THE FACULTY AND STAFF NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE, HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS AND STUDENT SERVICES.

*3C1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.*

The faculty at SMSU have always supported the institution's mission by providing high quality curricula that enhance student learning. The faculty provide students with excellent teaching and other learning engagements that prepare them for global opportunities. Individual departments and/or faculty have established various assessment tools for their programs or courses. Specific programs, including distance learning and graduate programs, have full-time faculty and staff, and also work study and in some programs, graduate assistants to accommodate demands for services, information and program support.

The number of faculty over the past ten years has decreased in terms of FTE faculty; the student-to-faculty ratio has also slightly decreased, indicating that the decrease in enrollment has slightly outpaced the decrease in numbers of faculty.

The decrease in numbers of faculty is due in part to retirements as well as cautious hiring in light of economic conditions. Over the ten years since the last HLC review, 34 IFO faculty members retired, and not all of these positions were rehired. In FY04, there were a total of 142.35 FTE faculty. In FY14, there were a total of 136.61 FTE faculty. While the total number of IFO faculty has decreased, the number of probationary FTE faculty has increased, and the percentage of fixed term faculty (those on one-year contracts) has decreased after a high of 19.53% in fiscal year 2011. In FY04, 24.69 FTE (17.34%) of the faculty were on fixed term positions compared to 19.79 FTE (14.49%) in FY14. Table 3.2 shows the number of faculty searches conducted each year since 2004; the table demonstrates that overall, probationary positions have outpaced fixed term contracts, lending some stability to the faculty workforce despite the downturn in number of FTE positions overall.

TABLE 3.2 IFO FACULTY SEARCHES 2004-2014

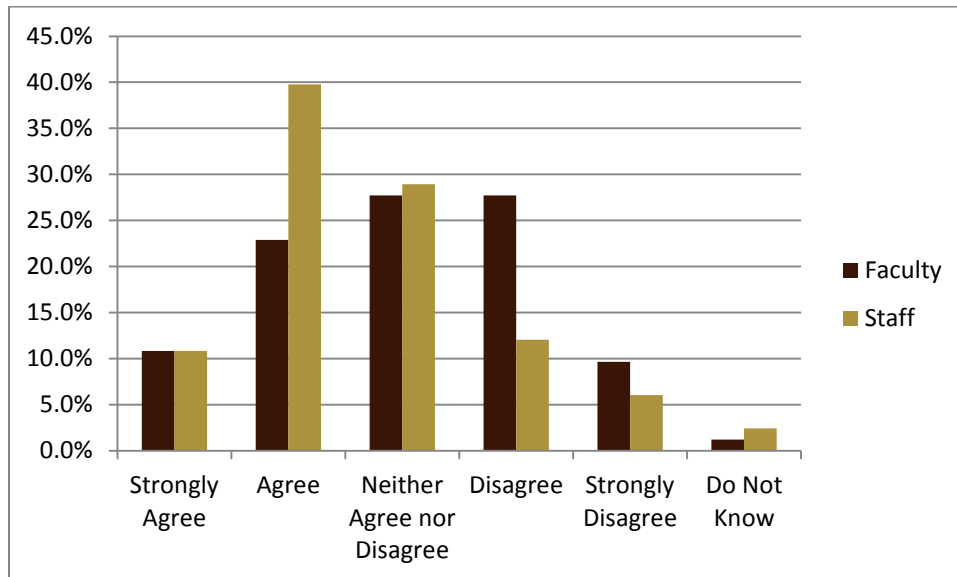
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>No. of Searches</b>	<b>Fixed Term</b>	<b>Probationary</b>	<b>Athletic 4 year FT</b>
2004	12	4	6	2
2005	13	4	8	1
2006	15		14	1
2007	21	2	19	
2008	18	3	12	3
2009	7	5	2	
2010	6	3		3
2011	16	13	2	1
2012	5	4	1	
2013	12	3	9	
2014	16	5	10	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>12</b>

As noted above, the student:faculty ratio has also decreased, largely due to lower undergraduate degree-seeking student enrollment. Because faculty teaching graduate students cannot be easily separated from those teaching undergraduate students (often faculty teach both graduate and undergraduate courses), the student:faculty ratio is calculated by including all faculty and all degree-seeking students. Over a ten year span, using Fall 2003 and Fall 2013 data (AY 2004 and AY 2014), there has been a roughly 8% drop in degree seeking student FTE and a 4% drop in faculty FTE. This creates a student:faculty ratio change of roughly 19:1 down to 18:1 when the numbers are rounded.

In addition to the IFO faculty positions described above, 10 MSUAASF members retired, which allowed the University to eliminate or change the majority of these positions. In FY04, the MSUAASF group consisted of 58.43 FTE employees with 55.6 FTE in FY13.

As part of the HLC Self-Study Survey conducted in Spring 2013, faculty and staff/administration were asked the same question regarding perception of having a sufficient number of faculty. Figure 3.1 shows that the groups had different perceptions:

*FIGURE 3.1 COMPARISON OF FACULTY AND STAFF/ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT "THERE ARE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN EACH PROGRAM."*



While how individuals answered might have depended on whether they were thinking of a specific program, the broader result that the overall faculty perspective does not match the staff perspective is not surprising. A review of faculty position requests from the past few years show that Departments always perceive a need for more faculty, in that they submit more requests than are usually funded, and the faculty must staff a large number of not only University committees but faculty-initiative committees (see [committee lists on the SmSUFA web site](#)), and thus must meet service obligations as well as support students and their own research agendas in addition to their teaching load.

*3C2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.*

Of the total of 110 probationary or tenured faculty in 2013-14, 99, or 90%, had terminal degrees. Out of 28 fixed-term faculty members, 9 had terminal degrees. Any faculty member employed by the University must undergo a stringent hiring process and meet the qualifications proscribed by the position requirement (see Criterion 2A). SMSU Extended Learning and Academic Outreach programs are appropriately staffed. Faculty for distance education courses are, for the most part, recruited from the campus roster of eligible instructors as part of their contracted course load. Periodically, eligible adjunct instructors are employed on a limited basis. Staffing methods are generally the same as in traditional programs, with qualified faculty being selected by the department and the dean. Faculty hired specifically to teach online courses must have relevant experience and/or training prior to teaching online. As described in the CN (dual credit) section above in Criterion 3A4, the CN Program is based on a mentoring system, similar to that of the relationship between a professor and

teaching assistant on the college campus. The teacher of record is the SMSU faculty member, the credentialed instructor responsible for insuring the integrity, rigor, standards, and grading rubrics, and for entering the final grades into the SMSU system. Departments working with CN accept properly vetted high school teachers into the program. Many of the CN teachers have master's degrees, discipline-specific graduate level coursework, and years of teaching experience. All teachers interested in teaching in CN go through an application process which includes submission of resume/vitas, letters of recommendation, and copies of all transcripts (undergraduate and graduate). The individual academic departments they will be teaching for make the decision on who is approved and who is not.

On-campus and MnSCU resource collections are available for faculty who develop online courses, and each year during Professional Development Days, training sessions are offered, with content determined by requests from faculty. A variety of other training opportunities are presented throughout the year (see sample [list related to academic technology training](#) in e-resources). Professional development funds provided to each faculty member may be used to attend training, meetings, conferences, or other opportunities related to distance learning instruction. At the system level, [MnOnline offers access to collections of articles, tutorials, and Web workshops](#) for use by faculty. There are many opportunities for additional professional development.

### *3C3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.*

In accordance with the established IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement (and as described in the Introduction "Response to 2004" section), faculty are evaluated for continuing improvement in teaching, in other student interactions, in the quality of scholarly activity and other service to the university and community, as referenced above in Criterion 3B5. The evaluation processes are intended to be supportive of a faculty member's desire for continuing professional growth and academic excellence. This process contributes to various personnel activities and supports the interest of each faculty member to achieve continuing professional growth and to pursue the highest possible level of academic excellence.

The five criteria for evaluation are listed below:

- Demonstrated ability to teach effectively and/or perform effectively in other current assignments
- Scholarly or creative achievement or research
- Evidence of continuing preparation and study
- Contribution to student growth and development
- Service to the university and community

During the fall semester, each faculty member, after consultation with their immediate supervisor (Dean and/or Athletic Director/designee), prepares a professional development plan (PDP) for the period to be covered by the evaluation. The PDP includes specific objectives, methods, and expected achievements in respect to the criteria listed above. At the completion of the plan, the faculty member provides a copy of the plan to his/her department members through the department chairperson. The appropriate Dean, his/her administrative designee, or other appropriate supervisor will comment on the plan. These written comments provide information to assist the faculty member in his/her professional development and, if applicable, provide guidance with respect to personnel decisions.



At the end of the evaluation period, the faculty member prepares a report and sends it to their supervisor as described above, together with appropriate documentation describing progress made in respect to achieving his/her objectives as specified in his/her professional development plan. A copy of the report must be sent to all the affected departments through the department chairperson(s). Beginning with the 2011-2013 contract, department members are now required to submit comments on the PDRs that are shared with the Dean; departments created their own policies about how to manage this feedback. Previously, department members were encouraged to provide written comments on the report to assist the faculty member in his/her professional development and, if applicable, provide guidance with respect to promotion and/or tenure. All written comments are forwarded to the faculty member being reviewed. The faculty member will then meet with the Dean and/or Athletic Director/designee to discuss achievements made during the evaluation period. A written summary of the Dean's and/or Athletic Director's/designee's assessment of the faculty member's accomplishments in respect to his/her plan, as they relate to the criteria, together with suggestions to guide future professional development activities, and any upcoming application for tenure and/or promotion, shall then be sent to the faculty member and placed in the faculty member's official personnel file.

The evaluation process and submission of materials proceeds according to a schedule determined by the President after the faculty association has been provided an opportunity to Meet and Confer concerning implementation of the procedure.

*3C4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.*

The [MnSCU – IFO Master Agreement](#) contains a provision for professional improvement, providing funds for improving professional competence (as outlined in Article 19). All members of the IFO faculty except adjunct faculty are eligible for the funds, as described in the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement. Three forms of faculty improvement monies are available: Professional Study and Travel, Sabbatical Leave, and Professional Improvement Funds, known at SMSU as “Faculty Improvement Grants” (FIGs). MSUAASF members are also eligible for improvement grants.

---

#### PROFESSIONAL STUDY AND TRAVEL

The IFO and MnSCU recognize the need for faculty development relating to their university's mission. Therefore, each department/unit is allocated professional study and travel funds. The 2011-2013 IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement (the contract still in effect pending ongoing negotiations) provides for \$1,300 per each full-time equivalent faculty member in a department. The departments, through a democratic process, determine an equitable procedure for distribution of funds. Funds provided by this section are limited to paying for costs associated with the process of faculty development. As stated in the Master Agreement, “Permissible uses include, but are not limited to, the cost of travel, housing, meals and registration associated with participation in professional conferences, workshops, and similar meetings and courses, professional memberships, professional books and journals, supplies and services including Internet access, online services including electronic subscriptions, software, multimedia, and fees associated with the publishing of professional writings including preparation services,” along with a new provision in the last contract that allows for “technology” provided the technology is needed for the faculty member to fulfill one of the criteria

for professional development. Professional study and travel funds are available to all faculty members at the time of hire.

---

## SABBATICAL LEAVE

The purpose of a sabbatical leave is to enhance professional development, support department/unit goals, and/or meet the instructional, service, or research priorities of SMSU. The President/designee may grant a sabbatical leave to an eligible faculty member who proposes to undertake a scholarly research project, additional study, or other endeavor related to professional development. To be eligible for sabbatical leave, a faculty member must have completed at least seven (7) years of service at the university, or have at least six (6) years of service since the conclusion of such faculty member's previous sabbatical leave.

The granting of sabbatical leave is contingent upon the President's determination that funds are available for this purpose and that staffing requirements of the university can be met. However, according to a provision in the master agreement, the faculty member shall be granted a sabbatical, upon request, after either, a year of service following an initial award of tenure, or completion of ten (10) years of service, and thereafter upon request after ten (10) years of service following the conclusion of the faculty member's last sabbatical leave. Should more than twenty-five percent (25%) of the faculty basis of any particular department or program be eligible for and request such a leave, the sabbatical(s) shall be granted in accordance with the following priorities: (1) faculty who have not yet received a sabbatical; (2) faculty whose sabbatical was postponed by this provision; (3) faculty with the longest service since their last sabbatical.

Sabbatical leaves may be granted for one (1) semester, at full base salary, or for a full academic year at eighty percent (80%) of base salary. For part-time faculty members, the amount of sabbatical pay shall be adjusted pro rata.

---

## FACULTY IMPROVEMENT GRANT (FIG)

Professional improvement funds, locally referred to as Faculty Improvement Grants (FIGs) are established by MnSCU to support faculty in fulfilling their professional development criteria of continuing preparation for study and scholarly or creative achievement. Faculty members may apply for the grant and receive up to the maximum potential grant each biennium. The current maximum amount is \$800.00. Each faculty is not automatically allotted \$800.00. Grant may be pro-rated depending on the number of qualified applicants. The FIG request must specify whether the activity fits into the category of continuing preparation and/or scholarly/creative achievement.

The President, after meeting and conferring with the Association, shall establish procedures and criteria for the application and awarding of these funds to individual faculty members. Awards shall be made by the President during the year of the biennium, and from one biennium to the next.

---

## MSUAASF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Minnesota State University Association of Administrative & Service Faculty (MSUAASF) members are eligible for Administrative and Service Faculty Improvement Grants (PIF) for projects that enhance the administrative and service faculty's professional competence while giving support to the mission of the University, with four funding cycles available annually. Like the Faculty Improvement Grant

process, the President determines the final awards after receiving input from the MSUAASF grant committee.

### *3C5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.*

Faculty members at SMSU are expected to make time to answer to students' questions outside the classroom. According to the [IFO-MnSCU contract](#) (Article 10, Section A, Subd. 2), each faculty member is responsible for ten (10) office hours weekly for assisting students, at times and approved locations, either on or off-campus, and posted at the faculty member's office for faculty members with assigned offices. A faculty member who is assigned to work from a remote location shall maintain equivalent interactive availability to students through the internet or other electronic means. If a faculty member's assignment includes teaching load at an off-campus site, a portion of his/her office hour obligation can be met at the off-campus site. In addition to official office hours, many other forms of contact occur, such as through the mentor program, email exchanges, Global Studies, or informal conversations in the hallway or after class.

In exploring data related to this subcomponent, it became evident that the different survey materials available do not directly address this particular issue of accessibility. The NSSE survey asks how much students go to their professors, but this is not the same as how accessible or available the professors are. The SMSU Senior Survey administered to all graduating seniors asks about the accessibility of advising, but this too is different than the broader question of student inquiry. All instructors list or post their office hours in their syllabi, and many include questions on their individual course evaluations asking students to rate their accessibility, but this type of data is not available to compile. Through the process of the self-study, the need to develop a method to gather data related to this subcomponent has been identified.

### *3C6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.*

Every unit in Student Affairs has specified minimum qualifications for each position. In each search, job openings are advertised with reference to these qualifications. The search process is designed to guarantee that the individual hired meets at least the minimum requirements for the position. Once hired, staff members undergo an annual review process appropriate for their position.

Ongoing training includes scheduled professional improvement days that involve all staff members. Professional Improvement Grants are available to support training activities. Every unit within Student Affairs develops their own plan and schedule for continuing training.

Staff members who employ student tutors engage in professional development related to this aspect of their position, as part of their professional development planning and reporting. Student tutors are therefore trained and supervised by well-qualified staff members who are current in their fields. Students who tutor in the Academic Commons are chosen based on their own success in the program for which they tutor. These students frequently sit in on the introductory classes for which they tutor and regularly work through homework assignments independently before students in the course see the assignments. Tutors in the Speech Center have all taken the Advanced Public Speaking course and are selected from that population; students majoring in Communication Arts and Literature/Secondary Education receive first consideration. The Speech Center tutors receive training from a Communication Studies professor. Tutors in the Writing Center complete a formal

course before working with students in the Center and participate in ongoing professional development through regular staff meetings and participation in professional conferences. Data from student evaluations of the Writing Center tutors show that students find the tutors to be helpful: In Fall 2013, 89% of those surveyed rated their session excellent to very good; 96% agreed or strongly agreed that they received at least one useful suggestion for improving their writing; and 93% said they would recommend the writing center to their peers. The numbers were much the same in Spring of 2014, with 91% of those surveyed rating their session excellent to very good; 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they received at least one useful suggestion for improving their writing; and 100% marking that they would recommend the writing center to their peers.

### CORE COMPONENT 3D: THE INSTITUTION PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.

*3D1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.*

SMSU supports students through a broad range of services, which are conveniently located throughout campus and are advertised to students through formal programs, residence halls, referrals from advisors, and hallway posters. These services include the Advising Center, Career Services and Counseling Services, Health Services, Financial Aid Office, Diversity and Inclusion, Residence Life, the Writing Center, and the Speech Center. In addition, the Office of Student Success (described in [Criterion 1A](#) on student support) was organized in academic year 2011-2012 to address issues related to retention, and thus frequently acts as a portal to help students identify the specific types of support they need. The Office of Student Success coordinates the Early Alert System used by faculty and staff members to notify them of any concerns they have about a student's performance, provides programming on helpful tips for students, and employs and trains "Mustang Mentors," upper-class students who are partnered with first-year students to provide one-on-one help and advice.

The [Advising Center](#) coordinates programs and provides academic advising for specific populations, such as undeclared students and PSEO students. The Director of the Advising Center works directly with students on academic warning or probation, reviewing the policies with them and helping them create strategies to improve their standing, in coordination with their major advisors. The Center assists students in the selection of an academic major and/or minor. In addition, the Advising Center answers student questions about academic forms and policies as well as functions as a drop-in center for student concerns.

[Career Services](#) supports students throughout their college years as students decide on a major and potential career path, then create and implement a plan to achieve their career goals. Staff members encourage students to take advantage of online and print resources to help identify possible careers and explore the preparation necessary to enter them. Programs and presentations help with interview skills, resume writing and other essential skills for finding employment after college. Although it is not a placement office, Career Services does support students through [mustangjobs.com](#) and other online job-hunting resources.

[Counseling and Testing Services](#) offers assessments to students for stress, anxiety, depression, relationship issues and a range of other complications commonly faced by college students. Short-

term counseling is also available for students who need more than an assessment of their issues. Test proctoring includes services such as the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exams, College Level Examination Program, ACT, the Senior Exam for Finance students, and the new 2014 GED for potential students and local residents. The Testing Center has been enlarged and equipped with 14 testing stations and is a resource available to community members and anyone needing a proctor in addition to SMSU students.

[Health Services](#) provides free and confidential services, including medical evaluations, for registered students. There is a small fee for laboratory tests, certain medications, supplies, and sports physicals students might also require. Health Services also assists students with off-campus referrals as necessary. The Health Service is also central to SMSU's promotion of itself as a smoke-free environment.

The [Student Financial Aid Office](#) provides fair, equitable, and unbiased service to students seeking financial aid. This supports the mission of the University by helping students find financial means that enable them to enroll in and complete their academic programs. The office guarantees delivery of federal and state financial assistance to students within rules and regulations established by government authorities. The Student Financial Aid Office coordinates all federal, state, and institutional financial assistance, including grants, scholarships, student employment, and student loans.

The [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) seeks to ensure that all SMSU students receive the quality education for which they have come to the University. The Office recognizes that students from underrepresented and underserved populations face challenges and roadblocks that are different from those faced by other students and works, through outreach, educational programs and speakers, to help each student find the appropriate path and strategies to succeed at SMSU.

[Residence Life](#) focuses on helping students develop positive communities for living, learning and working on campus. Residence Hall Assistants are trained and supported with the goal of integrating each student into a network of peers, so that each student develops the relationships and life skills that will help them graduate on time and retain a lifelong connection with SMSU. "Living & Learning Communities," co-ed residential communities organized around either an academic or a special interest, are also available to enhance the overall resident experience by grouping students with similar interests in the same house. Living & Learning communities available in 2013-2014 were centered on Culinology @; Access, Opportunity, and Success (AOS, described further below); Fine Arts; and Mustang Traditions.

Both the [Writing Center](#) and the [Speech Center](#) rely on trained students for staffing and organization. Students can make an appointment for a consultation, either in person or, in the case of the Writing Center, online. During the consultation, a trained and supervised student assistant will work with the student to take the next step in preparing a finished writing assignment or preparing for a speech presentation. This peer support helps students grow in their ability to compete assignments or prepare speeches effectively.

The [Academic Commons](#) area was established in 2005 as study center where an array of student academic support services are located together in a central, visible, and academically-identified location to facilitate seamless access to services for SMSU students and education resources for the wider community. The Education Department Learning Center, Math Lab, and general academic

tutoring in many subjects are all located in the Academic Commons, as well as a 24-station computer lab and other resource material and project supplies.

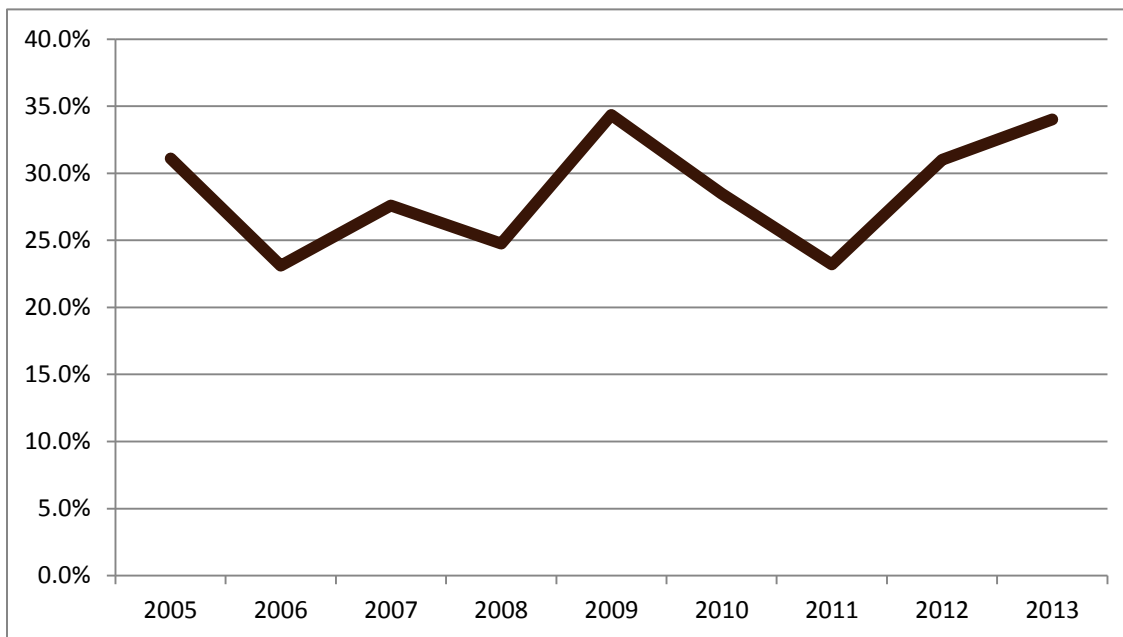
*3D2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.*

All SMSU students have access to appropriate support services for their needs, with many of those services tailored to the type of program in which the student is enrolled. Many of these services are described above in Criterion 3D1. In addition, some student populations receive more targeted services. These include Honors students, provisionally-admitted students, students in the AOS program, and student-athletes, as well as expectations for all entering first-year students.

The Honors Program is described in [Criterion 1A2](#). The Honors Program provides exceptionally well-prepared students the opportunity to create their own Liberal Education core, with a foundation of Honors classes, and student receive support from an Honors advisor.

Since a number of students enter SMSU on a provisional admission, it is necessary for the University to provide services and support to assist these students in becoming successful college students and graduates. Figure 3.2, New Entering Freshmen (NEF) Enrollment by Provisional Admission Condition, shows that of the undergraduate degree-seeking students, anywhere from 23% to 34%, depending on the year, are provisional admits. While the criteria for provisional admittance can change, they have stayed the same for the past three years. Provisional admits are generally students who scored below the 21 composite score on the ACT requirement yet have done well in high school. They are usually required to interview before being admitted. Students 21 years or older who have not taken the ACT are often admitted provisionally and require the Accuplacer to determine the college readiness. The Accuplacer is not an entrance exam but used for advising/placement purposes. More information on [admission requirements](#) can be found on the Office of Admission's web site.

FIGURE 3.2 NEW ENTERING FRESHMEN (NEF) ENROLLMENT BY PROVISIONAL ADMISSION CONDITION



Students who are provisionally admitted are directed into the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). In this program, provisionally-admitted students are advised into specific first-year courses both to help them develop the academic basis for continued success and to help them understand what it means to be part of a college community. These students receive academic advising from staff members who are trained and experienced in working with provisionally admitted students as well as from faculty members in the academic areas for which students have expressed an interest or have declared a major. As a condition of enrollment, provisionally-admitted students also take IDST 110, The University Experience, a 2-credit course created to help them transition successfully into college life. Many of these students are encouraged to utilize the resources on campus described earlier in Criterion 3D1.

As described in [Criterion 1C2](#), since 2008 there has been reorganization related to underrepresented, underserved, and first generation students, related to shifts in grant financing and retirement and other personnel factors. Some of this restructuring also affected the staffing and reporting lines of the EOP. Learning Resources, which had been the designated department to work with provisional admits, had also been home to TRIO Student Support Services (SSS), TRIO Upward Bound, Disability Resources, First Year Experience, and Access Opportunity Success (AOS). The Office of Cultural Diversity was added at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year, and Learning Resources was then renamed the Academic and Diversity Resources Department (ADR). At the end of the 2008-2009 year, the Director of ADR retired, and following the year after, SMSU's application for the federally-funded 2010-2015 TRIO SSS program was not selected to be funded. During this period of transition, the different offices were reassigned to different supervisors. One outcome of this is that the EOP program is now overseen by the Director of the Academic Commons, who reports directly to an academic dean, the Dean of ALS, rather than indirectly to the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. A second outcome is that due to the loss of the TRIO SSS grant, there

were staffing reductions and changes, culminating in one staff member (the Director of Academic Commons) remaining as the sole advisor for EOP students. In what is perceived as a beneficial outcome, given that the one staff member could not advise all of the EOP students on her own, most provisional admit students are now assigned two advisors. In the required IDST 110 course, attention is focused on helping these students understand advising and the LEP outcomes, and many of the students transition to a faculty-only advisor once they declare a major, although the Director of the Academic Commons is still available to them whenever needed.

Access, Opportunity and Success ([AOS](#)) is a state-funded program designed to help create the conditions for success with students who are low income, first-generation college students, or are students of color. Students in AOS are provided access to tutorial or supplemental instruction, and those who have a Pell Grant are eligible for a housing fee waiver. Freshmen and sophomore students in the program receive priority (early) registration. Entering freshmen have the opportunity to participate in the Summer Bridge program while sophomores are eligible for the Boost Your GPA Summer Bridge program. In addition, all AOS students have the opportunity to live in the AOS Living and Learning Community in the residence halls, mentioned in Criterion 3D1 above.

Student-athletes also receive support intended to help them succeed academically and personally. All student-athletes, regardless of whether they are regular-admits or provisional-admits, are required to take the IDST 110 course as well, which places an emphasis on life skills. Each athletic team requires their student-athletes to participate in study tables each week. Student-athletes that are in need of additional academic support are referred to the institution's student academic support services and/or disability services office. Each head coach and fulltime assistant coach is trained and assists in the academic advising process for student-athletes. Student-athletes attend an annual meeting to review the NCAA, conference, and institution eligibility regulations along with signing required consent forms. The Athletics Office maintains a Student-Athlete Academic Affairs drop-in office for student questions and concerns, and helps student-athletes achieve their academic, athletic and personal goals. (The [Student-Athlete Handbook](#) can be found on the Athletic Department's website.)

All entering freshmen are advised into a core group of courses that form the basis of SMSU's Liberal Education Program (LEP). The First-Year Seminar (LEP 100) and Academic Writing (ENG 151) in particular are designed for students who are new to college and are ready to study writing and critical thinking in a supportive yet demanding environment. Course placement sheets for all new entering students have been developed to assist advisors for course placement in English, Mathematics and The University Experience course placement. Writing and Mathematics placement is based on the ACT subject scores, Accuplacer exam scores, previous college coursework, and high school preparation courses documented in the student record system. Placement in the University Experience course is based on recommendation from the Office of Admission. In the case of the writing course placement, initial placements are double-checked with all instructors of ENG 151 and ENGL 100 (Introduction to Academic Writing) conducting and scoring a first day writing samples in all ENG 151 and ENG 100 sections and advising students if they appear to be in the best course for their needs. (Two samples of Placement sheets, [Example 1](#) and [Example 2](#), can be found in e-resources for reviewers.)

In various ways, SMSU provides 2+2 students the necessary student and support services. Off-campus students have access to student affairs offices already described such as Admission, Financial Aid, and Registration. 2+2 Coordinators travel to the community and technical colleges to collaborate with local staff as well as to meet and advise students. All students are assigned advisors



who are available to assist them in reviewing and planning their degrees. Also, very important to the 2+2 students' academic success is the SMSU Library off-campus access that provides students with access to Library resources from off-campus.

*3D3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.*

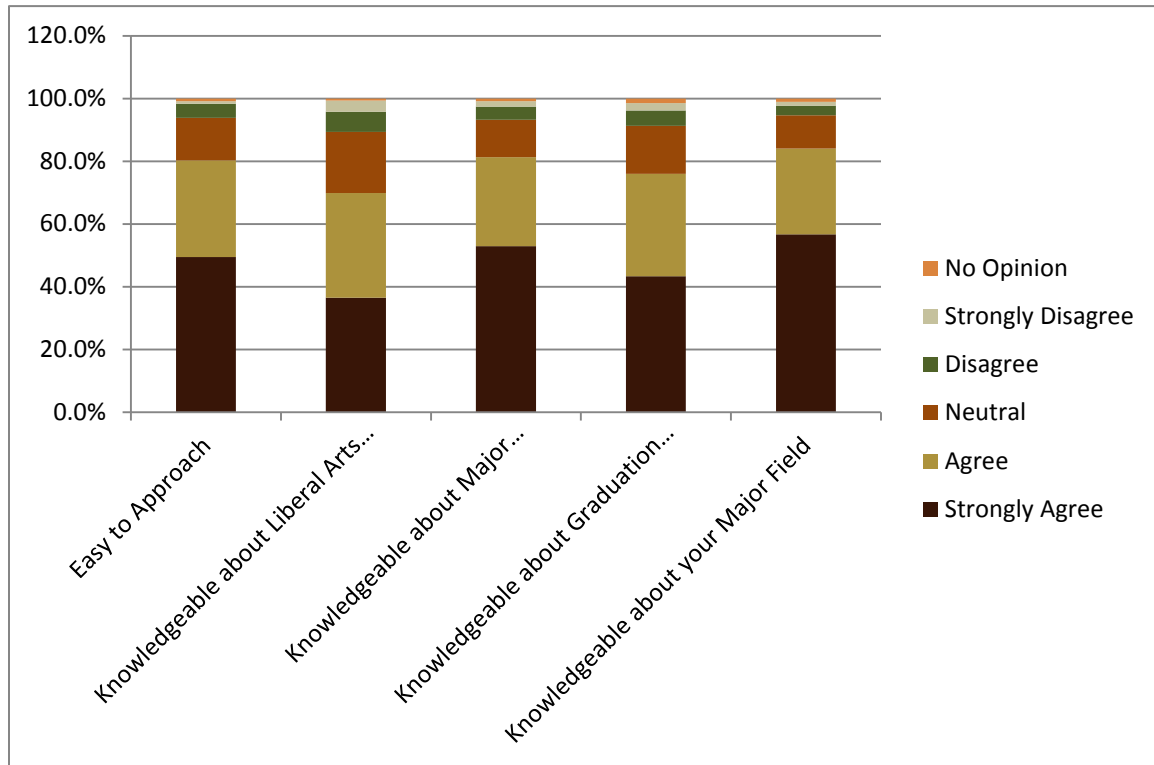
SMSU has a proud tradition of providing registration and other advice to students through one-on-one meetings with their academic faculty advisors. During the academic year, two complete days are set aside for faculty advisors to meet with their students in individual appointments. In order for students to actually register for courses during the Fall/Spring term, they need a registration access code that they only can get from their advisor. This further insures that students are getting advised to appropriate degree completion coursework. Some departments choose to advise in a single room with students speaking with any faculty member in their academic program; other programs require students to sign up for advising appointments with their specific academic advisor. In either case, the advisor has access to the student's academic record in the form of their Interactive Degree Audit Report ([DARS](#)). This document allows the advisor to see which degree requirements have been completed and which the student still needs to satisfy. These conversations frequently raise broader issues related to a student's program of study. In these cases, faculty members make additional appointments with students to complete the discussion.

Incoming students also register with the advice of a faculty member. In the spring and summer, SMSU hosts a series of advising days on which admitted students receive orientation to campus and meet at least one faculty member from their expected major area. Over eight or more days of such programs from April through August, 30 to 40 faculty members receive training and updates from the Director of the Advising Center on the Liberal Education Program, required courses, limitations on enrollment in specific courses and other important elements of providing thorough advice to new students. The training takes place immediately before each advising session so faculty can give the best, most accurate advice to each incoming student.

The Senior Survey, which all graduating students are required to fill out, provides some data on advising. Figure 3. 3 shows an overall positive perception of advisors' knowledge. Additional questions from the Senior Survey regarding advising can be found in Appendix A.

FIGURE 3.3 SENIOR SURVEY RESULTS REGARDING ADVISING ATTRIBUTES – AY 2012-2013

(IN RESPONSE TO “THINKING ABOUT YOUR CONTACTS WITH YOUR ACADEMIC ADVISOR(S), TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD YOU AGREE THAT HE/SHE (OR THEY) WAS/WERE ...”)



An Undergraduate Advising Task Force has been in operation for several years to make ongoing improvements to the advising practices on campus. Since it began meeting in December of 2012, the task force has enacted a number of improvements and has several more ready for discussion with the various campus constituent groups. The task force is charged with the following:

- To review advising as it currently exists at SMSU: a) review policies; b) review available data; c) map current processes
- To study best practices, theories, and mechanics
- To establish outcomes for advising; in effect, a curriculum for advising
- Create a plan for university-wide, effective advising
- Develop training plan and annual schedule, as well as resources for advisors

The group is in the final stages of completion for the first bullet above. A revised advising policy has been approved and is now posted. The second bullet was completed through group sharing of resources and discussion. The third and fourth bullets were completed by the development of a new [Academic Advising Guide](#), which includes the advising mission statement, advising expectations and outcomes, with a four- year general Advising Plan; this new guide will be posted on the Advising Center website at the beginning of Fall 2014. The fifth bullet is under discussion in Spring of 2014. Action items that came from this group include a change in the Fall Orientation program of replacing

the Academic Department Open Houses with a “Meet Your Advisor” activity, additional targeted communications to new students who do not have declared majors, and additional sharing of information from the Registration & Advising Office and the Office of Student Success.

*3D4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution’s offerings).*

Given the University’s age, having been built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the lack of state funding in the past ten years to address all the requested maintenance needs, some spaces and equipment on campus still reflect the era in which they were originally built. However, despite some of the funding obstacles, SMSU has enjoyed a physical makeover in many of its spaces, including Student Center, the Library, Science Labs, Culinology ® labs, and the Theater, as well as its technological infrastructure. Overall, SMSU is well-positioned to serve its students’ needs through the variety of technologies and physical spaces necessary to provide a quality higher education experience.

31 of SMSU’s 53 general classrooms are equipped with smart classroom technology. This technology allows instructors to use the latest news and information available electronically to support their classroom presentations. Every course offered at SMSU also has access to SMSU’s course management system—Desire to Learn, an online resource for course materials and discussions to support online courses, hybrid courses with some online activity and in-class courses that use the online discussions, group work areas and online submissions.

In addition to the smart classrooms, there are several technology-enhanced meeting/study rooms and special purpose classrooms across campus. Special purpose classrooms include science labs and specialized computer labs for disciplines like GIS and Graphic Arts among others. Across campus, a total of 12 rooms have been equipped with technology in the past five years.

The campus also has a total of eight general purpose computer labs and numerous stand-up or roll-up computer workstations accessible to students across campus including the Academic Commons, the Student Center, and the Library. Together, there are approximately 300 computer workstations available for student use on a daily basis.

The entire campus has access to Wi-Fi so students, faculty, staff, and visitors have online access everywhere. Faculty members also have access to video conferencing, web conferencing, and an online media management system.

Graduate students have access to a broad range of academic resources to support their coursework in Education and Business. With many graduate students connecting from around Minnesota and the United States, and occasionally from home, wherever that may be, the McFarland Library’s online availability is crucial to student success.

The Technology Resource Center (TRC) is physically located at the center of campus. It serves as the “front door” for the Information Technology Services division at the University. The TRC provides just-in-time responses to questions and issues from students, faculty and staff and strongly supports

SMSU's academic mission by minimizing computer downtime and maximizing access to information technology across the campus.

The Geographic Information System Center provides software for analysis of location-based data sets and creating detailed maps and other representations of complex data and demographic trends. The Iplotter allows students to prepare and use full-color posters to display their work. This printer is also used to prepare and print all research posters for the URC and other research events on campus.

Between 2010 and 2012, SMSU undertook a significant refurbishing and restructuring of laboratory space in the Science and Math building as well as kitchen space in the Individualized Learning building for the Culinology ® Program. Six laboratories and their related preparation and storage areas, the teaching greenhouse and three food preparation lab kitchens were gutted and rebuilt as part of the project to provide students with the most up-to-date facilities possible.

The [SMSU McFarland Library](#) is a primary site at the university where students learn how to use information effectively. By learning how to locate materials to address an information need, discriminate between credible and unreliable sources, and ethically and thoughtfully integrate new ideas, perspectives, and data into their existing knowledge bases, students who utilize the instruction, services, and materials of the Library prepare themselves for the intellectual growth they will experience after leaving SMSU. The Library's ability to support the process of seeking and selecting information is unique, and it offers students a wide array of methods for developing the habits of mind necessary for skillful location, selection, and incorporation of information into their academic, professional, and personal lives, including:

- classroom information literacy instruction
- one-on-one reference consultations, as well reference at point of need via chat, telephone, and text message
- a vast array of potential materials in physical and electronic formats: books, journal articles, audiovisual sources, etc.
- web-based research guides for asynchronous instruction and guidance
- a dynamic website designed to support all stages of the research process
- an active interlibrary loan system allowing easy access of materials outside of the SMSU Library's collection.

In August 2013, SMSU's McFarland Library debuted its new One Search option that allows students to search a broad range of databases with a single set of search parameters. This capability reduces the likelihood that a student will miss finding the most appropriate research materials by running a search in one database but not another. As SMSU has absorbed and reacted to a series of budget challenges since 2000, the library's acquisitions budget has fallen from \$288,128 in the 2000-2001 academic year to \$142,000 in the 2013-2014 year. This has occurred in an environment that has increasingly emphasized electronic resources over physical books and has also seen dramatic increases in the costs of those databases.

SMSU's Fine Arts building provides practice space in the form of two large rooms and 10 individual practice rooms. SMSU's mainstage theatre has recently replaced the stage floor as well as the house seats. The Black Box theatre gives student directors a flexible space for staging original works, improvisational performances and other performances. Two large conference rooms in Charter Hall and one in Bellows Academic also provide space for student performances and public presentations.

The Whipple Gallery inside the library and the Library Plaza in front of the library offer attractive spaces for displaying student and faculty artwork as well as student research projects. Two large outdoor courtyards provide another option for performance and practice space.

Throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, the Nursing program established 10 clinical practice sites for its students to access as part of their nursing preceptorship experience. The program, in compliance with the Minnesota Board of Nursing, requires nursing students to participate in clinical experiences at a community health setting to be eligible for the Public Health Nursing certificate. Additional clinical sites are in other healthcare facilities in the Marshall area.

SMSU supports several museums and other permanent displays that are integral to the mission and to SMSU's role in the region. The [Natural History Museum](#) focuses on plants and animals, particularly those native to Minnesota. The [Planetarium](#) offers Astronomy students an accurate view of deep space and hosts numerous school groups every year. The jointly-funded [ADM/SMSU Environmental Learning Area](#) gives visitors a compact area in which to observe a variety of prairie environments and wildlife. The [Southwest Minnesota Regional Research Center](#) and the Society for the Study of Local and Regional History is a public records repository and a resource for historical information about Marshall and the southwest corner of Minnesota.

### *3D5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.*

SMSU's Liberal Education Program requires students to encounter and address information literacy and the use of information resources in at least three ways. Entering students take LEP 100, the First-Year Seminar in their first or second semester on campus. Each section of the course explicitly addresses information literacy along with critical thinking and written and oral communication. As described in Criterion 2E2, instructors collaborate with the library in delivering information literacy instruction, beginning in LEP 100 and extending throughout the LEP. The information literacy element of the course is designed to lead directly into the use of information resources in ENG 151, Academic Writing, which many students take simultaneously. SPCH 110, Essentials of Speaking and Listening, also requires a basic research component. ENG 251, Writing in the Professions, or a similar course is part of every student's second year program at SMSU, and students expand their research skills by researching in their intended field of study. In the third or fourth year, each student takes LEP 400, Contemporary Issues Seminar, and a designated upper-level core skills course, each of which explicitly returns to information literacy and the use of resources. In addition to the LEP foundational research skills, all programs expose their students to the research and methods germane to their field. Library faculty support every program on campus with instruction specifically tailored to instructors' requests, and support students through multiple means including face-to-face reference desk staffing, online guides, and online chat sessions (see 3D4 above).

The LEC, librarians, and faculty members involved in teaching the LEP core classes for communication and critical thinking are in the process of reviewing how information literacy is scaffolded through the curriculum. At the end of spring semester in 2013, as an outcome of its first review of the LEP 100 course, the LEC led a [one-day workshop with LEP 100 instructors](#) in which information literacy baselines were discussed and recommended. The library has met with the English Department to discuss how ENG 151 and ENG 251 incorporate information literacy and can build upon what is learned in LEP 100. This remains a work in progress and linked to the LEP assessment teams' upcoming work on the communication and critical thinking goals. In addition, the

library tools and facilities described in 3D4 aid in helping students develop research skills across the curriculum.

### CORE COMPONENT 3E: THE INSTITUTION FULFILLS THE CLAIMS IT MAKES FOR AN ENRICHED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

*3E1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.*

*3E2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.*

The connection of SMSU's co-curriculum to the mission is first described in [Criterion 1D](#), and much of the information in that section is relevant here. SMSU's co-curricular programs support the mission in two broad ways. Programs like the Center for Civic Engagement, Global Studies, and student government are explicitly designed to help students "meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities." Service learning and student government require students to work as part of a community, whether it is the self-governing student population or the broader community within which service learning takes place. In addition, many of the over 80 student clubs perform service work in their annual activities;; students in these organizations contribute hundreds of service hours in a variety of projects on and off-campus (see the spreadsheet of service hours performed by student organizations in 2013-2014 [found in D2L resources for reviewers](#)). Other civic engagement activities and programs along with Global Studies' course-related travel emphasize for students the diversity of human culture and broaden the boundaries for students' awareness of significant issues. Student organizations such as the International Student Organization, the Latino Club, and Oyate Club are just a few examples of opportunities for students to share their own culture or to learn about other cultures represented on campus.

Other co-curricular activities are aimed at "connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world." Through internships, inter-collegiate sports, service learning, several different discipline-related student organizations, Global Studies, and the Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), students explore both professional directions and their connections with the world beyond SMSU's campus and local community. Discipline-specific clubs in the areas of Accounting, Biology, History, Math, Theatre and many others bring students into contact with the professional world beyond college. Conducting research for the URC requires students to tap into the wealth of academic research and apply it to their own issues and projects.

The University is able to demonstrate its claims of supporting the development of students as engaged citizens not only through the opportunities listed above but through the work of its Center for Civic Engagement. The Center, described in [Criterion 1D](#), provides a portal for all campus and community constituents to access information and support for civic engagement. A [detailed timeline](#) describing the development of and support for the Center since its inception in 2003 and is also posted on their website. As the report notes, SMSU has been involved with a number of support organizations such as the Minnesota Campus Compact and the AASCU American Democracy Project through the years and has hosted forums exploring the connections between civic engagement and

higher education. The Center's web site holds a number of links to resources for faculty and students with examples of a broad range of civic engagement and service learning.

Faculty associated with the Center, in collaboration with the Registrar's Office, have conducted and analyzed a Civic Engagement Survey on campus each year since 2009. This survey, taken by all graduating seniors, measures students' demographics, their participation in volunteerism and other civic-oriented activities sponsored by SMSU, as well as their "civic-mindedness." Civic-mindedness is measured using the Civic Minded Graduate (CMG) Scale, adopted from the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). The annual data reports for this survey can be found on the Center's web site under the [assessment link](#). Much detailed statistical analysis is contained in these reports. For example, the 2013 report shows that 237 of the 454 (52.2%) seniors surveyed took at least one class that included some form of community-involvement activity. An even higher percentage of the students agree with statements such as "My SMSU education has given me the professional knowledge and skills that I need to help address community issues" (59.0%), "My education at SMSU has made me aware of a number of community issues that need to be addressed" (69.6%), or "Through my experiences at SMSU, I am very familiar with clubs and organizations that encourage and support community involvement for college students" (63.4%). The Center and its faculty advisory board are working on ways to use this data and to increase the number of engagement opportunities for students.

### CRITERION 3: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Strengths:*

- The redesigned Liberal Education Program provides a strong educational foundation to support every degree program on campus.
- SMSU was created to fill a need in this part of Minnesota. From the beginning the University has identified unfulfilled needs in the region and developed appropriate responses. College Now, new programs such as Culinology ® and the RN-to-BSN, service learning and civic engagement efforts, and the Undergraduate Research Conference are recent examples of this approach to the mission.
- The College Now program is a leader in the state, providing access to quality college-level coursework and supporting high school teachers and students.
- A number of processes work together to ensure currency and quality of programs regardless of location or delivery method.
- The Writing Center, the Speech Center, Academic Commons, and formal library instruction in information literacy support overall educational excellence at SMSU, in addition to the services provided by Student Affairs' offices.
- Professional development funding such as study and travel funds and improvement grants aid instructional staff in keeping up with best practices and research.
- The faculty evaluation process in the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement ensures direct feedback from supervisors and departments annually while allowing for a range of professional achievement.
- Specialized segments of the SMSU student population receive extra support developed with their needs in mind.
- The review of advising has resulted in concrete actions and improved processes that support all students' advising needs.

*Recommendations:*

- Continue efforts to emphasize the new LEP goals across all campus units and involve all areas of campus in promoting them.
- While the student:faculty ratio supports the premise that faculty members know their students, and contractual office hour requirements indicate that students are likely to find their faculty members are accessible, the University could explore a revision of a survey instrument to determine student perception of faculty accessibility.
- Continue to consider the needs and how best to support offices, staff, and faculty who provide direct student assistance, especially in regard to new technologies.
- Continue to carefully monitor and support staffing levels for faculty as well as staff support as the budget allows.
- Continue to explore ways to support the mission's focus on helping students to become engaged in local and global communities.



## CRITERION 4

### TEACHING AND LEARNING: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

*The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement*

SMSU faculty are deeply committed to teaching and student learning and have been engaged in assessment activities for many years. Faculty as well as other staff in areas across the university continue to learn about the value of and rationales for participating in ongoing assessment; University members are vested in continuously improving student learning. Prior to the 2004 HLC review, several years of focused University attention resulted in departments and programs developing outcomes-based assessment goals and plans and seeking support to do so through mini-grants offered by the Committee for Institutional Assessment (CIA). (See the [2004 Self-Study](#) for a history of these efforts.) Following 2004, the overall assessment focus shifted to instituting a stable cycle of program review and the revision, implementation, and assessment of the new Liberal Education Program (LEP) outcomes. While some individual faculty and programs continued with their assessment efforts, during the revision of the LEP, they were not the focus of an institutional imperative; however, attention to the “whole” of assessment efforts was reinvigorated in 2012 with the appointment of an assessment coordinator reassigned part-time from faculty, the revitalization of the CIA, and a focus on sustainable assessment. The assessment coordinator provides support for department and program assessment efforts, and the Liberal Education Committee (LEC), the oversight body for the new LEP, is responsible for conducting assessment of the LEP outcomes. The CIA, co-chaired by the assessment coordinator and the Dean of ALS, is charged with communicating with the Strategic Planning committee to ensure that assessment efforts and evidence are considered in that committee’s work. The commitment to sustainable assessment is included in SMSU’s [2012-2017 Strategic Plan](#); Academic Strategic Direction, Goal 4 specifically states that the institution will “review annually all academic programs to insure continuous improvement” and “annually assess whether academic programs and the Liberal Education Core are meeting stated outcomes.”

This chapter will describe how SMSU’s multi-pronged approach to assessment, through the efforts of the assessment coordinator, the LEC, the CIA, and departmental reporting and program review, ensures that the University provides quality education to its students. All of the undertakings over the past ten years related to assessment, credit policies, curriculum programming, student services, and retention demonstrate the University’s ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

#### CORE COMPONENT 4A. THE INSTITUTION DEMONSTRATES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE QUALITY OF ITS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.

SMSU employs a variety of processes for assuring the quality of its educational programs and student learning experiences. Five-year academic program self-studies (i.e., reviews) and department annual reports are venues for consistent assessment of program quality, and the University has spent considerable time reviewing and strengthening its policies and procedures for transcribing credit over the past several years. The curricular process for the approval of all courses, degrees, and certificates is well-defined and requires approval at multiple faculty and administrative levels. Furthermore, the curricular process ensures that faculty have authority over course prerequisites, course rigor, and student learning outcomes. SMSU’s dual credit program, College Now (CN), meets all requirements and expectations for accreditation by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). In addition, all CN courses are subject to SMSU program,

departmental, and university policies. Several programs in addition to CN retain specialized accreditation or meet other licensure or approval criteria. The University is able to boast a 99% employment rate of its graduates, a strong sign of success in addition to other measures. Each of these elements is described in greater detail in the following subcomponent sections.

#### *4A1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.*

At SMSU, program review takes two forms: periodic five-year self-studies with an external reviewer who reads the review and comes to campus, and annual reporting by departments.

---

### ACADEMIC PROGRAM 5-YEAR SELF-STUDIES

The Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for oversight of all academic and non-academic programs at SMSU. Academic program self-studies (also called program reviews) have been instituted at SMSU since 1974 (past program reviews are housed in the [Striegel Archives](#) in the SMSU library).

In 2006-2007, the administration announced a new emphasis on and timeline for ongoing program reviews. SMSU's policy for program self-studies as well as guidelines for self-study completion are now located on the [Academic Deans' webpage](#). Three basic documents outline the requirements: 1) "[Academic Program Planning and Review Procedures](#)," 2) "[Academic Program Planning and Review Policy](#)," and 3) "[A Guide to the External Consultant's Report](#)." Both the procedure and the policy were revised in Spring 2014 to clarify requirements and expectations, to better align the official documents with the practices.

The most recent self-study documents align with an effort by the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs to revitalize the program self-study process by implementing a [five-year program self-study schedule](#). Though a few programs have steadily resisted complying with the program review timeline, the percentage of program reviews completed has been rising. For example, by 2004-2005, of the 22 academic programs in the College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences (ALS), 27% had completed a previous self-study. Five years later, (i.e., 2009-2010), 73% of ALS programs had completed a program review, and by 2013-14, 91% of ALS programs had completed at least one program review. Several ALS programs are scheduled to complete their program self-study during 2014-2015, which will bring the percentage of ALS programs completing at least one self-study to 100%.

The completion rate for program self-studies in the College of Business, Education, and Professional Studies (BEPS) has also increased over time. 38% of programs completed a self-study by 2004-2005, 46% had completed a self-study by 2009-2010, and by 2013-14, 90% of programs completed at least one program self-study (excluding four newly-developed agriculture-related degree programs and counting all Education undergraduate degrees as one program). By May 2015, 100% of BEPS programs will have completed at least one self-study. It should be noted that the composition of BEPS has not remained static over the last ten years. Four new agriculture-related programs were added to BEPS effective Fall 2013. The RN-to-BSN nursing degree was also a new program added in Fall 2013. The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) will be reviewing SMSU's nursing program October 15-17, 2014.

The increase in number of programs engaging in a self-study in recent years resulted from the administration's emphasis on program quality and efficiency as self-reported and corroborated by an external reviewer. Previously, many programs viewed mandated self-studies as busy work; in other words, the administration did not clearly articulate the inherent value of the self-study process to the program, department, and the university. Furthermore, there was little incentive (or reward) for programs completing a self-study, and there were no dis-incentives for programs that consistently

refused to comply. Additional evidence that the University itself undervalued program self-studies lies in the fact that there had been no oversight or designated repository for self-studies that is accessible by University members.

While the procedure has always contained a final step in which the program under review can respond to the external reviewer's suggestions and must write out a five-year plan in accordance with those suggestions, more recently the administration has emphasized this reflective step. As part of their reflective response, programs were expected to provide a timeline for the implementation of practices/policies suggested by the external reviewer that targeted program concerns/weaknesses. Under the revised procedure, the Dean and department analyze the reviewer's findings and suggestions and put into writing a record of which suggestions will be attempted, modified, or disregarded, forming the basis of the five-year plan, for the ultimate goal of providing and maintaining high-quality instruction that align with and support the department's mission as well as the University's mission and vision.

Program reviews frequently result in concrete changes to a program or specific course. The example of the Music Program described in [Criterion 3A](#) demonstrates how the content of courses might be changed or new courses added. Larger scale changes include the renaming of a program, Speech Communication, to the broader, more accurate title of Communication Studies, a change that grew out of that program's most recent review. The [Undergraduate Research Conference](#) was the product of a program review as well. Program review self-studies, external reviewers' reports, and, where available given its recent addition to the process, the department's and Dean's response to the external review are in e-resources for reviewers.

Past practice dictated that program reviews were shared primarily between the affected program and the respective Dean. Once the review was completed, it was shelved. Consequently, locating these early program reviews has been challenging, as there appears to have been no dedicated, central storage site for these reports throughout SMSU's history. Program self-studies now are in several locations including program file space on the University's t-drive, the Striegel Archives in the SMSU Library, the Academic Deans' office, and/or the individual program/department offices.

In an attempt to increase transparency of program self-studies, since 2012, the CIA has been engaged in discussion of how the self-study process may be amended such that completed self-studies must be reviewed by the CIA in addition to the Dean. Linking the program's self-study to the CIA webpage is an ongoing point of discussion. Program self-studies are now being saved on the t-drive, but this is a protected location accessible to the Deans and department chairs; whether and how to make the self-studies more accessible remains to be determined.

---

## ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORTS

The Administrative Dean's office implemented Department Annual Reports in 2004-2005. The [format of the Annual Reports](#) aligned with the faculty professional development and evaluation criteria as defined by the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement. The five criteria are: 1) demonstrated ability to teach effectively and/or perform effectively in other current assignments, 2) scholarly or creative achievement or research, 3) evidence of continuing preparation and study, 4) contribution to student growth and development, and 5) service to the university and community. Early Department Annual Reports (i.e., FY2005-06) also included a summary of courses taught by faculty within the department, faculty professional accomplishments, and program/department highlights. In FY07, departments were directed by academic Deans to include program and department mission and vision statements, student learning outcomes, and program budgets in the reports. The FY12 Department Annual Reports include number of majors in each program and a summary of College Now activities by the programs within the department.

The administration continues to refine and more explicitly define the contents of the Department Annual Report. For example, although assessment is part of the Department Annual Report format, it lacks specific guidelines as to the kind and extent of assessment data that should be provided by programs and departments. In 2013, administration revised the Department Annual Report format to include specific data requirements and a more extensive assessment component. Making Department Annual Reports public information by posting them on the academic Dean's website increases transparency of department activities for the University, regional, and national communities.

The most recent Department Annual Reports can be found on compiled into College reports on the [academic Deans' webpage](#), along with the annual Library Report (the 2012-2013 [ALS](#), [BEPS](#), and [Library](#) Annual Reports are linked here; the 2013-2014 reports will be posted online and available in e-resources by the time of the review. Earlier Annual reports can be found in e-resources or in the HLC Resource Room.

*4A2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.*

SMSU adheres to MnSCU policies and procedures for transcription of credits; see the "Educational Policies" chapter from the collection of [Board policies and System procedures on the MnSCU website](#) for a complete list of the MnSCU policies related to this subcomponent. In addition to common procedures for transcripts, MnSCU policies include guidelines on Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, CLEP, credit for prior learning, and transfer.

SMSU has in turn developed its own policies; most recently, a [Credit for Prior Learning policy and procedure](#) for SMSU was approved in April 2013. An [internship policy](#) guides overall university practice regarding internship credit, with departments creating their own procedures in line with the policy. [27 SMSU programs](#) offer internship credits, and the majority of these have their own program-specific internship policies. The program-specific policies are generally more prescriptive than the SMSU policy. However, the SMSU internship policy does not always align or complement program policy. In late Spring 2014 the Dean of ALS introduced an initial revision of the policy, and future Meet and Confer agenda discussions will address this.

SMSU's [grading policy](#) also provides the necessary parameters for grading options and how evaluation of a student's performance will be transcribed. The grading policy and GPA calculation information is also provided [in the Student Handbook](#), in order to make the University policy clear for students. In 2012-2013, SMSU developed and adopted [Policy A-049 Credit Hour Assignment](#), which is also described in Appendix B Federal Compliance.

With the implementation of the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS), described in [Criterion 2B](#), "Programs and Requirements," the degree check system, through which the Registrar's Office certifies that a student has met all requirements for graduation before issuing a diploma, has been made more efficient. While the degree check process existed prior to DARS, a student now has access to in-time review of their progress, such as credits earned, credits transferred in, and program requirements met, with useful color-coding and dashboards. At the degree check stage, a separate degree check DARS is printed for the student who must have the degree check reviewed by both an advisor and the chair of the program. Once those signatures are obtained, each student must return the form to the Registrar's Office. Registration staff then review and communicate with students concerning their degree completion requirements.

*4A3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.*

SMSU adheres to [MnSCU's transfer of credit policy and procedure](#). A new "[Acceptance of Transfer Credit Policy](#)" has been approved through the Meet and Confer process and will take effect in Fall

2014 with the new 2014 catalog. The policy includes the transfer process for courses from other post-secondary institutions, determination of course work transferability from another accredited institution, minimum grade level for transfer acceptance, courses with D grades that transfer if from a financial aid consortium agreement, and [Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses](#) designated as the MTC course from another MnSCU institution.

The policy also addresses how a credit may be deemed as technical but considered for transfer, transfer of credits from specialized proprietary institutions, credits as part of an Articulation Agreement, credits from non-accredited institutions or programs, the maximum number of accepted transfer credits on non-sectarian courses in religion, developmental/remedial course credits, credits from a completed Bachelor's Degree from a four year school and credits from a completed Associate of Arts Degree from a two year school. The policy notes that the DARS is the official university electronic system that provides analysis of transfer records. If a non-SMSU course has not yet been through the transfer review process, students may request a review by filling out a [student petition form](#), located on the [Registrar's website](#).

*4A4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.*

SMSU ensures that its courses and programs are of rigorous, college-level quality through a number of mechanisms, including curriculum design processes, learning outcomes, student support services, and qualified faculty. College Now dual credit courses are the same course taught on campus with identical learning outcomes and with students subject to the same criteria for evaluation.

## MAINTAINING RIGOR: CURRICULUM, COURSE DESCRIPTIONS, AND PREREQUISITES

While SMSU, as an institution in a state-wide public system, abides by System-level policies and procedures, SMSU is responsible for the rigor of its programs and courses. Specifically the SMSU faculty assume responsibility for course descriptions and pre-requisites, through their work developing and maintaining curriculum. The curriculum approval process (also referenced in [Criteria 2A](#) and [3A](#)) has several checkpoints built in for ensuring review of proposed courses or programs' rigor. As described in those earlier sections, all courses offered at SMSU must be approved by the faculty-led curriculum committee who, through the curricular process, indirectly assumes responsibility for the quality of all courses.

Course descriptions including course number and pre-requisites are determined by the faculty member(s) primarily responsible for teaching the course and the program. All course descriptions and pre-requisites are subjected to the curricular process before they appear in the course catalogue. The curricular process involves completing and submitting the appropriate form(s), "[Curriculum Change of Less than Major Significance](#)," "[Curriculum Change of Major Significance](#)," "[Curriculum Change of Major Significance Affecting LEP courses](#)," "[Additional Resource Worksheet](#)," "[Library Resource Checklist](#)," and one form for each of the [ten Minnesota Transfer Curriculum courses](#). All curricular forms require the written approval of the department chairperson before they are submitted to the graduate or undergraduate faculty-led curriculum committee and the academic Dean of the College in which the course is housed. All curricular changes are reviewed by the committee, and their recommendations are forwarded to the appropriate academic Dean for his/her consideration and subsequent approval. Curricular changes of *major* significance such as new courses, changes to a major, and courses with LEP designation, require additional approval by the faculty association, SmSUFA, before being submitted to the academic deans. Details of the curricular

process can be found on the [Curriculum Committee's home page](#). Curriculum forms related to the LEP are found on the [LEP program website](#).

All new programs must go through the curricular process at SMSU in addition to the curricular process at the MnSCU level and, depending on the program, review by HLC. At Southwest Minnesota State University, new programs can be initially introduced by departments, programs and administrators. Prior to July of 2012, any new program that was researched, investigated for feasibility and sustainability, reviewed for budget, costs and resources by the initiator, and then encouraged at the University level, was required to seek approval from MnSCU. (See [MnSCU Policy 3.36 Academic Program Policy](#).) Beginning in July of 2012, MnSCU converted the new program application process to what is known as [Program Navigator](#). Each campus has designated authorized personnel who can participate in the new program application approval process. The new Program Navigator provides an efficient online forum for authorized administrators from around the entire MnSCU system to review an application and to make comment. After review within a designated timeframe, the applying institution is notified of approval or denial of the application. (The [Program Navigator new program application](#) can be found in e-resources.)

Regarding the authority of curriculum design and prerequisites related to dual credit, SMSU retains complete authority over the courses it offers in its College Now (CN) program, the concurrent enrollment program in which SMSU courses are taught at high schools. CN is described at length in [Criterion 3A3](#). As noted in that section, each academic program ensures that the requirements, grading standards, and other course elements are the same in a CN course as they are for a course on campus. High schools who want to participate in CN must agree to SMSU's conditions of partnership, signing a [Concurrent Enrollment Agreement Contract](#), which makes explicit what each party can expect and abide by. While the overall availability of dual credit is made possible by the Minnesota state legislature via the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) bill, student eligibility for concurrent enrollment programs is determined by each participating university. SMSU's eligibility requirements for high school students to participate in CN include the following:

- High School Sophomores, Juniors & Seniors Only
- Sophomores – Top ten percent of class AND has scored over the ninetieth percentile on a nationally standardized test (proof of eligibility must be sent to the College Now office for sophomores)
- Juniors – Top 1/3 class rank *and* 3.0 cumulative GPA
- Seniors – Top 1/2 class rank *and* 3.0 cumulative GPA

These eligibility requirements take the place of other placement measures or prerequisites (given that SMSU's CN program delivers only MTC classes, it should be noted that there are no prerequisites for MTC courses).

In addition to the curriculum and CN processes described above, SMSU has adopted several other practices aimed at ensuring quality of its educational programs. For example, the five-year academic program self-study timeline, described earlier in Criterion 4A1, also contributes to the maintenance of rigor. Modifications to the program self-study guidelines have been made over the last five years in an effort to enhance and support program assessment. The ultimate goal of revisions to the program self-study process is to shift the focus from *how* the program brings about student learning to *what* students have learned. This latter evaluation of student learning can then be used to improve that learning of students in the select program. Although all SMSU programs do not view program self-studies as a means of improving student learning, there is growing evidence as found in sample program review administrative response documents, created between department members and the Dean when reviewing and discussing an external reviewer's report and suggestions, that programs are embracing this as a meaningful venue for ensuring program quality (see sample administrative responses from the History and Speech Communication programs found in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#); more examples are available with other recent program reviews).

---

## MAINTAINING RIGOR: EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

As part of the curriculum approval process, course outlines with learning outcomes must be included in the new course application to the curriculum committee. (See also [Criterion 3A2](#).) Thus the curriculum approval process provides initial oversight related to student learning outcomes. In regard to the new LEP, the redesign was entirely faculty-driven and grounded in a thoughtful process of reflection and feedback (see [Criterion 3B1 and 3B2](#) for a full discussion of the LEP transformation process). Because SMSU is required to share certain learning outcomes related to the MTC and design an appropriate general education curriculum to ensure transfer, part of the LEP revision included the incorporation of MTC goals, themes, and credit requirements in the first two years of the LEP. Discussion continues at the state level about transfer of non-general education courses. Faculty are involved in this process via state-wide faculty union committee and the Meet and Confer process with the Chancellor's office.

As noted earlier, dual credit CN courses share the same outcomes as an on-campus section of the same course. The criteria for grading remain the same; standards are not lowered because a course is being delivered in a high school setting. SMSU faculty mentors work closely with the high school instructor to ensure learning outcomes are being met and evaluation of student work meets college-level expectations. SMSU faculty review and sign off on grades, and it is possible that a CN student could earn a different grade on the CN college transcript compared to the grade a high school instructor assigns for high school credit. Maintaining authority over rigor and learning outcomes is further described in Criterion 4B on assessment.

In terms of maintaining authority over access to learning resources, several of the learning resources SMSU offers are in partnership with the System, as an effort to share resources and manage them efficiently. In particular this would include the Desire2Learn (D2L) course management platform, which is the common platform offered at all MnSCU campuses. The System provides funding and access to a help desk for D2L. However, local campuses such as SMSU must provide a local manager of the service and perform their own training for students and staff in how to utilize the resource. While SMSU may share resources with the System, SMSU is still responsible locally for implementing and supporting those resources. The Library catalog is another example of a shared service, and it provides continuity for students regardless of which MnSCU school a student attends. More information on student support services can be found in [Criterion 3D](#). As noted there, support services including the library, Disability Resources, and the Writing Center are available for distance learning students as well as CN students.

---

## MAINTAINING RIGOR: FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS

SMSU is committed to recruiting and hiring high quality faculty and staff. As described in [Criterion 2A](#) ("Integrity with Regard to Personnel"), the hiring process requires multiple stages of review of candidates. All hiring processes are overseen by both the local and the Minnesota State Colleges and University System, and are informed by state, federal, and university regulations regarding equal opportunity employment. Faculty positions are advertised locally, regionally, and nationally. SMSU is an equal opportunity/AA employer. Approximately 78% of full-time faculty hold a terminal degree in the field in which they teach; 90% of probationary or tenured faculty hold the terminal degree. With very few exceptions part-time faculty hold a minimum of a Master's degree. In addition to credential, another method for ensuring faculty qualification is the annual review of faculty professional goals and progress, as well as the promotion and tenure review processes. These review processes are described in [Criterion 3A1](#) "Faculty Review and Currency." Faculty teaching in graduate programs must be approved as graduate faculty through a review process conducted by the

faculty Graduate Council Committee, as outlined in the [Graduate Faculty Status Policy](#). Faculty vita will be available for review in the Resource Room.

Regarding faculty qualifications for CN, SMSU programs retain authority over which schools and high school instructors to partner with. SMSU faculty mentors in the CN program work closely with their high school instructor counterpart, as described in detail in [Criterion 3A3](#), “Ensuring Consistency through Teacher Training and Mentoring.” The CN Program is based on a mentoring system – similar to that of the relationship between a professor and teaching assistant on the college campus. The “teacher of record” is the SMSU faculty member, who is ultimately responsible for the class. One of the conditions for partnering with SMSU in CN is that schools agree that their instructors must be approved by the SMSU program/department for delivering the curriculum. Many of the high school teachers have master’s degrees, discipline-specific graduate level coursework, and years of teaching experience. The [CN Handbook](#) describes the general requirements and teacher approval process; each individual new teacher application is reviewed and considered on its own merit. All teachers interested in teaching in CN go through an application process which includes submission of resume/vitas, letters of recommendation, and copies of all transcripts (undergraduate and graduate). Various factors are considered, including undergraduate and graduate coursework, number of years teaching, experience with AP or other college level courses, ongoing professional development pursuits, principal letters of recommendation, and possibly visits to labs or phone interviews. The individual academic departments they will be working with are the ones who make the decision on who is approved and who is not. (Teacher application materials will be available for the team to review on campus.)

The approval process has been intensified in recent years, in line with more resources and oversight dedicated to the program. Currently, master’s level credentialing of the high school teacher is not a state-mandated requirement for the four-year universities in Minnesota. While an SMSU expectation is that high school teachers should have a master’s degree, preferably in the content area, not every school has such highly qualified teachers. In the past, some schools did not follow the instructor approval process when replacing a teacher, forgetting that the instructor as well as the school must be approved to partner with CN, and registering a class only to have the SMSU faculty mentor discover a new teacher had been assigned to it. This has changed with an improved registration system and with stronger emphasis on the CN requirements. Some high school teachers have been grandfathered in since working with the program for many years. It is clear, however, after the publication of HLC’s “[Dual Credit: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers](#)” policy, as well as the new “[Guidelines for Determining Qualified Faculty](#),” that programs will need to be aware of the new guidelines and make any changes necessary in their instructor approval processes. The guidelines provide additional backing for doing so.

*4A5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.*

This subcomponent is described in [Criterion 3A1](#), “Program Accreditations, Certifications, and Licensure.”

*Component 4A6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).*



SMSU uses multiple measures to assess student success. For example, one important measure is the employment rate of SMSU graduates. By this measure, SMSU is extremely successful. As of the most recent [report in 2012](#), nearly 87% of SMSU graduates report being employed in a field related to their major with the majority of those graduates (75%) working in Minnesota. Overall, when including all employed graduates, SMSU graduates boast a 99% employment rate. Data from 2004 to 2012 also indicates the percentage of graduates intending to continue their education ranged from 6-13%. Annual employment reports are public and are published on the [Career Services website](#).

To track the employment rate and what students intend to do after graduation, as well as to better understand students' overall experiences during their course of study, SMSU requires all graduating seniors to complete a multi-stepped procedure called the [campus clearance process](#). As part of the campus clearance process, students must complete three surveys (the surveys are available in e-resources for HLC reviewers):

- the [Senior Survey](#), a three-part survey that requests information from seniors in the areas of general information, academic information including educational goals and perceived preparedness for employment and lifelong learning, and campus services
- the [Student Civic Engagement Survey](#), which queries students on their activities related to civic engagement
- the [Graduate Follow-up Survey](#), which focuses primarily on the employment status of the graduating senior,

All three surveys are conducted online.

The *Graduate Follow-up Survey* has been part of the campus clearance process since 1971. SMSU's [current survey](#) consists of 11 MnSCU-required survey questions (#1-11 on survey) and four (#12-15) SMSU-specific questions. SMSU participates with MnSCU System Universities to determine best practices in conducting the survey, obtaining accurate data, and reporting the data. SMSU collects the data on its graduates via a letter requesting updated employment information at three different times: degree completion (graduation), six months after graduation, and one year after graduation. A letter that is sent with the students' diplomas encourages students to keep SMSU up to date on their address and employment. MnSCU requires a return rate minimum of 85%; SMSU consistently has a return rate of 90% or higher (range 85-95%). MnSCU conducts the statistical analysis. SMSU publishes the data yearly in the Annual Employment Report and makes the information available [online](#). SMSU graduation statistic reports are available from 2004-05 through 2011. Table 4.1 represents a 10 year history of employment of SMSU graduates, as reported on the Graduate Follow-up Survey.

TABLE 4.1 EMPLOYMENT RATES OF SMSU GRADUATES

Year	Related Employment	Employed – Still Seeking Related	Total Employment
2012	86.8%	12.2%	99.0%
2011	91.6%	7.5%	99.1%
2010	90.6%	7.7%	98.3%
2009	85.4%	12.1%	97.5%
2008	87.5%	9.5%	94.0%
2007	91.7%	2.3%	94.0%
2006	88.4%	2.8%	91.2%
2005	92.5%	5.6%	98.1%
2004	86.7%	*	
2003	93.0%	*	
2002	93.0%	*	

\*Not computed

Student participation in AmeriCorps, VISTA, or Peace Corps is tracked only when students self-report such positions on the Graduate Follow-Up survey or in communication with their former professors. However, within the last 10 years, three SMSU alumni have been hired as VISTA Member staff for the Center for Civic Engagement. Also, in the past two years, three SMSU graduates have been involved in the AmeriCorps Summer Reads program focused upon literacy enhancement (and administered through the Minnesota Literacy Council). Finally, one of the most frequent requests for information coming through the Center for Civic Engagement is for information about national or international service options.

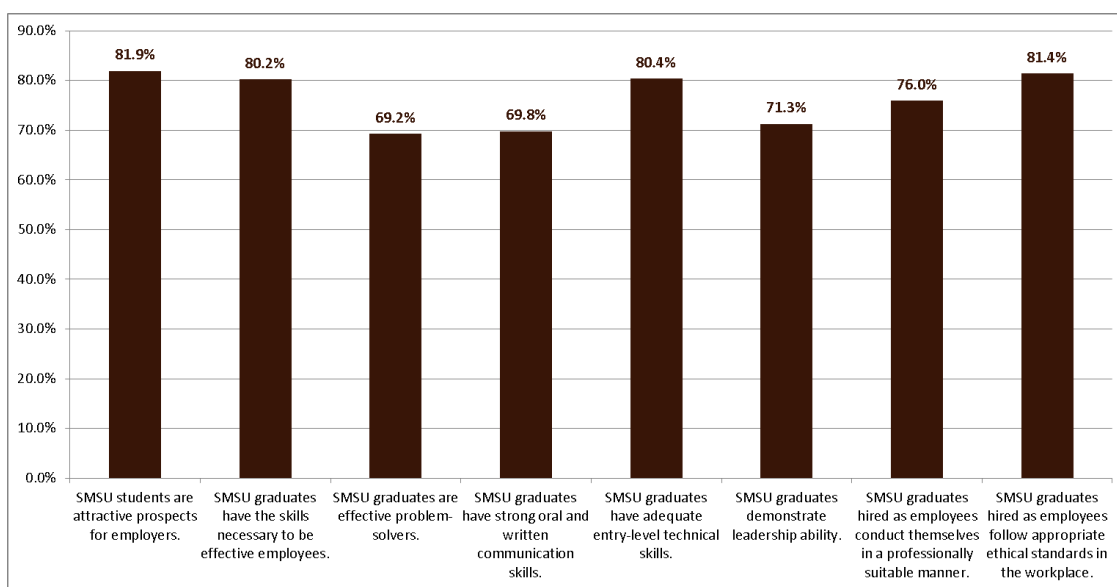
Data on student success and satisfaction are also gleaned from program self-studies. Unfortunately, data on student success and satisfaction from program self-studies are not summarized for all SMSU programs and archived in a central location. From individual program self-studies, however, students report what can be used as measures of success. For example, over 70% of biology graduates surveyed for the Biology Program's self-study in 2010 agreed that the program provided opportunities to compete with life science majors from other institutions. Similarly, over 70% of graduates reported that the Biology Program provided them with opportunities to develop their critical thinking and interpretive skills.

Student success is also measured through performance in regional or national clubs. For example, SMSU Culinary students were national champions in the 2011 (24 institutions participated) and 2013 (12 competing institutions) Research Chefs Association (RCA) Culinary competition and finished third in 2012 (18 competing institutions). This is a remarkable achievement given that their competition included Research I universities and land grant universities with student enrollments of several thousand more than SMSU. The Southwest Minnesota State University Chemistry Club is another example of a nationally recognized student organization. The American Chemical Society

(ACS) has established three levels of recognition for ACS- approved chemistry programs, of which there are approximately 671 in the United States. An “honorable mention” is awarded to the top 50% of national chemistry programs, “commendable” is for the top 30% of national chemistry programs, and “outstanding” is awarded the top 20% of chemistry programs. The award is based on the club’s activities throughout the year, including participation in the Homecoming parade; performing magic shows; engaging in hands-on activities with area students; presenting research results; participating in an Adopt-a-Highway program; and other social events the club holds throughout the academic year. The SMSU Chemistry Club (comprised entirely of SMSU students with a faculty mentor) has been awarded an honorable mention for five years (2004-2010), a commendable award for three years (2010-2013), and an outstanding award in 2003-04 and 2004-05.

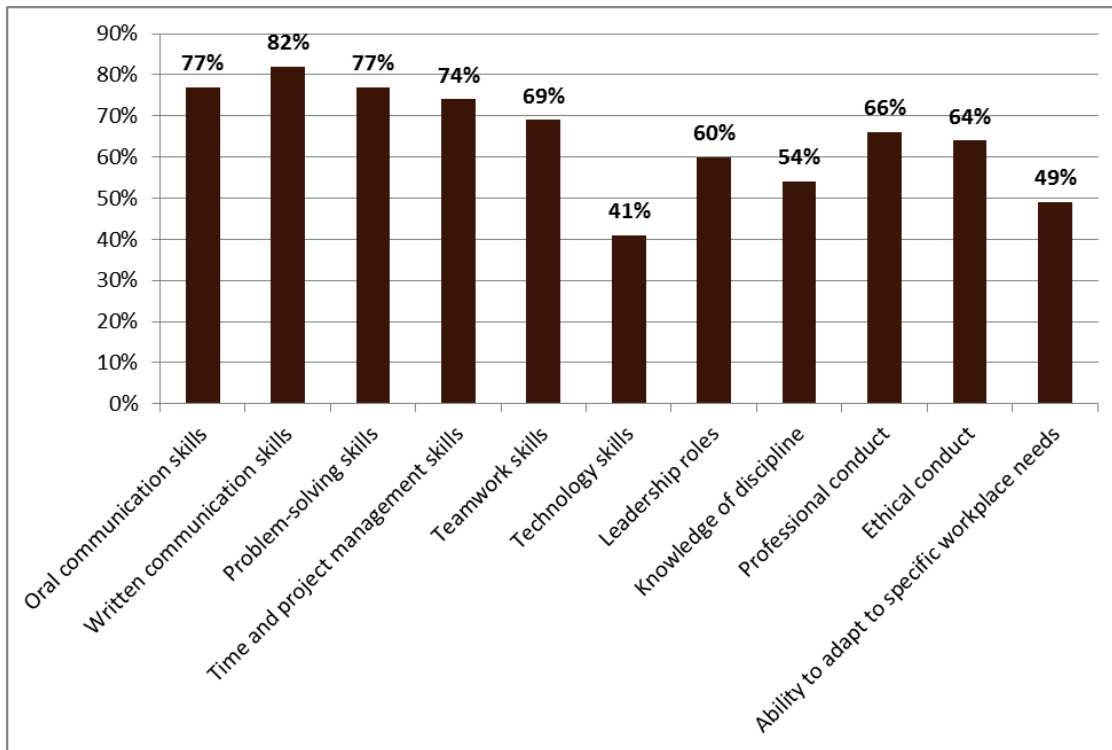
Employers with direct knowledge of SMSU graduates rate SMSU graduates highly in regard to skills useful in the workplace, according to the total percentages of strongly agree and agree responses to the HLC Self-Study survey in Spring 2013, demonstrated in Figure 4.1:

*FIGURE 4.1 HLC SELF-STUDY SURVEY SPRING 2013 EMPLOYER RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION: “PLEASE INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REGARDING SMSU STUDENTS’ PREPARATION FOR JOINING THE WORKFORCE” (\* “DO NOT KNOW” RESPONSES OMITTED FROM TOTAL)*



Likewise, alumni responded favorably when asked a question with some similar elements on their HLC Self-Study Survey. In response to the question “In what areas did your experiences at SMSU prepare you well for the following workplace needs (check all that apply),” oral and written communication, problem-solving, and time and project management skills were the top choices, as shown in Figure 4.2.

FIGURE 4.2 HLC SELF-STUDY SURVEY SPRING 2013 ALUMNI RESPONSE TO QUESTION “IN WHAT AREAS DID YOUR EXPERIENCES AT SMSU PREPARE YOU WELL FOR THE FOLLOWING WORKPLACE NEEDS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)”



**CORE COMPONENT 4B. THE INSTITUTION DEMONSTRATES A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ONGOING ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING.**

Assessment of student learning at SMSU occurs at four levels—the course, program, department, and institution, and draws from both direct and indirect measures of student learning. SMSU has a renewed commitment to assessment of student learning via a number of university-wide venues and activities.

SMSU has been experiencing a culture shift regarding assessment over the past ten years. Prior to the previous HLC review, members of the University community had come to understand that basic assessment measures should be based on outcomes and had made adequate progress in accordance with the expectations at that time. However, much of the assessment efforts still consisted of what Linda Suskie, author of *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* and former Vice President of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education who visited SMSU in early 2012, would term a “traditional approach,” in which assessments are planned and implemented without clearly defined course goals or learning outcomes, and learning tends to be judged primarily by the individual student’s course grade. Though progress had been made leading up to the 2004 review, and a number of programs developed solid, ongoing assessments, many programs still struggled with cultivating appropriate outcomes or assessment measures.

Immediately following the 2004 review, focus shifted to the revision of the Liberal Arts Core. As described further below in Criterion 4B1/4B4, this had direct consequences for support of program assessment. With the development of the new LEP, however, also came an increased understanding of learning outcomes and outcomes-based assessment. The LEP was developed from a ground-up effort involving all faculty, starting with the identification of what the core learning outcomes that are at the heart of an SMSU education should be. (See [Criterion 3B1 and 3B2](#) for a full description of this effort.) After five years, the process resulted in a new [LEP curriculum](#) approved by the faculty in April of 2009 that was implemented in Fall 2010. Once implemented, attention shifted to review and assessment of the LEP. At that time, program assessment, which had been ongoing in some programs but not all, came back into focus. In 2011, support for “contemporary” approaches to assessment as defined by Suskie became more evident, with growing acknowledgement that assessment be carefully aligned with program and/or course goals and student learning outcomes, be focused on thinking and performance skills, and use data to improve teaching and learning for all students.

Moving the campus to this contemporary approach has been part evolution based on the learning experience associated with the LEP and trends in the national dialogue on higher education, but also due to a reinvestment in assessment with a renewed Committee for Institutional Assessment (CIA) and the strong efforts of a faculty member serving as assessment coordinator since 2011 (with accompanying partial reassignment since 2012-2013) to help lead faculty efforts and provide support.

The institutional components related to assessment are described further in the following sections. Subcomponents 4B1 and 4B4 are clustered together in order to describe the goals, structure and methodologies, and support for good assessment practices. Discussions of assessment outcomes and examples of continuous improvement that arise from the goals and processes are then described in Subcomponents 4B2 and 4B3.

*4B1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.*

*4B4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.*

---

## IDENTIFYING GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

The faculty body took responsibility for reviewing and revising the core liberal education goals, or outcomes, associated with the transformation of the LEP. Through this effort, [ten outcomes](#) that comprise the foundation of any student’s education at SMSU were identified and agreed upon, and the appropriate curriculum, encompassing the [MTC general education transfer requirements](#) as well as upper-level liberal education requirements, was designed around the outcomes. (See the full discussion of the LEP in [Criterion 3B1/3B2](#).)

Remarkably, after providing support and infrastructure for assessment focused on defining and delineating the difference between assessment for determining student learning versus evaluating student learning through course grades, the number of programs with defined goals increased rapidly. In Fall of 2012, 71% of undergraduate programs and 33% of graduate programs reported having defined program and/or department goals. A number of these undergraduate programs also indicated that they were in the process of developing and articulating student learning outcomes (see D2L documents for peer reviewers). By May of 2014, 100% of undergraduate programs reported having defined goals, with 85% of the 33 undergraduate major programs (counting all of Education undergraduate majors as one program and excluding the four new or re-established agriculture programs just approved in 2013-2014) having student learning outcomes, curriculum maps, and assessment plans (see Assessment Coordinator’s Assessment Documentation Checklist Summary

document found in [D2L documentation for HLC peer reviewers](#)). In addition to academic programs, the departments in Student Affairs have also begun to include learning outcomes, primarily centered around the ten LEP outcomes, in their assessment efforts. Samples of academic and Student Affairs programs' learning outcomes and course maps will be available in [D2L documents for reviewers](#).

The work done to date and the future sustainability of assessment efforts rely on the infrastructure that has been established or reinigorated, described in the following section.

## CREATING A SUSTAINABLE ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

Over the past four years, efforts aimed at building a culture of sustainable assessment at SMSU have been developed, enhanced, and implemented. The following elements have contributed to fostering assessment at SMSU and will each be described in further detail:

- the Committee for Institutional Assessment (CIA)
- the appointment of an Assessment Coordinator
- the establishment of the Liberal Education Committee and appointment of a faculty LEC co-chair
- a revised Student Affairs assessment model and process
- the reorganization of Data Management and Institutional Research
- University-wide efforts to raise awareness of assessment

### *The CIA and Its Trajectory*

The CIA has been a standing University committee since 2001, prior to the previous HLC review. As noted in the 2004 self-study, its University-committee status was intended to denote the enduring and ongoing nature of assessment work and its importance at the University. The CIA was instrumental in preparing the University for the previous round of accreditation. (For a full history of assessment efforts and the CIA from 1993 through 2004, see Chapter 10 of the [2004 Self-Study Volume 1](#).) From 2001 to 2003, the CIA worked with another campus group established for the accreditation review, the University Service Assessment (USA) committee, to encourage assessment across campus and to provide mini-grants to support units' efforts. During this time, in addition to its work supporting program assessment, the CIA decided to begin assessing components of the then-titled Liberal Arts Curriculum (LAC), and conducted a study of communication skills on campus.

A new provost was appointed in 2002, and he was charged by the President to reexamine and refocus assessment on campus. In 2003 he encouraged the University to participate in more nationally used survey instruments including the Noel Levitz and the NSSE surveys, and, recognizing that the LAC was soon in need of revision, desired to shift assessment methods of the LAC to focus on achievement of overall outcomes for a general education program rather than assessment results from individual classes. While the CIA had begun some of this type of work, the Provost visited the committee and asked them to cease their plans to move on to other LAC goals while his intended restructuring of assessment support took place. Reassigned time for the chair of the CIA was also eliminated. The Provost proposed a new "Professional Development Service Network," an organizational structure in which one or more faculty members would have responsibility and reassigned time, in collaboration with the campus representative to the System-level Center for Teaching and Learning and with student support staff. This network was to help the University understand how to integrate assessment into ongoing teaching and learning activities as well as recognize the teaching and learning taking place in support areas. University resources were to be channeled into this Network, with the CIA and USA left responsible only for the mini-grant function. In addition, the Provost envisioned a new faculty oversight committee charged solely with reviewing the LAC.

The timing of this request and planned reorganization occurred in the months before the HLC review took place. Following that review, the University was indeed required to revise its LAC, and as

described elsewhere in this chapter and report, an LAC Transformation Committee did form and accomplished the goal of developing a new liberal arts foundational curriculum, the LEP. The Transformation Committee was then replaced by the Liberal Education Committee (LEC), the standing committee which operates today to provide oversight and assessment of the LEP (the LEC is described in further detail later in this subcomponent section).

In 2007 several committee members identified some key findings in the 2004 and the 2006 HERI reports at an [All-University meeting](#), at the request of administration. The CIA, however, left without a clear charge or task plan, including the absence of mini-grants when that budget item was eliminated, essentially suspended its operation for several years. A number of committee members left the committee, and the committee did not meet at all for a year, and met only briefly the following year to debate possible purposes. The Professional Development Service Network also did not materialize in the manner which the Provost intended. Additionally, the Provost moved on from SMSU.

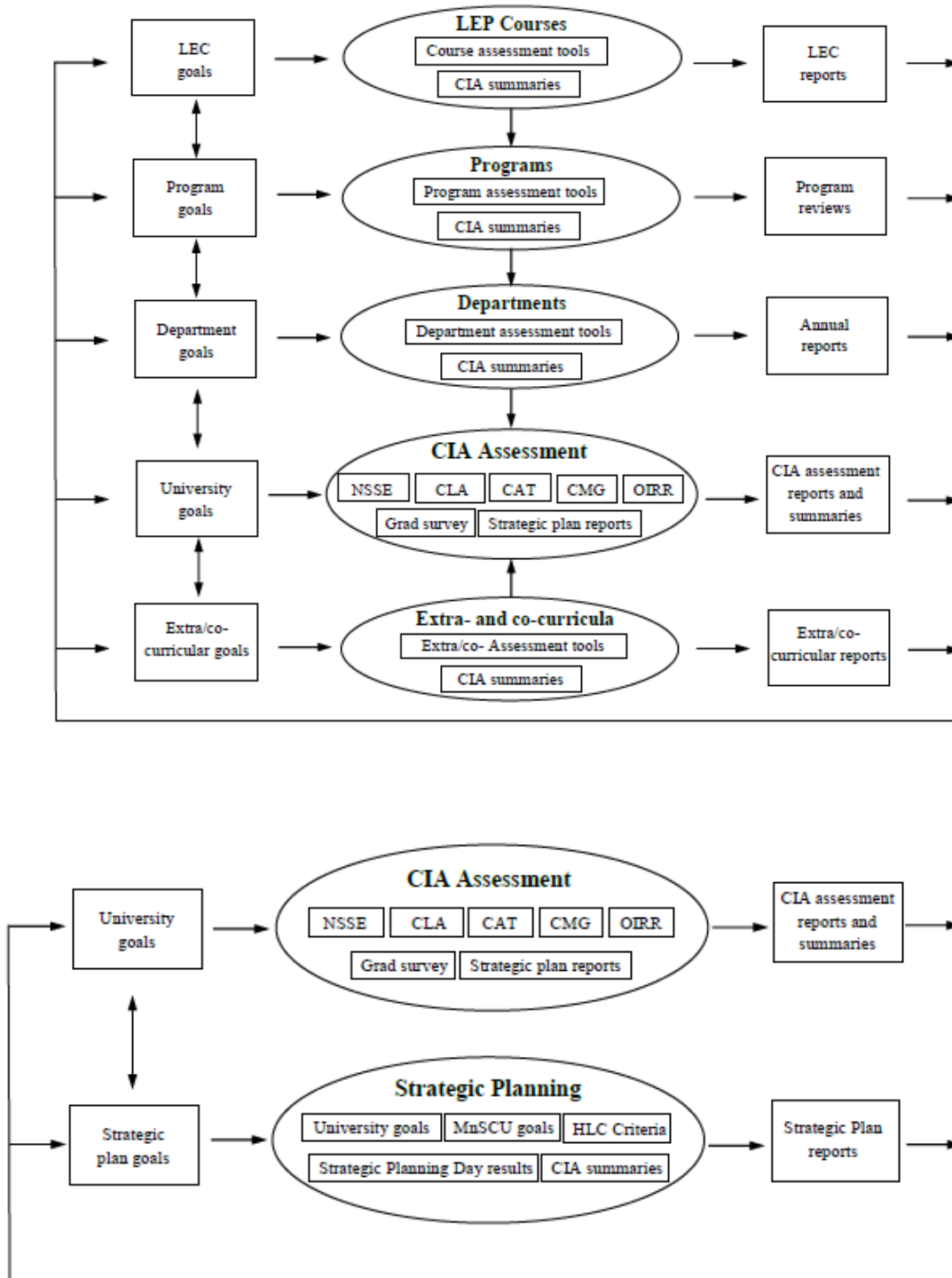
In 2009, Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs Weatherby requested the committee become active again. Chaired by then-Dean of ALS Lyn Brodersen, the committee worked to regain its footing, reviewing key findings from the 2004 NSSE and 2006 HERI, and comparing them to the 2008 NSSE results. A Committee member created an [analysis report on the 2008 NSSE](#). The following year the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs charged the Dean with creating an institutional assessment plan by the end of the year. The CIA divided into subcommittees, with some members continuing work on reviewing data from surveys and others helping the Dean develop an institutional assessment plan. The Dean had received permission to base an SMSU assessment plan on a model provided by another university and undertook the bulk of the revision. Unfortunately, the Dean resigned at the end of the Spring term in 2011, and the assessment plan was not completed. However, the members of the CIA had developed a greater understanding of what elements might need to be involved in an institutional plan and were not satisfied with relying on a different institution's model, as it had not proven to be a good fit.

The CIA has regularly met since 2011 and has continued to refine its charge. In 2011-2012, the committee was co-chaired by the Dean of ALS and a faculty member, who went on to be appointed as Assessment Coordinator. Reassigned time was provided again for the coordinator/co-chair position beginning in Spring of 2012, at of six credits for the academic year. Previously, the CIA was comprised only of faculty representatives from each academic department, but the [charge](#) was re-examined by the committee in Spring 2012 to ensure that all operational areas were represented. Consequently, the co-chairs invited other areas including the other bargaining units to appoint a member to serve on the CIA. The CIA now has members from the faculty and other instructional and organizational units including Student Affairs and support staff. Significant changes in the CIA included the addition of the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President of Student Affairs to the committee in order to foster and strengthen curricular and co-curricular student learning experiences and the addition of the Director of Institutional Research and Reporting, in order to provide expertise on data and evidence-gathering.

The CIA has spent significant time exploring what an institutional model for assessment should look like at SMSU, its version of an institutional assessment plan. A committee member developed an institutional assessment flow chart, based on his disciplinary lens of chemistry. The chart, represented in Figure 4.3, is based on a model of inputs, reactants, and products. Each of the elements represented on the chart has been operational since 2009 in the case of the LEP or earlier, such as the CIA and Strategic Planning. The flow chart demonstrates how information should be distributed, reviewed, and used by the different entities involved in the different levels of course, program, and institutional assessment at SMSU.

FIGURE 4.3 SMSU INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT FLOWCHART

CIA flow chart draft 5 edited by CIA  
Submitted by Jay Brown for review 12/01/11



Several CIA members and the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs presented on the flow chart at the 2013 HLC Conference. As the Provost noted in her presentation, “Perhaps the



most difficult parts of creating an assessment plan that encompasses an entire institution are mapping the relationships among such a large number of moving pieces and then devising a way to communicate that every piece impacts all of the other pieces,” adding that the flow chart “has the advantage of clearly communicating that assessment is everyone’s responsibility.” Although still in the developmental stage, the flow chart is an attempt to link academic program assessment with the university’s strategic plan and other non-academic areas.

Now that the CIA has identified and mapped all of these moving parts, the committee is working out the best methods for achieving the communication and reporting goals described in the chart, in order to ensure that assessment is not just being talked about but is resulting in continuous improvement. Given that the chart indicates “CIA assessment reports and summaries,” in Spring 2014 the CIA spent time sifting through all the departmental assessment materials that had been gathered to date, in an attempt to pilot what a summary report might include. Committee members wrote summaries of what stages their departments were in, what documentation existed, and what timelines were in place. In the process, several different templates for assessment reporting were discovered and shared among the committee members (the Science Department, Psychology Program, and Literature Program summaries provide a variety of examples and can be found in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#)). The committee found the exercise useful in helping them identify what material was most relevant and in seeing how the different departments organize their assessments. The CIA intends to move from the spring pilot to a common template that will be made available to all departments from the beginning of the academic year, so that departments can add to it gradually and keep a record useful not only to the CIA but also for the departments to integrate directly into their required annual reports at the end of the year. At the end of the Spring 2014 semester, the assessment coordinator/co-chair of the CIA created a [summary report demonstrating how the CIA has met its charge](#), listing out the different activities and tasks that the CIA and the coordinator completed. This first report spans from 2011 to 2014, with the expectation that an annual report will be conducted from now on. The report will be shared with the CIA at their first fall meeting, with further discussion of how to disseminate or post it.

In addition to their work on the institutional assessment model and reporting, in Spring 2012, with funds allocated by the administration, the CIA re-instituted [assessment mini-grants](#) after a hiatus of nearly 10 years. The mini-grants of \$200 help with items such as supplies, meeting incentives, and student help encourage academic faculty and programs to engage in assessment of courses and academic programs. Eight assessment mini-grant projects were submitted to the CIA in Spring 2012. In FY13, seven more programs applied for grant money, followed by four in FY14. Although the grant funds were small, they were enough incentive for programs to set aside time to meet and discuss program goals and develop (some for the first time) student learning outcomes, a program course map and a three-to-five year assessment plan. Programs who received these grants made substantial progress in the development of the program’s overall assessment plan. Recognizing the need to include all levels of the institution in assessment, assessment mini-grants were extended to include all SMSU staff in Spring 2013. The first non-faculty assessment mini-grant was submitted by an administrative assistant whose proposal aimed to engage all administrative assistants in helping faculty report and showcase their program/department’s assessment activities. (See [Summary Table of CIA Assessment Mini-Grants](#).) Grant recipients are required to submit final reports after using grant funds, such as the [Sociology Program’s mini-grant report](#). It is the intention of the CIA to continue offering assessment mini-grants on a regular basis following the 2014 HLC visit, thus promoting an ongoing culture of assessment at SMSU. [More information on the grants](#) can be found on the CIA website.

In addition to the mini-grants, the CIA has also promoted assessment and educated University members about assessment through a variety of other means. More information about these efforts are described later in this section.

### *Assessment Coordinator*

As noted above, the administration approved the formation of an assessment coordinator position in 2011-2012. The assessment coordinator serves as co-chair of the CIA. The part-time reassignment of a faculty member into this position supports the ground-up approach to academic assessment that has been successful in helping faculty come to view assessment as under their control rather than being dictated from above. The assessment coordinator has been instrumental in organizing professional development days focused on assessment, providing information and templates to all departments and programs, and coordinating assessment efforts with the LEC and communicating with the Strategic Planning committee.

The assessment coordinator created a guide for programmatic assessment, based on readings and templates from a number of sources, called "[Creating a Plan for Assessment of Student Learning \(PASL\) at SMSU](#)." The development of the plan was in response to faculty requests for guidance in constructing student and program assessment measures and plans. The templates found in this plan were the basis for an assessment day activity and create the foundation for what is expected in departmental assessment files. The coordinator, with the help of the CIA, also developed an [assessment file documentation checklist](#) for departments. The following spring, a template that departments could use to help develop the [assessment portion of their annual reports](#) was added, a first effort by the CIA to try to integrate the reporting processes.

In December 2011, the assessment coordinator applied for and was awarded a Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Campus Faculty Development Project Grant. The grant, entitled "[Building a Sustainable Commitment to Assessment of Student Learning at SMSU](#)," proposed to support and promote assessment efforts by retaining the services of a nationally-recognized assessment consultant to assist SMSU in developing a framework on which to build a sustainable, institutional commitment for assessment of student learning. Linda Suskie's visit to SMSU on January 26, 2012, was the additional incentive the institution needed to reinforce its assessment activity not only at the level of academic departments, but across the entire university. Her [visit schedule](#) and the [final report](#) she prepared for campus after her visit are available in e-resources.

As with all reassignments at the University, the assessment coordinator's reassignment has been reduced due to budget constrictions, from six to three credits each semester for 2014-2015. This will likely affect the scope of what the coordinator is able to accomplish. However, the coordinator will continue to co-chair the CIA, and that body will help to carry forward the assessment efforts as well. In addition, assessment will be supported through the University's participation in the AAC&U Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project, focused on testing the Value Rubrics; a grant from AAC&U will provide reassigned time for another faculty member to lead the collection and education efforts associated with this project, described further in 4B2/4B3.

### *The LEC and Its Role in LEP Assessment*

As described above in the history of the CIA, a separate oversight body (the Liberal Education Committee, or LEC) was formed to handle responsibilities related to the new LEP. This group took the place of the LAC Transformation Committee, which led the development of the revised program. The committee is co-chaired by a faculty member and by the Dean of ALS. The faculty co-chair had been reassigned 50% to the position for a three-year term since 2009, a continuation of support that was provided to the LAC Transformation Committee chair. Similar to the assessment coordinator position, the LEC co-chair's reassignment is reduced to one-quarter reassignment beginning in 2014-2015. The CIA faculty co-chair and LEC faculty co-chair work closely together along with the HLC Self-Study Coordinator to ensure that faculty are aware of and have multiple opportunities to participate in academic assessment activities.

The LEC is a University committee, with representation from the Educational Opportunity program in addition to IFO faculty and participation from Student Affairs as needed. The committee is charged with the following:

1. Initiation and review of curriculum proposals for the LEP/MnTC. Proposals will be reviewed by the LEC and forwarded to the Curriculum Committee with recommendations.
2. Oversight of LEP 100: First-Year Seminar (FYS). The LEC will approve sections, coordinate schedules, and offer instructors' meetings.
3. Oversight of LEP 400: Contemporary Issues Seminar (CIS). The LEC will approve sections, coordinate schedules and offer instructors' meetings.
4. Implementation of curricular and co-curricular activities that foster achievement of the 10 LEP outcomes throughout a student's educational experience.
5. Assessment and assessment planning for the 10 Outcomes of the LEP. Two outcomes will be assessed each year on a five-year rotating cycle. [Note: The Committee has since changed the assessment rotation cycle, as described in 4B2/4B3.]
6. Communicate and collaborate with university administration, faculty, and staff on all aspects of curriculum, assessment, advising, and co-curricular activities that relate to the LEP.

The full text of the committee's charge and make-up can be found [online](#).

After several years of intense work reviewing curriculum as the revised LEP took root, the LEC has focused efforts on assessing the LEP outcomes. Of note here is that, following the advice of a national consultant, the committee has established an assessment plan that puts LEP assessment on a three-year cycle rather than a five-year cycle as described in the charge above. Each outcome will be assessed by an Ad Hoc Assessment (AHA) team devoted to a single outcome and made up of co-chairs from the LEC and CIA, a Student Affairs representative, and an additional two-four faculty volunteers. Information on the methods and progress made to date in these efforts is described in Criterion 4B2/4B3.

#### *Student Affairs and Co-Curricular Assessment*

As indicated in the sections above, efforts have been made in recent years to broaden the scope of the CIA and LEC committees to include Student Affairs directly in the discussions about academic assessment.

As shown on the Student Affairs [organizational chart in Criterion 1](#), the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President for Student Affairs has supervisory authority for fifteen departments: Access, Opportunity, Success (AOS); Career Services, Scheduling/Event Services, Counseling and Testing, Diversity and Inclusion, Disability Resources, Health Services, Residential Life, Student Activities, Student Center, Student Government, Student Judicial Affairs, campus bookstore, child care center, and dining services. International Student Services and the Office of Student Success previously had also been overseen by the Dean of Students but transitioned in July 2014 to the new Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success.

Although many of these departments have been collecting data over the years, assessment activities have been ramped up over the years since the last HLC review. Prior to the professional development days of August of 2012 and February 2013, the co-curricular assessment activities were conducted on a one-on-one basis with the department directors and the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. From 2004-2005 through 2008-2009, each department would produce a document that would contain its goals for the academic year. Then at the end of the academic year they would produce the accomplishments from that set of goals. The first several years of the Goals and Accomplishments process the end results were very positive, but outcomes were not well documented. Beginning in the 2009-2010, departments were asked to add what the next steps would be from these results. A more formal assessment plan within the Student Affairs

departments continued to evolve. In 2011, the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President for Student Affairs began a coordinated effort with the Assessment Coordinator and the Office of Institutional Research to develop a comprehensive, outcome-based assessment program for the division of Student Affairs. Other catalysts which aided in refining the assessment planning and reporting process included commenting on assessment activities as part of the directors' annual evaluation; dedicating one directors' meeting per semester to assessment strategies; identifying assessment consultants to assist with outcome formulation and instrument design; and the utilization of consistent reporting template(s) to organize the annual assessment activities and report.

In order to assist the department directors in the assessment process, an [assessment reporting template](#) has been developed that each Director and department will follow. These templates will be assembled at the end of each academic year to form a Year End Report for the Division of Student Affairs. Each Department's assessment plan includes six components: mission statement, planning goals, program objectives or student learning outcomes, methods and measures, findings, and conclusions/status. The [first annual compiled report](#) (2012-2013) from all areas is posted to the [Dean of Students' website](#) and available in Appendix A (the final 2013-2014 report will be available in early Fall 2014). The expectation is that each director, in conjunction with his/her staff, will formulate at least four student learning outcomes or program objectives related to departmental mission, goals, and division/university priorities. At least one of these outcomes must be "student learning"-oriented with measurable outcomes. The outcomes are to be tracked and reported on during the course of the year.

To help Student Affairs' staff understand the new approach and learn about outcomes-based assessment, a professional development workshop led by an external consultant who provided assessment examples and guidance was held in August 2012. A second workshop was held in February of 2013 to follow up on departments' planning and questions. The transformation from a program improvement model to a student learning based program model has progressed smoothly. As with any newly developed model, Student Affairs will learn with each assessment and continually update the model.

Other areas not overseen by Student Affairs structure their own assessment plans and report to their supervisors through the appropriate mechanism. For example, information from Academic Commons is provided to the Dean of ALS; [the Math Lab](#) and the [Writing Center report](#) on their assessment efforts via their Directors' contributions to their departments' annual department reports, which are then wrapped into the [ALS Annual Report](#); and the Center for Civic Engagement houses on its site an [annual report of findings from the Civic Engagement Survey](#), conducted as part of the campus clearance process for graduating students and analyzed by professors working with the Center.

#### *Reorganization of Data Management and Institutional Research*

Another helpful component in creating infrastructure that supports sustainable assessment has been the reorganization of what had previously been the Office of Research and Institutional Grants (RIG) into a new office titled "Data Management and Institutional Research" (DMIR). (This reorganization is also described in Criterion 3A1 "Curriculum Design and Review Processes.") Following the retirement of the RIG director in 2005, the University took the opportunity to reconfigure how data was processed and managed. The University opted to create a Chief Information Officer position to lead RIG's functions and future information technology services planning and operations. Concurrently, the previous Computer Services department was reorganized into a new Information Technology Services division. The DMIR office was created within Information Technology Services and an Interim Director of Institutional Research and Reporting was named during the 2007-2008 academic year; the interim director has since been replaced with a permanent hire. The Director himself now reports to the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. The office is also staffed by two Database Programmer/Analysts who constitute the Data Management group and report to the Chief Information Officer.

The [DMIR](#) office provides data analysis, reporting, planning and policy support, and assessment data to the University. These DMIR personnel manage a data warehouse of snapshot data that encompasses student enrollment, demographic, course, and outcome data. Moreover, they work in coordination in analyzing important variables such as graduation rates, numbers of majors and minors, numbers of students enrolled, numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) students at the University, etc. Since 2004, the DMIR office has worked hard in creating an edited and cleaned longitudinal dataset that is the source for Factbook, program review, enrollment reports, and ad hoc requests. Additionally, the DMIR office is available to departments and programs to assist in evaluating data, presenting data in alternative formats, and performing statistical manipulation.

Beginning in 2009, the DMIR group began transitioning from the publication of an annual “Datum” and toward online dissemination of University recordsets. Currently, this [online repository](#) houses reports encompassing Enrollments, Degrees Awarded, Admissions, Retention, Tuition and Financial Aid, and Facilities. Student Engagement [data from NSSE](#) is also available online, as well as [Program Analysis and Review data](#). Beginning in 2012, these offices began providing day-to-day reports on enrollments during registration and beginning of semesters as a more efficient means of transmittal to administration, faculty, and staff. Interested offices can also request Senior Survey data.

All of these reports are available to the University and public at large for analytical research, question answering, and information. Offices and programs from across the University can access these datasets and integrate them into their strategic planning and budgeting processes. This easy access to information leads toward more effective management of the operations of the University. Even with improved distribution via the internet, knowledge of and usage of online data still can improve. As such, training and knowledge sharing during professional development and strategic planning days continues to be a point of emphasis.

Surveys as a source of information at SMSU have evolved in the past decade. NSSE surveys have become a MnSCU-required instrument on a bi-annual basis. Usage of this instrument remains a work in progress. Since 2008, NSSE has been administered three times, so a useful historical reference is beginning to come into focus. As noted earlier, a subgroup of the CIA identified [areas in the 2011 NSSE that stood out](#) and presented on them to the University for discussion. The 2013 NSSE contained a high percentage of new or revised questions, which makes some comparisons difficult. A small team of staff and faculty met at the end of Fall 2013 to begin to discuss the 2013 NSSE findings; this small group is meeting over the summer of 2014 to identify useful data, and a report from the team should be available when HLC reviewers arrive on campus. Graduating student surveys, known as the [Senior Survey](#) and described earlier in Criterion 4A6, continue to be administered each year, but the data set is not often utilized. The Registrar and the Director of Institutional Research and Reporting have recommended a revision of the survey, as many of the questions ask for demographic data already available and other questions could be refined to provide data and information more in line with departments’ and the University’s assessment needs. Overall, survey data appears to be best used when departments have a specific research question that the survey can help to shed some light on and thus help to close a particular loop, and University members and committees are slowly starting to use the data in this manner.

Increasingly, the University has been making use of online survey tools to quickly create and send a survey on a very topical area. These online surveys run the gamut from alumni surveys for programs to quick studies of student’s summer school plans. These tactical surveys can be short and to the point and can be put into decision-making hands quickly. Similarly, the DMIR office is working with the Office of Student Success on developing an analysis of that office’s exit survey. This project is part of a larger project involving student retention and persistence.

Beginning in Fall 2010, SMSU began a process shift in how to meet the needs of enrolled students. One part of that process was the collection, analysis, and use of retention data to better examine why students do or do not remain at the institution and then determine how the institution can be more effective in increasing retention. More information on retention can be found in Criterion 4C.

### *Efforts to Raise Awareness of Assessment*

In addition to mini-grants, all of the entities described above have been active in raising awareness and providing ongoing training related to assessment. As shown in Table 4.2, the list of varied activities over the past three years demonstrates the investment of the campus community in assessment. Table 4.2 lists faculty and Student Affairs' professional development days, workshops, calendared assessment work time, Lunch and Learn presentations sponsored and organized by the CIA, AHA team work, rubric discussions and votes, and all-University strategic planning sessions that involve assessment.

Assessment of student learning was the theme for faculty professional development days beginning [August 11, 2011](#), which highlighted HLC criteria and evidence of student learning needed for our HLC accreditation self-study. The day's activities focused primarily on assessing the First Year Seminar course, a key part of the newly-implemented Liberal Education Program. "Building a Sustainable Commitment to Assessment of Student Learning: Mapping the Way to a Program Assessment Plan" continued as the theme for January 2012's professional development day activities. The day featured reports from HLC criteria teams and segued into a basic "how to create an assessment plan" for academic programs.

Program and institutional assessment were the topics for [August 22, 2012](#), professional development in a concerted effort to underscore to faculty the importance of assessment of student learning. Since the August 2011 focus on assessment, there have been numerous requests from faculty for more information about and guidance through the assessment process, and dedicated time to do assessment. Both requests were honored. As further evidence of administration's commitment to promoting a culture of assessment at SMSU, a designated assessment day (September 19, 2012) was added to the academic calendar for the first time in SMSU's history. An assessment day (Feb. 20, 2013) was also calendared for Spring 2013 and called Planning and Assessment on the Spring 2014 calendar. The Spring 2014 time focused primarily on planning for the budget shortfall.

The Lunch & Learn presentations (L&L's), one-hour informal sessions that feature a topic related to campus assessment instituted by the CIA, have also helped to create a culture of ongoing assessment. The general purpose of the L&L's is to inform the campus community of assessment-related activities across the campus; assessment is purposefully being defined broadly, with a wide range of topics that demonstrate the different ways in which campus constituents are engaged in assessment and continuous improvement, even if they would not use the term assessment. (See e-resources for a [list of Lunch and Learn topics](#).) L&L's are open to faculty and other interested SMSU staff. Although attendance at most Lunch & Learns has been modest, ranging from 20-40 attendees, each session draws in a variety of people from across campus. No L&L's were held in Spring 2014, as the all-University conversations on the HLC Self-Study drafts took the place of the L&L's for that semester.

Further evidence that faculty are accepting of assessment comes from evaluations of these faculty professional development and assessment days. Faculty response has been very positive as seen in the following comments: "I found our assessment session in the afternoon very helpful. We made great progress, and we appreciate having this time set aside to focus on assessment," and "[The] most useful was the time to actually work on Assessment within programs." The assessment mini-grants and Lunch and Learn topics serve to reinforce assessment mindfulness regarding assessment, not only with faculty, but with staff as well.

With the renewed commitment to institutional assessment, administration, the assessment coordinator, and the LEC co-chair have discussed the best approach for continued support for assessment efforts on campus. Ideas for a part-time staff position, student support, or a full-time assessment position had been discussed in the past. However, with the budget shortfall, no additional resources are likely able to be funded, and the current assessment coordinator and LEC co-chair have had to reduce their reassignments. The assessment methods now in place have positioned departments and programs fairly well to continue to move forward.

TABLE 4.2 FACULTY AND STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES, 2011-2014

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Topics/Outcomes</b>
Aug. 17, 2011	Faculty Professional Development Day	“Building A Sustainable Commitment For Assessment Of Student Learning” Presentation of HLC criteria and need for assessment data; review of LEP assessment data; discussion of speech communication rubric for use in LEP.
Jan. 5, 2012	Faculty Professional Development Day	“Building A Sustainable Commitment For Assessment Of Student Learning: Mapping The Way To A Program Assessment Plan” update of HLC self-study; discussion of components of academic assessment plans; mapping student learning outcomes.
Jan. 26, 2012	Campus visit by accreditation and assessment consultant, Linda Suskie	Report entitled “Observations And Recommendations On Assessing Student Learning At SMSU Based On A Visit, January 25, 2012”—provided foundation for promoting sustained assessment at SMSU
Feb. 9, 2012	Oral Communication rubric discussion and vote at SmSUFA	The Oral Communication rubric proposed by the Speech Communication Program was discussed and passed by SmSUFA
Feb. 15, 2012	Strategic Planning Day, campus-wide	President Wood seeking campus input regarding updating SMSU Strategic Plan; assessment of academic programs and LEP represented as goal of “Academic Strategic Direction”
Feb. 29, 2012	LEP outcomes workshop	Discussion of examples of assessment for outcomes per each of ten LEP goals; Began developing plan to assess outcomes.
March 20, 2012	LEP outcomes workshop	Finalized Assessment Plan related to outcomes for each of ten LEP goals
Aug. 9, 2012	Student Affairs Professional Development Day	Development of formal assessment plan within student affairs department; individual programs will report on assessment activities in spring 2013
Aug. 21, 2012	Faculty Professional Development Day— Part I	President Wood introduces new Program Analysis System (PAS) which provides data on cost of academic programs; academic programs/departments meet to review their own data.
Aug. 22, 2012	Faculty Professional Development Day— Part II	“On Our Way... Building A Sustainable Commitment For Assessment Of Student Learning;” HLC and LEP updates; CIA assessment mini-grants information; continued work on SMSU Academic Programs Assessment Documentation Checklist
Sept. 19, 2012	Faculty Assessment Day	First Year Seminar (FYS) updates; Assessment mini-grants information; Programs continued work on SMSU

		Academic Programs Assessment Documentation Checklist; faculty request to share examples of course/program assessment. Faculty note value of dedicated time in academic calendar for assessment activities.
Oct. 18, 2012	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	"A Focus On Contemporary Issues Seminar—Where Do We Go From Here?" (Discussion of assessment measures for LEP 400)
Nov. 1, 2012	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	Assessment mini-grant recipients presentation of how assessment activity informed program faculty
Nov. 8, 2012	Written Communication rubric discussion and vote at SmSUFA	The Written Communication rubric created by the English Composition Committee was discussed and passed by SmSUFA
Jan. 10, 2013	Faculty Professional Development Day	HLC and LEP updates; Programs continued work on assessment plans; faculty request to share examples of course/program assessment. Faculty note value of dedicated time in academic calendar for assessment activities.
Feb. 6, 2013	Student Affairs Professional Development Day	Departments discussed and compared assessment plans; set assessment goals for next year.
Feb. 7, 2013	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	"Advising For The LEP: Are The Rules Working?" (review of data on how well students are moving through LEP 100 and LEP 400)
Feb. 20, 2013	Faculty Assessment Day	Examples of faculty assessment presented; programs engaged in on-going assessment discussions.
Feb. 21, 2013	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	"Guide To SouthwestNet: Instructions And Best Practices For Editing Your SMSU Webpage"
April 4, 2013	Critical Thinking rubric discussion and vote at SmSUFA	The Critical Thinking rubric proposed by a subgroup of the LEC was discussed and passed by SmSUFA
May 13, 2013	First Year Seminar Workshop	Current and future LEP 100 instructors met with LEC members to review and discuss critical thinking and information literacy course components
May 14, 2013	AHA team meetings	First AHA teams for LEP Physical and Social World, Diversity, and Citizenship plan their work
Aug. 20, 2013	Faculty Professional Development Day	LEP and HLC updates; AHA and Civic Engagement break-out sessions
Sept. 25, 2013	Campus Conversation	Included a strategic planning brainstorming session regarding the President's three key themes



	(President's Office)	
Oct. 23, 2013	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	"Civic Engagement At SMSU: 'Being The Change'"
Nov. 7, 2013	Lunch and Learn (sponsored by CIA)	"Undergraduate Projects as High Impact Teaching Technique"
Jan. 9, 2014	Faculty Professional Development day	HLC, Assessment, and AHA team updates
Feb. 7, 2014	Planning and Assessment Day	The formal part of the day centered on strategic planning related to budget solutions.
Spring 2014	Series of All-University Conversations  (HLC Steering Committee)	Five separate noon-time meetings dedicated to discussing the criterion chapter drafts; regarding assessment, the February 27 <sup>th</sup> meeting focused on Criterion 4
June 12-13, 2014	AAC&U Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project meeting	HLC, CIA, and LEC coordinators attended project meeting and shared information
August, 2014	AHA team meetings	Second cluster of AHA teams studying Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Communication plan their work
Aug. 14, 2014	Faculty Professional Development Day	HLC, CIA, updates; initial AHA team findings shared; AAC&U Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project kick-off
Calendared: Feb. 6, 2015	Assessment Day	

*4B2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.*

*4B3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.*

Results of course, program, and institutional assessment of student learning provide an important basis for program improvements. Assessment practices across campus include direct and indirect methods such as end-of-course questionnaires completed by students; surveys of students' reactions to selected aspects of courses (such as lectures, assignments, the professor's attitude, level of preparation, etc.); pre- and post-tests; review of students' ability to synthesize and integrate subject matter in capstone courses; review of student portfolios; review of videotaped student performances; juried reviews of student work; evaluation of students' performance on research papers and/or oral presentations in capstone courses; informal and formal conversations among faculty concerning levels of student achievement in cumulative major courses; and many others. Institutional measures of student learning via nationally available tools such as NSSE and CAT are also available to identify areas of concern or strength regarding student learning. NSSE data can be found on the [DMIR website](#).

In every department or program, collection of information is followed by integration of that information into the cycle of review of classes, courses, and curricula and leads to changes that further encourage and support student learning. This integration can take the form of revising course materials to meet student expectations and improve student performance, devising alternative means of presenting information to students, involving students in active learning, and encouraging student participation in service learning. Assessment has resulted in changes in the sequence of courses in majors, changes in the overall structure of majors, and changes in major requirements, all designed to insure that valued student outcomes are being achieved.

Specific examples from LEP assessment, academic program assessment, and co-curricular assessment follow below.

---

## LIBERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Considerable time and effort has been devoted to assessment of the LEP since its debut in Fall 2010; prior work on assessment as the program was being developed is documented in the two progress reports on general education submitted to the HLC in [2007](#) and [2009](#) (also available in Appendix A and on the [SMSU HLC website](#)). While initial assessment efforts have focused on LEP 100 First Year Seminar, the first course of the LEP curriculum, one of the most important and immediate examples of assessment activity has been the development and implementation of an assessment plan for the overall LEP. Faculty and administration recognize that the on-going task of assessing the LEP will be successful only if faculty are involved and drive the process.

### *Initial Assessment of LEP 100 and Critical Thinking*

After the first semester of courses in the revised LEP were offered, the LEC focused initial assessment efforts on LEP 100 First Year Seminar. The Faculty Assembly had had difficulty coming to consensus regarding the critical thinking outcome's objectives and placement in the curriculum. With almost all entering freshmen required to take this new course, the LEC wanted to determine how well the intended curriculum was operating programmatically in addition to accomplishing the critical thinking outcome associated with the course. The LEC and LEP 100 instructors have already made several improvements to the course and assessment measures. The LEC reviewed a variety of tools used to assess critical thinking. SMSU had participated in a trial of the CLA exam with other MnSCU

institutions but did not feel the test accurately measured critical thinking as outlined in the SMSU objectives. The LEC decided to pilot the CAT exam, the results of which are described in the [LEC report on the CAT](#) available in e-resources. Overall, the results of the pilot study indicate some, albeit modest and inconsistent, evidence of improvement toward the critical thinking outcome of FYS students at SMSU. However, after several administrations of the test and comparison of what the test measured to how critical thinking is discussed and taught in the LEP sections, the LEC determined that the CAT exam was not the best instrument. The CAT focuses heavily on inductive reasoning and not the deductive reasoning and argument analysis that many of the FYS instructors teach in the class, per the SmSUFA-approved approach to critical thinking. The committee has now decided to require an adapted Ennis-Weir letter method in each section; this measure is a better match with the curriculum. The use of this method was first required in all sections in Fall 2013. The results from this approach will be one of the key pieces that the AHA team focusing on critical thinking in 2014-2015 will review.

In addition to the direct critical thinking assessment measures, the course has been reviewed by faculty in several other ways, including analysis of the course's other learning objectives related to information literacy and adapting to college. The co-chair of the LEC [presented an overall assessment regarding LEP 100](#) (including the CAT data) at Professional Development Day in August 2011. LEP 100 First Year Seminar (FYS) and the Contemporary Issues Seminar (LEP 400) were the topics of [Assessment Day activities in Fall 2012](#). The LEP 100 session focused on discussion of the core concepts/principles to include in course and assessment measures and assignments that faculty would use to assess critical thinking. Instructors of LEP 100 also meet periodically as a group to discuss what methods and approaches seem to be working well that can be shared with other sections. The ongoing review and instructor meetings resulted in an [Instructors' Manual for LEP 100](#), produced by the LEC and approved by SmSUFA in February of 2013. At the end of Spring 2013, a special [one day workshop for LEP 100 instructors](#) (current and those interested in teaching it in the future) was led by the LEC to conduct training on critical thinking and to establish shared approaches to the information literacy component of the course.

The outcome related to adapting to college and how much time can be devoted to this outcome was one of the key points discussed in spring of 2012. In Fall 2011 and Fall 2012, President Wood initiated a special retention pilot project, a free one-credit course intended to connect students closely with faculty and a small peer group called "Building Connections." This course was offered to a small, randomly selected group of "middle class" freshmen, students who were not admitted provisionally, yet not honors students. Highlights from a report on this project were shared with the LEC in Spring 2013 (the full report is available [in D2L resources for HLC peer reviewers](#)) in order to explore how the course or best practices from the course could be incorporated into LEP 100 for all students. While the conclusion of the LEC after reviewing the methods and data was that the entire course could not be subsumed into LEP 100, the activities were shared with the LEP 100 instructors as suggested engagement activities.

Now that LEP 400 has been offered for several years, the LEC will be engaging in a similar process of reviewing the course, starting with bringing together those who have taught it for their feedback. The LEP learning outcome focused on in the course, creative thinking, is slated for assessment in 2014-2015.

#### *The LEP Assessment Plan for All Ten LEP Outcomes*

In addition to the assessment work on critical thinking and LEP 100 described above, the faculty and the LEC spent several years developing a final [assessment plan for all ten LEP outcomes](#). The plan was approved by SmSUFA and through the Meet and Confer process in February of 2013. As noted earlier, the assessment cycle outlined in the plan enables review of all ten outcomes every three years rather than every five. While ambitious, the more frequent review was put in place after Dr. Linda Suskie's visit to campus, in agreement with her counsel that five years is too long to wait to see

how/if improvement efforts from a previous assessment are making positive differences. In addition, the plan states that an outcome could be reviewed more frequently than every three years if needed. As noted earlier, each year, three or four of the LEP outcomes will be assessed, led by an AHA team, which is co-chaired by a representative from the LEC and from the CIA. The remaining membership consists of one member from Student Affairs and faculty members who teach courses in the outcome area to be assessed or from the faculty at large, for a total of 4-6 team members. The rotation cycle will repeat every three years; Table 4.3 demonstrates the first cycle:

TABLE 4.3 PLANNED SCHEDULE FOR LEP OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>LEP Outcomes to Be Assessed</b>
2013-2014	5. Physical and Social World; 6. Diversity; 8. Citizenship
2014-2015	2. Communication; 3. Creative Thinking; 4. Critical Thinking
2015-2016	1. Disciplines; 7. Moral; 9. Life-long Learning; 10. Mind, Body, Spirit

The AHA teams actually work over a period of 18 months, assembling towards the end of one academic year, working through the next year, and reporting out at the beginning of the following year. Thus, each year there is some overlap as new AHA teams begin while the work of the prior teams is finishing up. The AHA Team calendar is as follows:

- Mar. 31: SMSUFA names members of each AHA Team
- Apr. 30: Each AHA Team identifies outcomes, courses and methods
- Following fall and spring semester: Each Team collects data
- Sep. 30: Each AHA Team reports to the LEC
- Oct. 31: LEC reports to SMSUFA

It is up to each AHA team to determine which sub-goals of the outcome to assess; the co-chairs' knowledge from their work on the LEC and CIA committees should help inform the team about the strategic priorities and assessment history related to each learning outcome. Each of the first AHA teams for all ten outcomes is receiving a duty day of pay in order for the teams to gather at the end of spring semester or over the summer to make plans for data methods and collection over the course of the next year. Ideally these teams are establishing baseline practices that future AHA teams can follow when the LEP outcome comes up again for assessment review. The first AHA teams' reports to the LEC will be available at the time of the HLC review team's visit, along with a summary of the second teams' plans.

En route to the final LEP assessment plan, several key efforts helped move the process forward. One of the first efforts was the establishment of common rubrics for the four core skills of [oral communication](#), [written communication](#), [critical thinking](#), and [information literacy](#). (Each of these finalized rubrics can be viewed on the [LEC's website](#).) While the rubrics were passed by SmSUFA in 2011-2013, with the critical thinking rubric the final one in Spring of 2013, each of them had been worked on initially during the development of the LEP outcomes; for example, the first draft of the critical thinking rubric was discussed at an all-University meeting in October of 2008 during the construction of curriculum phase. The early discussion during the LEP formation process helped faculty identify a common understanding of the core skills and enabled them to see how the core skills could be measured in any class or program. The direct utility of the rubrics remains a work in progress. The English Department uses the Written Communication rubric to conduct program assessment of their LEP writing courses, as does the Communication Studies program with the Oral Communication rubric and its SPCH 110 course. Other program areas have adapted the rubrics for

use when evaluating student performance. As the AHA teams conduct their work, the rubrics are tools that are at their disposal.

A second effort that proved very helpful in engaging the entire faculty in the LEP assessment process were two large-scale brainstorming workshops held by the joint efforts of the LEC and CIA. The LEC and CIA held two meetings in February and March of 2012 for faculty who had taught or were interested in LEP classes in any of the ten goal areas and asked them to help design what the assessments could/should be for each goal area. The meetings involved one or two facilitators from the LEC who directed the discussion based on a specific set of instructions and questions for the group to address, so the group's task was clear and manageable. Each group had an Assessment Plan Handout for each LEP goal that they were tasked with completing. Approximately 32% (N=110) of faculty volunteered to participate in the LEP assessment workshops. The workshops successfully resulted in potential, specific assessment methods for each of the ten LEP goals (see assessment—CIA, LEP file). A draft of each group's Assessment Plan was sent to the LEC, who [consolidated the ideas](#) and looked for common instruments or other useful overlaps. The assessment plans were then shared with SmsUFA Executive Committee for their review and feedback. The final version is being distributed to each of the AHA teams for their use.

Important to note regarding the cycle of LEP assessment above is that assessment of some of the outcomes is already ongoing within departments and other entities. For example, the Biology Program assesses its LEP courses, and thus the "Physical World" learning outcomes related to LEP goal 5 (link to sample report). Data related to the "Citizenship" outcome is gathered yearly via the "Civic Engagement Survey" as part of the campus clearance process for graduating seniors. In addition, SMSU administers NSSE on a regular basis, 2004, 2008, 2011 and 2013, along with Campus-Community Inventory of Civic Engagement (2004, 2009), and has administered the HERI Faculty Survey (2006). Data from all three surveys provides a national reference point regarding civic and community engagement. The English Department has created a cycle of review of its LEP writing courses and conducted portfolio review of random samples from several of those courses. Numerous programs review how well their introductory courses contribute to a baseline understanding of their disciplines in their program reviews. In addition, in Spring 2014 the LEC conducted a [survey of all faculty asking them to identify which of their non-MTC-designated classes](#) (which are already aligned with LEP outcomes) might provide evidence for meeting an LEP outcome. This information is available to all AHA teams. In other words, the AHA teams' work will not be conducted in a vacuum, but will identify and mine assessment practices from across campus to assemble a larger understanding of how the ten LEP outcomes are being met and addressed not only in core LEP classes but across the curriculum and co-curriculum.

As further evidence of the support for LEP assessment, the University has joined the AAC&U Minnesota Collaborative Pilot Project. The Minnesota Collaborative Project's goal is to demonstrate a "proof of concept at scale" for using the Value Rubrics as the basis for a national rubric-based assessment measure, one based on rating actual student work rather than testing. 10 Minnesota private and public four-year and two-year colleges are involved in this project. AAC&U is providing a grant that will help to cover the part-time reassignment of a faculty member to educate the SMSU community about the project and to oversee the collection of assignments and artifacts. Three of the fifteen Value Rubrics will be assessed the first year, with the expectation that funding will continue into a second year and second round of three more Value Rubrics to be tested. Two of the first three rubrics being tested (Critical Thinking and Communication) align with the AHA teams already slated for 2014-2015, and although the AAC&U rubrics were consulted in the creation of SMSU's own rubrics, engaging in the study will help the SMSU community become more familiar with the rubrics and how they can be used in assessment.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

SMSU bases its academic assessment on the achievement of student learning outcomes. SMSU's efforts to utilize assessment results are exhibited in a number of ways. For example, course-level learning outcome results may be used by individual faculty for improvements in course delivery and content. Programs may also use course-level learning outcomes to assess student learning of key concepts for a particular academic major or minor. Periodic review of data, especially as related to the five-year program self-study cycle, also provides evidence regarding student learning that informs decision-making and continual change. As described in Criterion 4A1, these assessment results are subject to external scrutiny via each program's external consultant. The consultant's recommendations combine with the program's reflection, culminating in a five-year plan for improvement. Data in program reviews can include portfolio assessments or other direct measures of learning outcomes such as pre-and post-tests, NSSE and Senior Survey results, alumni surveys, employer surveys, graduate school acceptance data, enrollment, retention, and completion data, feedback from internship mentors or other partnerships, or other materials as appropriate to a program's goals. While not all data is necessarily directly related to specific learning outcomes, faculty in the program scrutinize the findings, looking for areas and learning goals in which students excel as well as where more focus or attention might be needed and outline strengths and concerns in the program's self-study.

As noted earlier in 4B1/4B4, strong efforts, led by faculty helping other faculty, have helped programs identify learning goals, map these goals to courses, and create assessment plans. A few departments are still struggling to accomplish each of these steps, but newer programs, such as [Professional Writing and Communication](#) and [RN-to-BSN](#), have been developed with an awareness of the importance of assessment from the beginning. One measure of identifying the progress of programs is reviewing what has been posted onto the t-drive assessment file space. Even this is difficult because of the variability in language used by programs, making it hard to identify and quantify. While this may be an incomplete account, as several programs claim to have additional assessment materials than posted there, as of May 2014, 100% of undergraduate degree programs (with the exception of the newly-formed four agriculture majors) have defined learning outcomes posted, and further, 85% of the 33 undergraduate major programs also have curriculum maps and assessment plans. See "SMSU Academic Programs Assessment Documentation Checklist" (found in D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers) for the complete list and additional information.

On-going assessment by programs is reported in departmental annual reports and program review self-studies (department reports are consolidated into college reports, the most recent of which are publically available on the [Deans' website](#); see also Criterion 4A1). The reports reveal that programs are in different stages of assessment, with some programs having fully embraced assessment for many years with strong data sets and a history of evidence-based decision-making, and other areas that are in process of creating stronger programmatic assessment plans. For example, some programs have program goals but assessment methods are still centered primarily at the course level with traditional student evaluation methods. However, those programs have been working to assemble broader programmatic assessment, especially as they engage in program review self-studies. Other areas have identified new methods for achieving programmatic assessment but are in the process of instituting the changes. For example, the Accounting program notes in its report the success they have had in moving from identifying goals and developing a plan to instituting the changes needed to enact their plan. They have established two new additions that will enable them to conduct assessment of their program's learning goals: a senior exam that beginning in the 2013-14 academic year, and a student learning portfolio beginning with the 2014-15 academic year, in which students must demonstrate fulfillment of the program's goals.

Programs with a strong history of assessment include Education, Environmental Science, Sociology, Biology, Chemistry, Communication Studies (formerly called Speech Communication), and Psychology. The Education Department has long had to demonstrate assessment results in order to provide teacher licensure programs accredited by the Minnesota Board of Teaching. The assessment

plan for undergraduate programs includes review of students' portfolios using Livetext ratings for both student and program assessment. All graduate Education programs also include an Action Research Project and a graduation portfolio requirement. During the last review of graduate Education programs by the Minnesota Board of Teaching (BOT) in December 2010, a recommendation was made that Graduate Education should include the use of Livetext as a platform for documenting assessment results to remain consistent with the undergraduate licensure programs. This has occurred.

An example of the utility of assessment data comes from the Communication Studies program, as [exemplified in its 2013 annual report](#). The report notes several examples of how data was used to result in recommendations. One recommendation related to the Senior Seminar course is based upon the program's examination of how well students were meeting learning outcomes and the curriculum mapping they had completed: "The need to address issues of scholarly research, portfolio management and employment materials earlier in the student's academic career may require that we split the Senior seminar course into two separate courses: a 1 cr. Sophomore Seminar and a 2 cr. Senior Seminar. This will allow some content to be introduced to students earlier in their studies and also provide another opportunity for assessment of competency development." Pre- and post-test data from the LEP introductory speech course provided the department confirmation that several learning objectives were being met well, while perhaps more instruction was needed in areas such as types of claims and logical fallacies. Yet another example of the use of data comes from the Psychology program. The Psychology program analyzed potential use of a pilot assessment tool, a randomized, online D2L exam that was given to students in a section of the introductory PSYCH 101 General Psychology course and students in the capstone, PSYCH 420 History and Systems of Psychology, both taught in this instance by the same professor. Data from the pilot suggest that students make substantial progress in their understanding of psychology during their fifteen weeks of PSYC 101, but it is less clear how much they improve past that, as the difference between General Psychology students and Junior and Senior psychology majors was not quite significant. The Psychology program's analysis (available in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#)) goes on to interrogate the assessment tool and methods in order to determine how the results should be interpreted, demonstrating that in addition to looking at the data on student learning, the program carefully considers the validity of its measures: "For future assessments, the program may want to find or develop a different measure that is more reflective of the content areas that our faculty actually focus on in their classes. This would provide a more valid and useful estimate of how well our students are meeting the goals of the psychology program." (HLC Reviewers will have access to the full assessment files from all programs in the [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#), which have been copied over from the assessment t-drive folder.)

While department annual reports and program reviews contain reports of assessment progress, many departments are also taking advantage of the mini-grants being offered by the CIA to reflect on their assessment processes and develop or refine them as necessary. Mini-grant reports reflect not only what programs learn about achievement of student learning outcomes, but what programs learn about assessment measures and intentions as well. For example, the Department of Agribusiness Management and Economics state they have benefitted significantly; the Agribusiness faculty used a mini-grant to provide food and supplies for a series of summer assessment meetings during which they refined the six major goals they had identified at the January 2012 Professional Development day session on assessment. According to their mini-grant report (available in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#)), they "reviewed and revised our program goals and SLO's, developed our assessment course matrix, examined program course syllabi for assessment evidence and created our curriculum map" during these meetings. The Professional Writing and Communication program, which started in 2008, used the mini-grant to test the learning outcomes of the PWC major and conduct its first round of portfolio assessment. In Fall 2012, a group of English faculty test-rated one portfolio in order to test out the rubric and learning outcome language. The pilot resulted in a revision of the learning outcomes, largely through a refinement of language so that each outcome describes a measurable, identifiable element. (See the mini-grant report [in D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#) for a comparison of the original and revised outcomes.) Using the new outcomes language, according to

the mini-grant report, in February 2013 “a larger, different group of English faculty read a random selection of portfolios from two capstone classes. While the sample set is as yet too small to offer statistically significant results . . . the nine portfolios read met learning outcomes with scores above 3.5 where 5 is the highest level of accomplishment and 1 is the lowest level of accomplishment. Moreover, the readings of portfolios led to the revision of the capstone portfolio project. Future portfolios will be ‘presented’ to portfolio readers by the student through the use of a Jing video where the student literally walks the reader through the portfolio. This component has been added so that future readers can assess both oral communication and self-reflection learning outcomes.” Table 4.4 notes the portfolio assessment results:

TABLE 4.4 2013 PWC PORTFOLIO SCORES

(5 IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AND 1 IS THE LOWEST)

Abbreviated Learning	Portfolio Number									Mean
	1001	1002	1003	0801	1004	0802	1005	0803	0804	
1. Demonstrate a mastery of rhetorical principles	3	2	4	3.5	4	5	5	4	5	3.94
2. Apply appropriate design principles	3	2	4	5	5	5	4	3	4	3.88
3. Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and skills	3	3	5	3	5	5	5	4	4	4.11
4. Create documents that are “user-friendly”	3	3	4	5	5	5	5	3.5	5	4.27
5. Make use of credible, reliable, and relevant source material	3	4	5	2.5	5	5	5	5	5	4.38
6. Utilize a variety of electronic environments proficiently	3	4	4	3	5	5	5	3	2	3.77
7. Manage large projects effectively	3	3	5	2.5	5	5	3	3	5	3.83
8. Demonstrate proficient of language	5	3	5	4	4.5	5	4	4	5	4.38
9. Demonstrate grammatical and technical proficiency	5	5	5	3	5	4	3	3	5	4.22

Thus the PWC program was able to identify how well students were meeting the intended outcomes and identify a better method for presenting the portfolios in order to accommodate the need to assess both written and oral communication elements.

#### COLLEGE NOW (DUAL CREDIT) ASSESSMENT

Programs with College Now (CN) dual credit offerings have worked in recent years to assess CN sections in the same manner as on-campus sections of the class. All CN classes have the same learning outcomes as on-campus sections, and students enrolled in CN courses are evaluated by their



instructors with the same standards and criteria as on-campus students. Each SMSU faculty mentor works with the high school instructor to determine the exact nature of these evaluations, in keeping with departmental expectations. (See [Criterion 3A3](#) for a full description of the CN program; materials for CN's successful accreditation by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships [NACEP] can be found in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#).) Assessment of CN sections in the past relied heavily on teacher and student survey feedback and traditional comparison of grades from CN sections to on-campus sections. These are still primary features, but in more recent work, programs are focusing on assessing attainment of learning outcomes in the same manner as they assess on-campus, expanding their on-campus measures as they are developed or refined to include and analyze CN performance. Examples of CN assessment that is conducted in common with on-campus assessment of the same course include direct assessment found in pre-and post-test given to students in BIO 100 since 2011, rubric-based ratings of randomly-sampled English 151 papers, and identification of overall grading and critical thinking demonstration trends in PSYCH 101 and 102 compared to on-campus sections, and indirect assessment via a common student exit survey for all sections of SPCH 110 sections. Reports from CN programs describing their efforts and findings that were collected as part of the self-study process can be found in the report "College Now Assessment Descriptions" in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#). While most programs offering CN sections engage in some form of assessment of CN compared to on-campus sections, more concentrated effort is needed to ensure that all programs are doing so.

A common finding described by multiple areas in the report is that the CN students tend to perform more strongly than on-campus students in the same course. Keeping in mind that the learning outcomes, assignments, and evaluation criteria are all the same across CN and on-campus, several of the departments posit possible reasons for this; the two most common hypotheses across the departments are that CN students are drawn from the top of their classes, meeting stricter eligibility requirements compared to SMSU's general admission standards (for a greater understanding of SMSU's enrollment profile, see [Criterion 1A2](#) and the discussion of provisional admission in [Criterion 3D2](#)), and that CN students spend more time studying and on task with the material than on-campus students by virtue of their high school block or daily schedules and longer semester.

While departments have made great strides in assessing CN, if CN students are indeed performing better than on-campus students, then it would be useful to dig deeper to identify the factor or factors responsible for this disparity. For example, if specific, targeted assessment measures are able to demonstrate that CN students perform better because they are in class more and have more direct contact with their teacher, SMSU could explore ways to apply those assessment results on-campus, perhaps finding comparable opportunities on a regular and ongoing basis for our on-campus students. In other words, analyzing dual credit performance might afford insights not only from the college-to-the-high-school perspective but from the high-school-to-the-college angle as well.

---

## CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

As noted in [Criterion 4B1/4B4](#), the basis for co-curricular assessment has changed over the years since 2004. Student Affairs' departments traditionally focused on setting goals such as service targets and reporting on their accomplishments at the end of the academic year. In August of 2012, in an effort to incorporate learning outcomes, especially the new LEP outcomes, where appropriate in co-curricular areas of Student Affairs, the Dean of Students/Associate Vice President of Student Affairs required a new assessment template required of all departments. The first full Division of [Student Affairs Annual Report](#) based on this template was collated from individual departments' reports in summer of 2013; the 2014 compiled report will be available shortly after the publication of this self-study and will be on the web site and added to e-resources at that time. The use of the template has resulted in more defined outcomes with specific discussion of methods and conclusions by Student Affairs' departments. While the initial reports still primarily focus on programmatic outcomes and exhibit the learning curve inherent in adopting a new model, several areas include learning outcomes.

One department with a student learning outcome is the Office of Student Success (OSS) (described in Criterion 1A2 [Office Student Success Crit 1](#)). Organized in academic year 2011-2012 to address issues related to retention, the OSS had a broad learning outcome related to students coming through the early alert program: "Students who meet with the Office of Student Success due to an early alert that has been reported during Spring 2013 will increase their knowledge of SMSU's student support services." To measure this outcome, the OSS administered a post survey after the conclusion of each early alert intervention meeting. Questions were asked to specifically gather data about how knowledgeable students were before their meeting with the OSS, if they felt the OSS provided them with the knowledge and support they needed to be successful, how knowledgeable the student was after their meeting with the OSS, if they planned to utilize the advice received from the OSS, and if they felt comfortable coming back to the OSS to address any questions or concerns.

A total of 77 students took the survey and the findings were extremely positive. In short, 71% of students reported that they were either slightly knowledgeable or not knowledgeable of SMSU's support services prior to their meeting with the OSS. After their meeting, 100% of students reported that they were either very knowledgeable or moderately knowledgeable about SMSU's support services, 100% of students felt that the OSS provided them with the knowledge and support they needed to be successful, and 100% planned to utilize the advice they received from the OSS in the future. In addition, 94% of students said that they would feel comfortable coming to the OSS to ask for help in the future. Overall, this learning outcome has been met and has exceeded the OSS's expectations.

Residence Life created a learning outcome on related to diversity and inclusion. The outcome states that "Students residing in SMSU Residence Halls will broaden their thought processes in regards to their own beliefs and perceived and unperceived prejudices regarding diversity issues within the SMSU Residence Life departmental diversity program model dimension." Pre- and post-surveys were collected in Spring 2013 at diversity-related programs offered in the residence halls. The survey included questions about attendees' perceptions of the amount and variety of diversity programming and their resident assistant's attitude toward diversity in addition to questions about self-perceptions regarding prejudice and discrimination before and after the programs. Results on the latter questions, out of 180 surveys, 101 students responded that they are mildly more open or very open toward their own attitudes on diversity and inclusion after attending the program. 22 students responded that they feel as though they are either more discriminatory or considerably more discriminatory than they originally thought before attending the program, with 100 answering that they are neither more nor less discriminatory than they originally thought, and 53 feeling that they are less discriminatory than they thought before attending the session. Residence Life staff conclude that they need to continue to offer opportunities for students to explore their attitudes regarding diversity and inclusion.

In addition to departments overseen by Student Affairs, other co-curricular and student support areas also provide evidence of student learning. As described in [Criterion 1D](#), SMSU has been actively engaged in promoting and supporting civic and community engagement for the last decade. The Office of Civic Engagement has conducted ongoing assessment of students' perceptions related to civic engagement since 2009 (see the [Office of Civic Engagement's annual reports](#) available on their website). The SMSU Writing Center has developed a learning-outcome approach to assessment in addition to its data analysis related to student usage of the Center and student evaluations of tutors. This learning-outcome approach includes informal, formative assessment measures and formal, summative assessment measures. Informal, formative assessment is driven by the Writing Center's client reports. Every time peer tutor works with a client, he or she writes up a client report at the end of the session. The Director reads these reports, returns them to tutors for revision for clarity when needed, looks for trends in client needs, and uses those trends to plan for tutor development at staff meetings. For instance, if there is a trend in clients needing help with commas, the Director will conduct a tutor-training workshop in that area. Because the peer tutors learn a great deal through their work in the Writing Center, identifying the learning they accomplish is a key outcome of the Writing Center's formal, summative assessment measure. The Writing Center Director, modeling the

faculty professional development goal and reporting process, has tutors establish their own learning goals as tutors and collaborate in writing one, end-of-year report in which they demonstrate how they accomplished their learning objectives and what they learned. (See report on last year's tutor goals in the ALS Annual Report.)

---

## CONCLUSIONS

All of the samples above describe how programs at SMSU are making concerted efforts to apply best practices in assessment in order to continuously improve their offerings and to ensure that students are indeed learning what is intended in the courses and majors. While the intensity of assessment at the institutional level has sometimes varied depending on the number of other significant mandates imposed on the University and the available resources and support, assessment at the department/program and co-curricular level is integral and ongoing.

While reports of “closing the loop” and using assessment data to make improvements to programs are described in department annual reports, program review self-studies, and mini-grant reports, through the process of creating the self-study, it has become apparent that this information can be difficult to locate; it might appear in one location but not the other, be labeled one thing by one program but something else by another, or might not show up on the t-drive. However, lack of placing files in the t-drive does not necessarily indicate lack of assessment. In addition, the assessment checklist in use by departments did not include a separate section for demonstration of results or use of data, partly because it was understood to show up in the other documents listed above. A revision to the checklist and the template for annual reporting is under consideration by the CIA, as described earlier in this chapter. While over the past several years there have been many improvements related to systematic and understood use of assessment, the University recognizes it must continue to refine its reporting and communication systems related to assessment. The CIA is discussing how it could become more involved in providing models and reviewing programs' documentation.

One unknown is whether the assessment methods and engagement in all units will continue to be sustainable in light of reductions in reassigned time in 2014-2015 due to budget constraints for faculty who either directly or indirectly support assessment efforts via their reassignments. Departments and units will need to continue to recognize the importance of assessment and maintain or adapt assessment methods as needed; however, the strong foundation created by the increased awareness and understanding of assessment, coupled with ongoing dedicated time on the academic calendar for assessment activities, are strengths.

## CORE COMPONENT 4C. THE INSTITUTION DEMONSTRATES A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ONGOING ATTENTION TO RETENTION, PERSISTENCE, AND COMPLETION RATES.

*4C1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.*

One of five strategic directions noted in SMSU's 2012-2017 strategic plan is “2. Enrollment Management Strategic Direction: Develop and commit to an enrollment management program to increase University enrollment both on and off campus through recruitment and retention programs.” Specifically, the following goal is listed: “Establish and implement a retention system that improves student success such that by 2017 the University freshmen to sophomore rate of retention is 78%.” Prior strategic plans have included this ambitious retention rate. In the 2007-2012 plan, a

retention rate of 80% was set as the goal, with a note that “Enrollment and retention are university-wide responsibilities.” The previous Biennial Plan for 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 likewise noted identical language of an 80% goal and campus-wide responsibility, with a separate, additional objective elsewhere in the plan to “Assess and evaluate current graduation requirements at every level, including university-wide and major and minor graduation requirements.” The System Office sets priorities related to completion. The [MnSCU Strategic Framework from January 2012](#) includes the broad goal of increasing completion, and a new System initiative, “[Charting the Future](#),” a product of System-wide workgroups charged with determining how to implement the strategic framework, likewise includes broad goals related to completion, although not specific targets. Measures needed to implement “Charting the Future” are [still under development](#).

The appropriateness of the goals per SMSU’s mission, student populations, and educational offerings is described in relation to collection, analysis, and use of this data in the following Criteria 4C2/4C3.

*4C2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.*

*4C3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.*

Through the [DMIR](#) (see Criteria 4B1/4B4), SMSU collects and analyzes data regarding retention, persistence, and completion. As noted earlier, beginning in 2009, the DMIR group began transitioning from the publication of an annual “Datum” which contained this information and toward online dissemination. In addition to annual reporting to the System Office via the “[Accountability Dashboard](#)” on these measures, the DMIR provides data to groups on campus engaged in enrollment and retention-related studies. These groups analyze the data in order to make informed decisions and to guide retention efforts. Examples of groups or individuals utilizing the data include a retention task force and an advising task force, who have studied retention rates in particular; the Director of Institutional Research and Reporting, who has presented related data the last several years at faculty Professional Development Day sessions and who prepared a special “Completion Analysis” report (excerpts are used in the discussion below, the full report is available in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#)) during the summer of 2013 for administrative review; and the Office of Student Success, which has drawn from this data to help guide their priorities and practices. A new Enrollment Analytics Team (EAT) was convened by President Gores in Fall 2013 to guide recruitment and retention; this group has been scrutinizing data in order to identify trends, strengths, and areas of concern.

Recognizing the importance of this area to SMSU’s strength as an institution, SMSU has hired a Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, who started in July 2014. The expectation is that the person in this position will provide a stable, clearly identifiable point person responsible for recruitment and retention, a responsibility that has been somewhat spread in recent years despite the many campus efforts to improve services leading to better retention.

SMSU’s retention, completion, and persistence data along with examples of improvements related to analysis of these measures follows.

---

## RETENTION AND COMPLETION

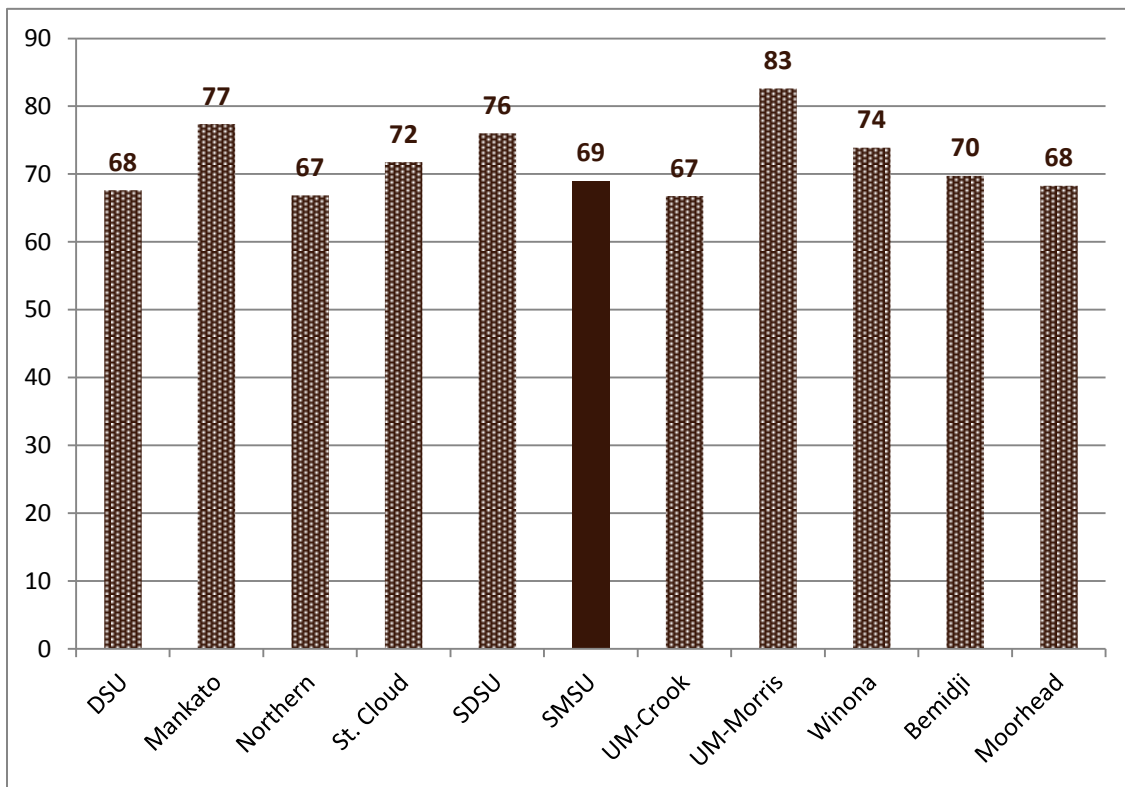
Ultimately, the public definition of student success in higher education is defined by the conferring of a degree to a student. The result is a statistic referred to as completion rate or graduation rate. The United States Department of Education’s rules for graduation rates defines the group to be measured chiefly as students who have not attended a higher education institution previously, likely graduated from high school recently, and qualify as full-time students. Graduation rates are defined as completion within 150% of time, which for a 4-year institution constitutes a six-year window.

Within that time period an initial measure is taken after the first academic year that is commonly referred to as the retention rate.

SMSU categorizes this measured group as New Entering Freshmen (NEF). Although the NEF cohort provides for a means to do comparisons between institutions, is reasonably well-defined, and is a measurement that is understandable, it is increasingly not an entirely complete reflection of SMSU's student population. In the past 10 years SMSU's degree-seeking student population has shifted from a 70/30 mix of traditional and transfer students to closer to a 60/40 mix. (Traditional students are similar to the Federal NEF Cohort definition. Transfer students are students that began coursework at another institution.) Transfer student success at SMSU has trended higher than the traditional/NEF Cohort group described above.

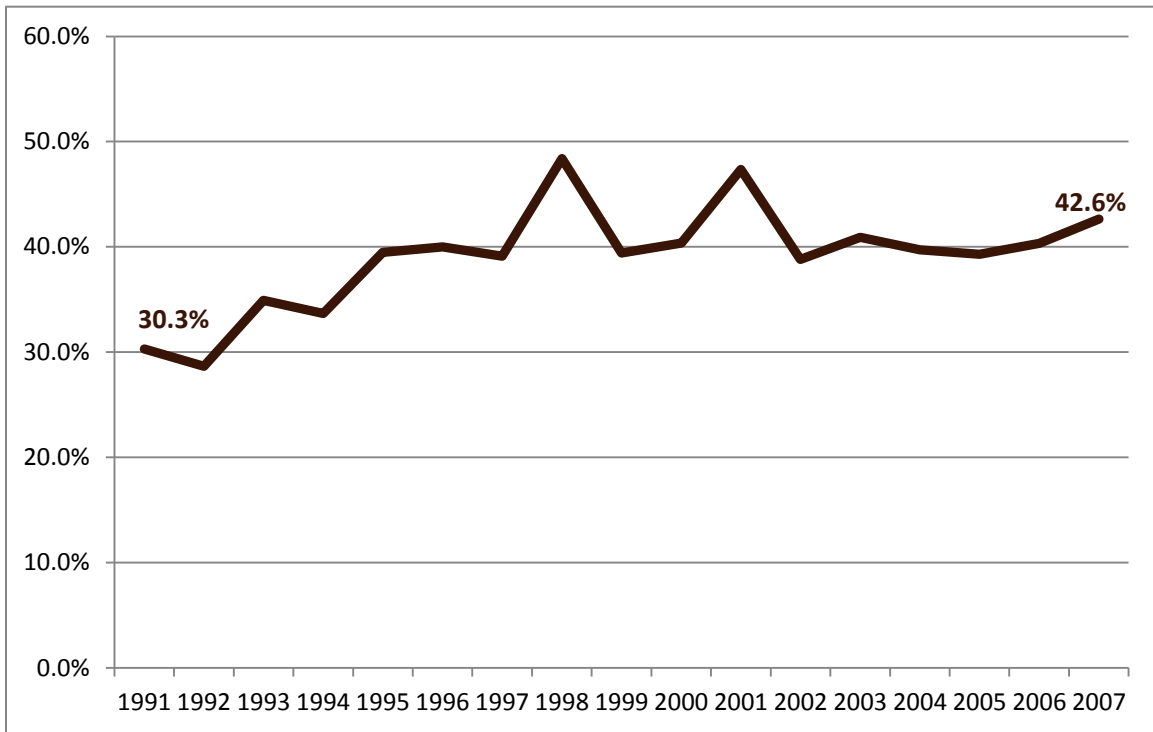
Over the past two decades, SMSU's NEF enrollment has hovered near 500 students annually while transfer enrollment has been near 200 students. SMSU's composite retention rate for the 2004 to 2011 cohorts is 69%; the 2011 cohort rate of 68.6% demonstrates a rise since the 2004 and 2005 rates of 66% and 65% respectively. SMSU compares favorably in terms of retention on a regional level. Figure 4.4 shows the IPEDS retention rate data of ten institutions within Minnesota and South Dakota, selected for useful comparison either as a competitor, a peer, or a MnSCU sister institution (or two or three of those categories). SMSU ranks mid-pack among the institutions.

FIGURE 4.4 COMPOSITE RETENTION RATES FOR 2004 TO 2011 NEF COHORTS



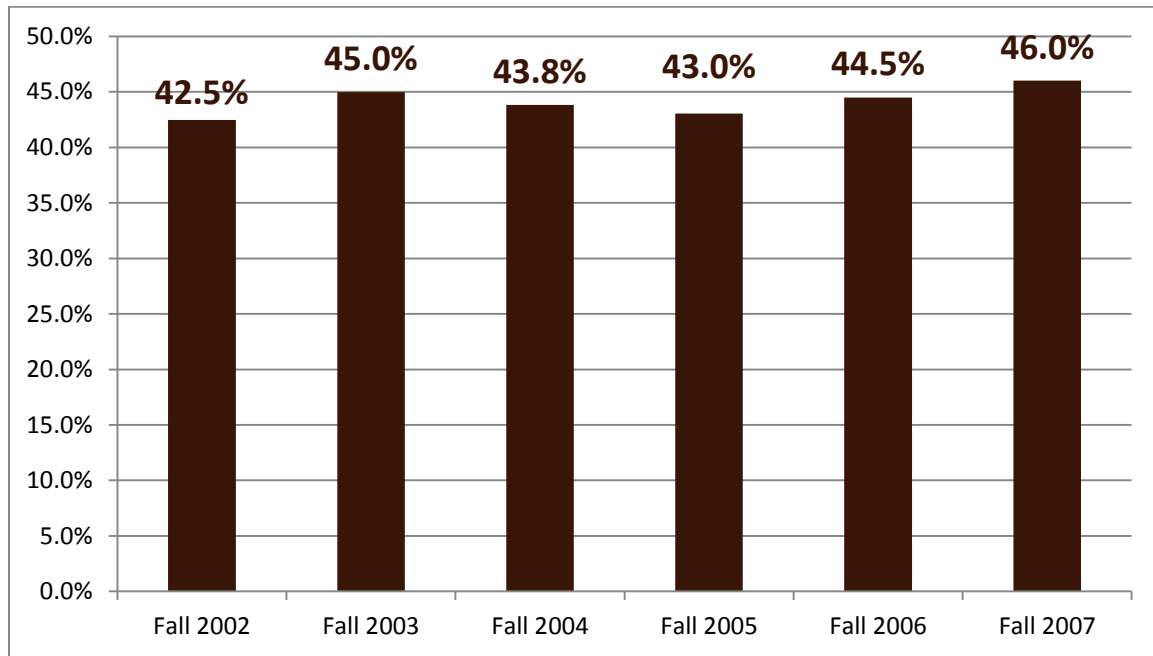
Over the past 20 years, SMSU's completion rate has risen from approximately 30% to 42.6%. The past five cohorts for which data is available all track near this 40% line. Since 1995, only once has the six-year completion rate dipped below 39% (38.8% in 2002). Twice the completion rate has topped 47% (1998 and 2001); see Figure 4.5.

FIGURE 4.5 SMSU COMPLETION RATES SINCE 1991



Transfer student graduation rates have consistently topped the 50% mark for recent cohort groups. Overall, the full-time student composite graduation rate for the past six cohorts of all Degree-Seeking students (Traditional/NEF and transfer) has been 44.1%. Figure 4.6 shows the completion rate for these past six cohorts.

FIGURE 4.6 DEGREE-SEEKING COHORT COMPLETION RATE FOR COHORTS YEARS FALL 2002 TO FALL 2007<sup>2</sup>



Completion, though extremely important, is also one of the most complex topics in higher education. First, the measure itself is four to six years in the making. Policies, procedures, and goals enacted now, may not be adequately analyzed for success or failure for a decade. The make-up or the size of an entering cohort can skew results years after admission decisions were made. Factors that might initially be cheered as increasing enrollment might result in declining completion. In short, merely setting a goal for completion will not likely result in improved completion rates six years down the road.

In recent years SMSU has committed more resources toward improving student success outcomes measured in retention, persistence, and completion rates. In so doing, SMSU has increased its understanding of the potential opportunities for assisting students and also some of the realities that pull down SMSU's rates. For example, SMSU has found that embedded in that seemingly well-defined NEF cohort exist an increasing number of sub-groups. As such, there exists no certainty that SMSU's 42% completion rate will remain steady. Further, since completion is measured at a minimum four years after the cohort's start and more appropriately after 6 years, many additional factors may contribute to a cohort's ultimate success.

For SMSU, the NEF group is made up of sub-groups that all have varying degrees of measured success. Here are a few sub-groups worth describing:

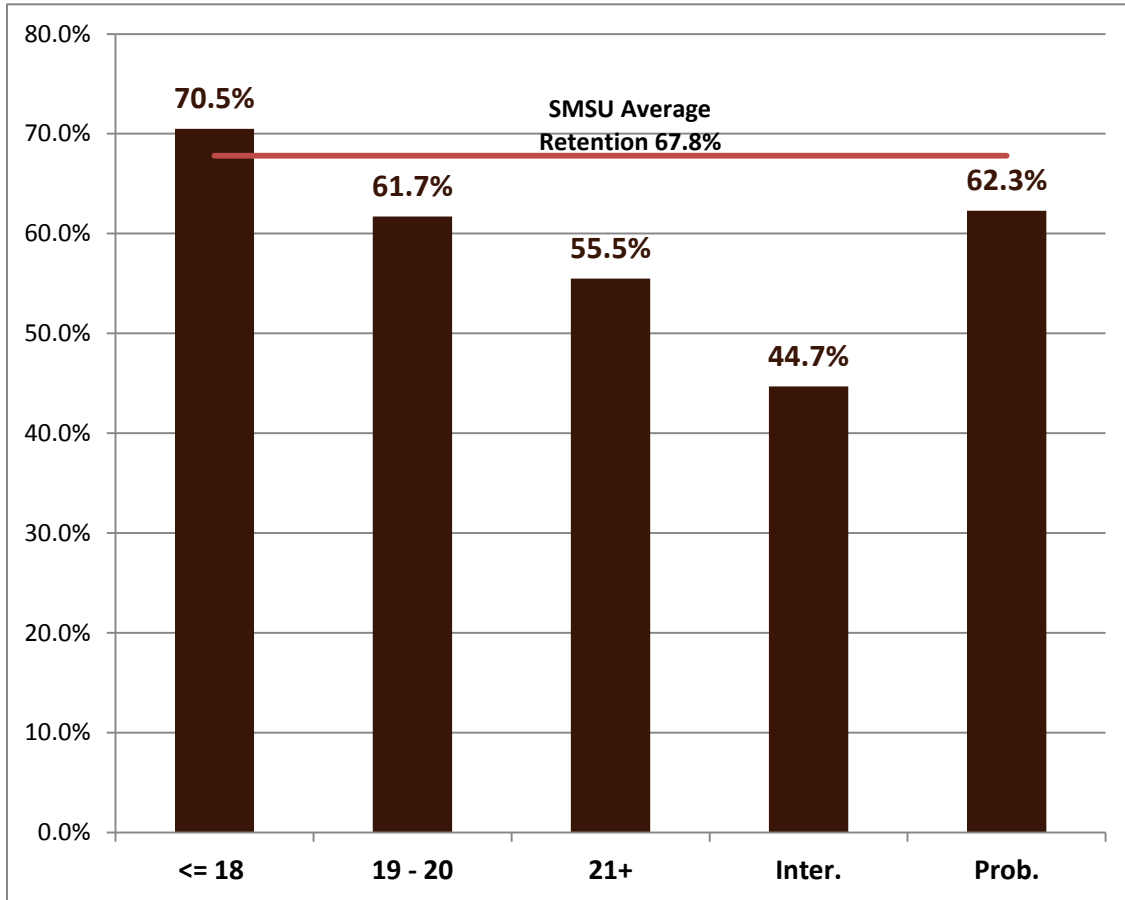
1. Traditional 18-19 year-old recent HS graduates
2. Traditional 18-20 year-old recent HS graduates with one semester or more of college credit
3. International students
4. Students older than 20 years of age

<sup>2</sup> All Degree-Seeking Full-Time Traditional and Transfer students

## 5. Probationary students

The retention rate for each of these groups is shown in Figure 4.7 Average Retention by Select Sub-groups of NEF.

FIGURE 4.7: AVERAGE RETENTION BY SELECT SUB-GROUPS OF NEF (FALL TO FALL)

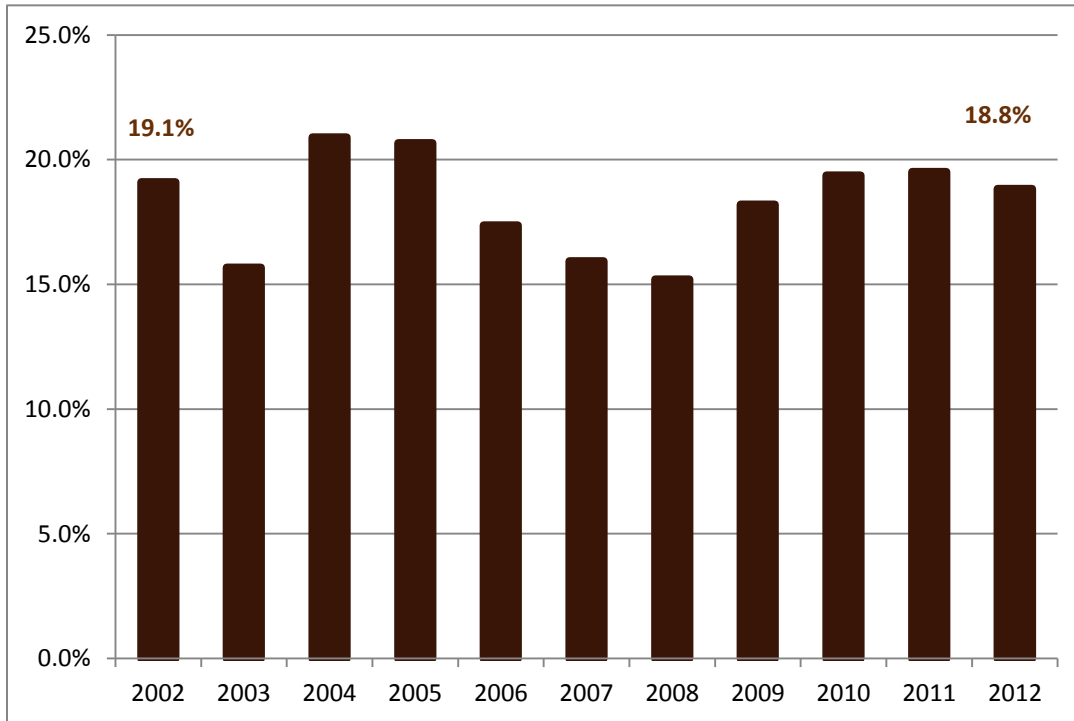


As the table shows, these various subgroups have very different historical retention rates. Thus, SMSU is developing better processes to try to identify and assist these varied student groups earlier.

Additionally, there have long been anecdotal stories of students using SMSU as a cost-saving institution from which they always planned on transferring. From a pure data perspective, there seems to be some validity to this idea. Figure 4.8 shows the percentage of each cohort that had transferred to another institution for the students' second academic year. Admittedly, on the surface such a statistic could show that students are unsatisfied with SMSU. However, exit surveys and exit interviews provide substantiating documentation that many students are not simply dissatisfied with SMSU. (The exit survey and results can be found in the D2L materials for the peer reviewers.)



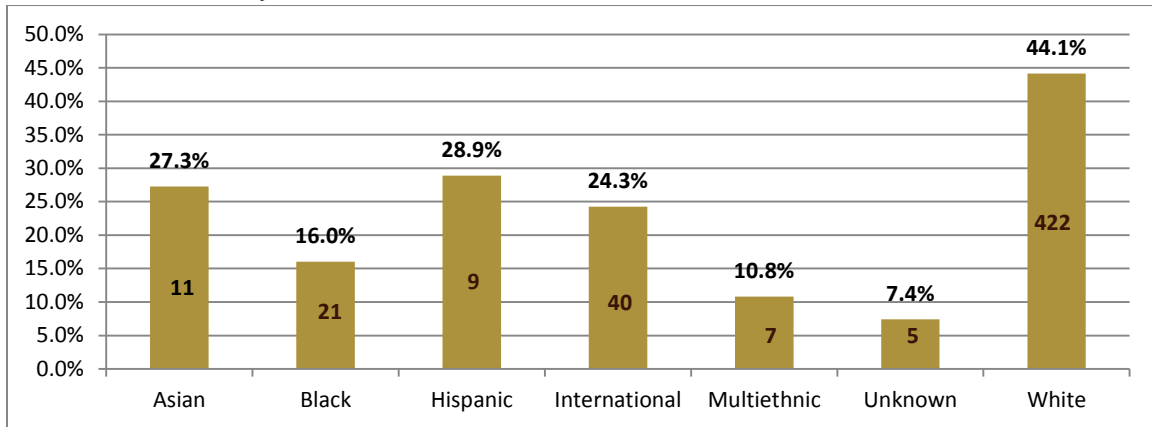
FIGURE 4.8 NEF COHORT 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR TRANSFER OUT RATE



With evidence suggesting that roughly 10% of the NEF cohort always intend to transfer, that becomes a rather strong headwind for SMSU to overcome while trying to raise retention and completion rates.

In addition to transfer-related issues, the “Completion Analysis” report from summer of 2013 (available in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#)) provides detailed analysis of retention and completion for other various subgroups, including by admission status (in good standing and provisional admits), ACT composite score, class rank, student age, first generation status, Pell eligibility, gender, race/ethnicity, and different combinations of these factors. Two of these categories demonstrate areas of concern related to completion: gender, in which female students in all cohort groups (NEF, transfer, degree-seeking) have a higher composite completion rate than their male counterparts, particularly within the NEF cohort; and race/ethnicity, in which all non-white cohort groups have markedly lower completion rates, as shown in Figure 4.9:

FIGURE 4.9: NEF COHORT COMPOSITE COMPLETION BY RACE/ETHNICITY (WITH AVERAGE # OF STUDENTS IN COHORT)

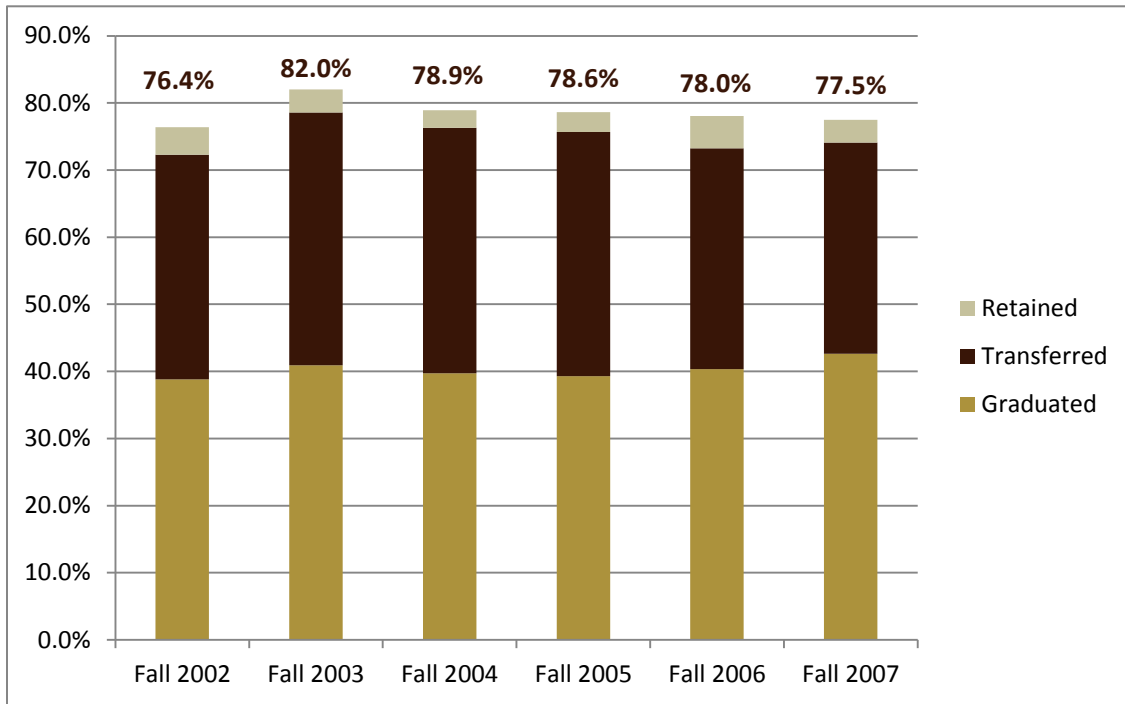


The increased focus on data and especially the sharing of data, such as at open sessions during Professional Development days or All-University Conversations, has helped make the broader University community aware of issues such as the low completion for minority students and the need to update the Diversity Plan and heighten focus on strategic planning related to these issues. Further, the linkages between recruitment, retention, completion, and the budget are made clearer, helping University members recognize that everyone is or should be invested in these matters.

#### PERSISTENCE

The goal of serving students well can be seen in the long-term persistence data available from the National Student Clearinghouse. That data, represented in Figure 4.10, shows that three out of four NEF cohort students have graduated or are still enrolled in higher education 6 years after first enrolling. A 75% long-term persistence rate is a standard SMSU hopes to maintain and hopefully improve upon.

FIGURE 4.10 NEF LONG-TERM PERSISTENCE DETAIL



Within MnSCU, SMSU’s performance has also been quite positive. Since 2009, SMSU’s persistence as measured within MnSCU’s system goals (looking at persistence through a cohort’s second fall of enrollment) has ranked third amongst MnSCU’s seven sister universities, behind Winona and Mankato. This measure of persistence takes into account both new freshmen and new transfers that have been retained, transferred, and potentially even graduated to create a total figure. For the Fall 2011 cohort, SMSU’s persistence rate was 86.1%.

#### USING DATA TO FOCUS ON STUDENT NEEDS

Based on analysis of data, SMSU is making efforts to begin earlier and earlier to identify and address concerns, issues, and potential indicators pointing toward student attrition. For example, a Retention Task Force was created during the 2012-2013 academic year. The task force was led by a Special Assistant to the President for Retention and Advising, hired by *interim* President Wood to investigate retention-related issues at the University and make suggestions for improvement. The task force completed a review of all areas of the University, culminating in a final report including elements of a retention plan. A pilot program called Building Connections was also developed by the Special Assistant to the President for Retention and Advising. This program ran for two years and focused on “middle class” freshmen students who were not admitted provisionally, yet also were not honors students. During the first year of the program, 24 students participated. During the second year, participation doubled to 48 students. The program had success both years with increases in freshmen to sophomore retention rates of the students who participated. (See also Criteria 4B2/4B3 “Liberal Education Program Assessment” for more information on this program.)

Beginning in Fall 2010, SMSU implemented a student relationship software (Hobson’s Retain). Efforts related to using Hobson’s Retain to develop a new early alert system led to the establishment of the Office of Student Success (OSS), initially called the Office of Retention, in 2011-2012. As described in Criterion 2A, this office has been charged with using the early alert warning system to help identify

students who are at-risk so that intervention strategies can be employed, developing a Mustang Mentor program to help new students become acclimated to campus, and creating an exit procedure to collect feedback from students who leave SMSU.

The early alert system appears to help with the goal of increasing retention. This system engages faculty within the first weeks of a semester in an attempt to identify and intervene with students that are struggling in academic, social, or other perceived ways. The Early Alert system has been fully implemented and used since Fall 2012 (AY 2013). Although the sample size is limited, early report measures show the potential of early intervention. For all students that received an early alert during the fall semester of AY 2013, the fall-to-fall retention rate was between 60.5% and 63.9%.<sup>3</sup> Due to resources, time, and student availability, the OSS has been able to meet with roughly 30-40% of alert recipients during each semester. However, for those students that OSS was able to have a direct interaction with during Fall 2012, the retention rate is markedly improved (see Table 4.5).

*TABLE 4.5 COMPARISON OF EARLY ALERT RECIPIENTS RETENTION FROM FALL 2012 TO FALL 2013. TOTAL ALERTS AND WHETHER THEY MET WITH THE OSS*

Term	Period	Categories	Total	Met with OSS		
				No	Yes	Diff.
Fall	Week 3	Total	227	99	128	
		Returned	145	55	90	
		Rate	63.9%	55.6%	70.3%	14.8%
	Week8	Total	294	216	78	
		Returned	178	123	55	
		Rate	60.5%	56.9%	70.5%	13.6%

The figures present both the potential of early intervention as well as the resource constraints SMSU has been facing. One potential solution is the reallocation of personnel resources as part of an Early Alert Team that would be trained by and work with the OSS during particular periods of the semester to assist in directly intervening with these identified at-risk students.

Another initiative of the OSS grew from the work that began under the Building Connections pilot program. Using the formula of instructor and student mentoring, the OSS partnered with faculty during the Fall 2013 (AY 2014) in three sections of First Year Seminar/LEP 100 to have student mentors involved with the course. Although preliminary and, again, limited in scope, such supplemental assistance appears to hold value. When comparing Fall semester to Spring semester

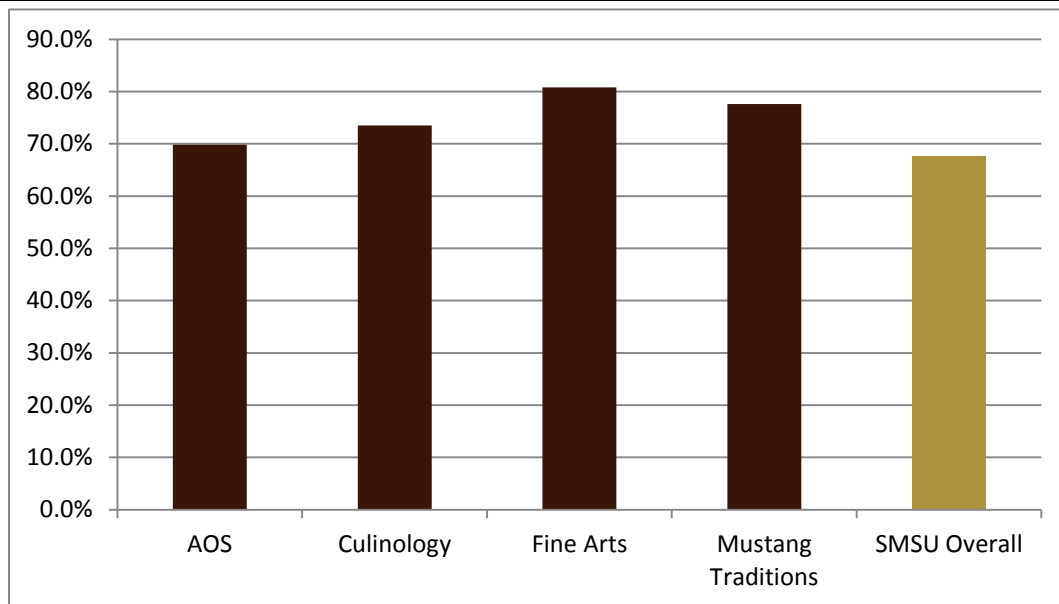
<sup>3</sup> Students receiving alerts during the Week 3 alerts were retained at 63.9%. Students receiving alerts during Week 7 alerts were 60.5%.

retention from those enrolled in all of the FYS/LEP 100 courses, there was a general similarity in overall retention across courses. However, in particular all three sections involving student mentors specifically outperformed the overall retention of male students as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Outside of the OSS, another example of improved student success has been students involved with Living & Learning Communities (LLCs). Measuring federally defined New Entering Freshmen as the cohort, those students involved with LLCs are retained at a higher rate than the SMSU average. In most years, each LLC outperforms the overall SMSU rate. However, for LLCs such as AOS that involve students from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or other at-risk factors, the overall rate and year-to-year rates do even better when compared to students within similar categories, as shown in Figure 4.11.

*FIGURE 4.11 RETENTION OF NEW ENTERING FRESHMEN PARTICIPATING IN ON-CAMPUS LIVING & LEARNING COMMUNITIES. FALL 2008 TO FALL 2012 COHORTS*

LLC	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Overall
AOS	63.3%	84.4%	64.3%	57.1%	75.0%	69.8%
Culinology®	75.0%	92.3%	69.2%	72.2%	58.3%	73.5%
Fine Arts	77.4%	71.4%	77.8%	95.5%	78.6%	80.8%
Mustang Traditions		71.8%	79.3%	73.7%	86.2%	77.6%
SMSU Overall	68.6%	68.1%	70.1%	68.1%	67.2%	67.7%



<sup>4</sup> Overall male fall to spring retention of 87.8% in all LEP courses. In the specified sections male retention was 93.9% or a 6.1% improvement.

Another retention-related effort includes the Director of the Advising Center's monitoring of students who are on academic probation. These students are invited to meet with the Director of the Advising Center to discuss SMSU academic policies, their individual academic situation, and strategies for improving their situation. There are approximately 150 students on academic probation each semester. The Director of the Advising Center meets with approximately 80-100 of these students each semester. The Director of the Advising Center also meets with approximately 15-25 students each semester who have been suspended from SMSU, but who are returning. She discusses SMSU academic policies, their individual academic situation, and strategies for improving their situation.

*4C4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)*

As a member of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, SMSU's IPEDS data surveys are submitted centrally from MnSCU's IR office. SMSU has review oversight. As such, MnSCU follows all IPEDS-mandated submission definitions. Internally, SMSU uses the same IPEDS definitions for reporting official retention, persistence, and completion data (with exception of preliminary retention figures, for which SMSU and MnSCU use the same source data tables compiled by MnSCU).

However, IPEDS definitions are very narrow in scope and only apply to approximately 40% of SMSU's total student population. Moreover, IPEDS rates do not provide broad insights into long-term student persistence, specific variables impacting retention, and various institution-level persistence concerns and goals. Thus, SMSU also compiles and analyzes data using a broader dataset that includes a wider range of bio/demographic, financial, and academic criteria. Wherever and whenever possible, these analyses follow IPEDS guidelines as closely as is possible.

## CRITERION 4: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Strengths*

- Over the past four years, efforts aimed at building a culture of assessment at SMSU have been developed, enhanced, and implemented, with renewed funding and structural supports
- Faculty have numerous professional development opportunities including instruction regarding assessment of student learning at the institutional level and system level
- A full LEP assessment plan is implemented, with initial AHA teams supported with a duty day to establish baselines
- There is a clear cycle of program review, increasing completion rates of those reviews, and continuous spiral of improvement linked to the reviews
- College Now is accredited and most programs have initial assessments that mirror on-campus assessment in addition to service goals
- More evidence-based decision-making is occurring throughout university
- SMSU has a very high employment rate of its graduates

- SMSU has current policies that guide transcription of credit and procedures that ensure rigor
- Student Affairs assessment has shifted to include learning outcomes in addition to programmatic outcomes
- Retention has been well studied, and analysis of retention has led to recent concrete, evidence-based initiatives such as the Office of Student Success

#### *Recommendations*

- Continue to develop clear lines of communication and reporting regarding assessment processes and sharing of information
- Develop better archives of assessment efforts
- Strengthen the manner in which College Now is assessed across all disciplines
- Continue to build upon progress made by College Now Director and committee in strengthening policies and practices, especially in alignment with HLC's new guidelines for dual credit
- Review retention, completion, and persistence goals so that goals are set with regard to data analysis
- Develop and implement initiatives that address the needs of students whom the data show have the lowest retention and completion rates, most notably students of color (see also Criterion 1)
- Continue to recognize and enhance the relationship between the co-curriculum and core curriculum via collaborations between Student Affairs and academic programs
- Review the internal survey instruments currently in use and revise to ensure the data being collected are what is most useful
- Review program internship policies and the overall SMSU internship policy to ensure the overall policy addresses needs of programs and that program policies are consistent with the overall policy

## CRITERION 5

### RESOURCES, PLANNING, AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

*The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.*

As is the case with many institutions of higher learning across the country, Southwest Minnesota State University often finds itself being asked to do more with less, especially over the past years when the effects of the recession were felt throughout different sectors of the economy. Even during difficult times, however, SMSU has kept its focus on moving forward and providing access and quality education in southwest Minnesota and the surrounding region. Strategic planning, effective organizational structures, and realistic acknowledgement of the University's human, physical, technological, and financial resources help SMSU fulfill its mission.

#### CORE COMPONENT 5A. THE INSTITUTION'S RESOURCE BASE SUPPORTS ITS CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND ITS PLANS FOR MAINTAINING AND STRENGTHENING THEIR QUALITY IN THE FUTURE.

Since 2004, SMSU has had years when the revenues have been sufficient to support operations on campus, but has also faced years when the University has had to make difficult decisions to reduce spending so as to balance the budget. For example, fiscal year 2011 was a fiscal year in which the University had to make numerous spending reductions. In fiscal years 2012 and 2013 the budget was sufficient to maintain the operations on campus. However, in fiscal year 2014 and anticipated through the end of the biennium in 2015, SMSU found itself facing a shortfall, with tuition rates frozen for the fiscal years 2014 and 2015, but commitments for salary and benefits through contracts and settlements increasing (audited financial statements can be found in Materials Set II; these same annual financial reports are also located on the [MnSCU website](#), with a link provided on [SMSU's Business Services webpage](#)). The University responds to financial shortages by reassessing all areas and keeping in mind its strategic directives. Budget difficulties have arisen due to decreased state funding, lower than projected enrollment, increased costs, and combinations of these factors. The state's budgeting process, which is often protracted and leaves very little time for reacting to final budget determinations, is another factor (described in more detail in Criterion 5A1).

At the time of the last review in 2004, the University was in the midst of a fiscal crisis, having faced an unallotment from the System in 2003 and a 15% legislative cut in higher education funding, resulting in an almost \$3 million reduction. As was stated in the 2004 self-study, "Although the reduction is small in terms of percentage of the overall System budget, the reduction is relatively drastic at the University level." At that time, the percentage of the state's general fund balance directed to higher education had decreased from 15% in 1987 to 11% in FY01 (see [2004 Self-Study](#)); since then, the percentage has continued to decrease, to [7.2% in the 2014-2015 biennium](#) (based on data from the Minnesota Management and Budget Office).

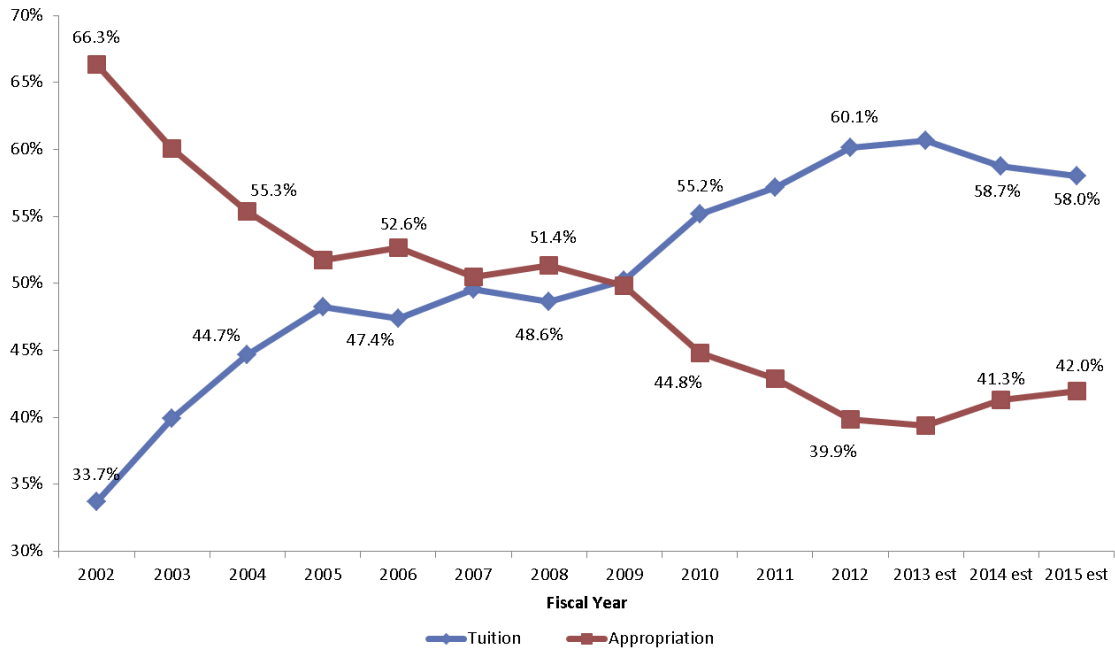
The effect of the decreased funding can be seen in the overall funding for MnSCU institutions and in SMSU's own budget. In fiscal year 2003, state appropriations contributed 60% of the revenue within



the general fund of the MnSCU system. Tuition made up the other 40%. By 2013, the percentages were reversed, as shown in Figure 5.1:

FIGURE 5.1 MNSCU SYSTEM PERCENTAGES OF TUITION AND STATE APPROPRIATION (SYSTEM-WIDE)

(Source: MnSCU Office of Institutional Research)



At SMSU, the same trend is clear. During the previous review, the percentage of the annual revenue budget from state appropriations decreased from 49% to 38% from 1994 to 2004, while during the same period annual revenue from tuition and fees (without scholarship allowance) increased from 19% to 32%. From 2004 through 2012, the percentages have continued on the same trajectories, with tuition increasing to 39% of annual revenue in 2012 and appropriation decreasing to 28% of revenue since 2011.

The economic conditions for Minnesota and the rest of the nation are improving slowly, but there is still much uncertainty in the recovery. Considerable challenges face the University including this long-term trend of decreasing appropriations, limited outside resources, competition for students, and changing demographics within the University’s traditional recruitment territory. Descriptions of SMSU’s resources, current financial condition and outlook, and budget process in place to help SMSU manage these challenges follow in the sections below.

*5A1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.*

---

## FISCAL RESOURCE COMPONENTS

Given SMSU's status as a relatively young, public university with a strong history of shared governance, several contextual factors affect SMSU's finances and fiscal functioning. Fiscal resource components include budgeting processes, organizational structures, sources of revenue, and patterns of expenditures.

### *Organizational Structures*

As is shown in the [organizational chart](#) in Appendix A, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, who is a member of the President's Cabinet, is the University's chief fiscal officer. The Director of Business Services reports to the Vice President and oversees the personnel and operations of Business Services. Under the Vice President's supervision, Business Services maintains the financial records of the University and is responsible for management of accounts receivable, student payroll, payroll entry, accounts payable, purchasing, risk management, fixed asset inventories, accounting, and financial reporting. Business Services also assists faculty and staff with financial aspects of grant programs, including financial reporting, handles travel reimbursement, and provides many services to students, including the ability to view and pay their bills online.

The Vice President for Advancement oversees the Advancement area and also serves as the Foundation Executive Director. Advancement includes Alumni Relations, the Foundation and Development Office, and the Office of Communications and Marketing. Advancement is responsible for building on the distinctive strengths of the University, developing more widely its academic reputation, and fostering philanthropic investment. Advancement works closely with other areas of the University through integrated campus planning and aids in the generation of new resources from private and public sources. The SMSU Foundation is a private, nonprofit corporation formed to administer donations for the support of Southwest Minnesota State University, its people, and programs. Managed by a board of directors, the Foundation supports programs and activities that enhance the University's academic and cultural offerings beyond those provided by state budget allocations.

### *Budget Processes*

Because funding for public higher education in Minnesota is appropriated and allocated to systems rather than to institutions, budget processes tend to be cumbersome, untidy, and lengthy. The external process begins when, on a biennial basis, the MnSCU Board of Trustees and the System Office request a level of funding from the legislature. In each odd-numbered year, the legislature appropriates a biennial budget for the state colleges and universities for distribution by the system. In consultation with the Board and the Council of Presidents, the System Office distributes funds to each institution in the system through an internal allocation formula.

Major factors involved in the allocation formula include system-wide and university enrollments, average cost of institutional programs, size of facilities, and relationships between the costs

associated with operating each college and university as compared to a peer group of non-system institutions. The [allocation formula](#) is subject to change as circumstances both within and external to the system change. Only after the allocation formula has been applied to the biennial legislative appropriation does the University know its approximate level of funding for the next two years.

Tuition rates are determined by the University during the annual budgeting process and then are presented to and approved by the board. However, approval of tuition rate increases can also be affected by legislative action; in 2013, the legislature froze tuition, disallowing any tuition increases that had been anticipated in the budgeting process. In addition to tuition, the University also charges fees to cover costs of programs and services not directly related to instructional programs. [Fees](#) include the student activity fee, student center facility fee, student health services fee, Minnesota State University Student Association fee, technology fee, commencement fee, maintenance fee, and athletic fee. Changes in fees are first proposed locally and then presented to and approved by the Board.

The university budget is planned each year based on available funds and how those funds meet the mission, vision, and values of the University via the strategic goals (directions) of the university, the themes identified by the President, and the commitments to the System Strategic Framework. It is an iterative process, in which constituencies are able to provide input, and proposed budgets are adjusted in response to suggestions. In late fall or early winter, the President and the Cabinet review the overall budget for the following year. The review process involves rolling forward known expenses, reviewing revenue estimates, and reviewing estimates of general fund revenues provided by the System Office. In the fall semester, administrative officers gather requests for changes in staffing and operating budgets from the President, the Cabinet, the Deans, department chairs and directors, bargaining units, and faculty and staff.

The President's Cabinet works on the budget details and then presents a preliminary budget for review by all constituency groups at Meet and Confers. Usually two all-university meetings are held to allow all campus employees and students a chance to review the budget information. Student consultation is mandatory by MnSCU policy; the budget is discussed at student Meet and Discuss which usually occurs monthly. The President and/or Vice President for Finance and Administration also meet with the student government leaders and may attend student government meetings to present the budget. After receiving input from constituencies, the Cabinet revises the proposed budget based on changing conditions and changes in expense and revenue estimates. By mid to late spring, an initial budget is approved by the President and finalized prior to the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1. Summary documents are provided to campus constituencies in the fall. Each year the current budget is available on the [Vice President for Finance and Administration's budget webpages](#).

Although the University's internal budget process usually begins six to nine months prior to the start of the next fiscal year, the University is rarely able to finalize the process on a consistent calendar schedule. The finance staff does the best it can to complete estimated budgets until final numbers are available. This inconsistency results from two factors related to the state's and the System's budget processes.

The first factor is related to timing within the legislative session. Although the Minnesota legislature convenes in early January, the biennial budget allocation is frequently one of the last items approved during the session, which ends in May. Consequently, the System Office usually receives its final budget allocation from the legislature sometime in May. The System Office must then calculate the proportion each individual institution receives based on the allocation formula, with notification of

the allocation to each college or university made in late May or in June. This timeline makes it very difficult for the University to complete its internal budget process, determine tuition and fee rates, and set departmental and unit budgets prior to the time students and faculty leave for the summer.

The second factor is the system’s allocation formula. Factors in the allocation formula make it difficult to estimate the funding the University may receive, since the formula considers total enrollment within the system as well as enrollment at each individual institution. Another large factor in the allocation formula are the average instructional costs for each program, which are calculated annually. These are not usually available until early to mid-March. Without being able to easily estimate appropriated revenue, the University must wait until the legislative and system processes are complete, often with the result that the University’s final budget process cannot be completed on a timely basis.

*Revenue*

SMSU receives the majority of its funding from state appropriations and from tuition paid by students. The remaining revenue is comprised of restricted student payments, state, federal and private grants, sales and other. Table 5.1 shows the overall revenues from 2004-2012 in these categories, excluding capital-type items and with scholarship allowance factored into revenue as per the accrual financial statement process:

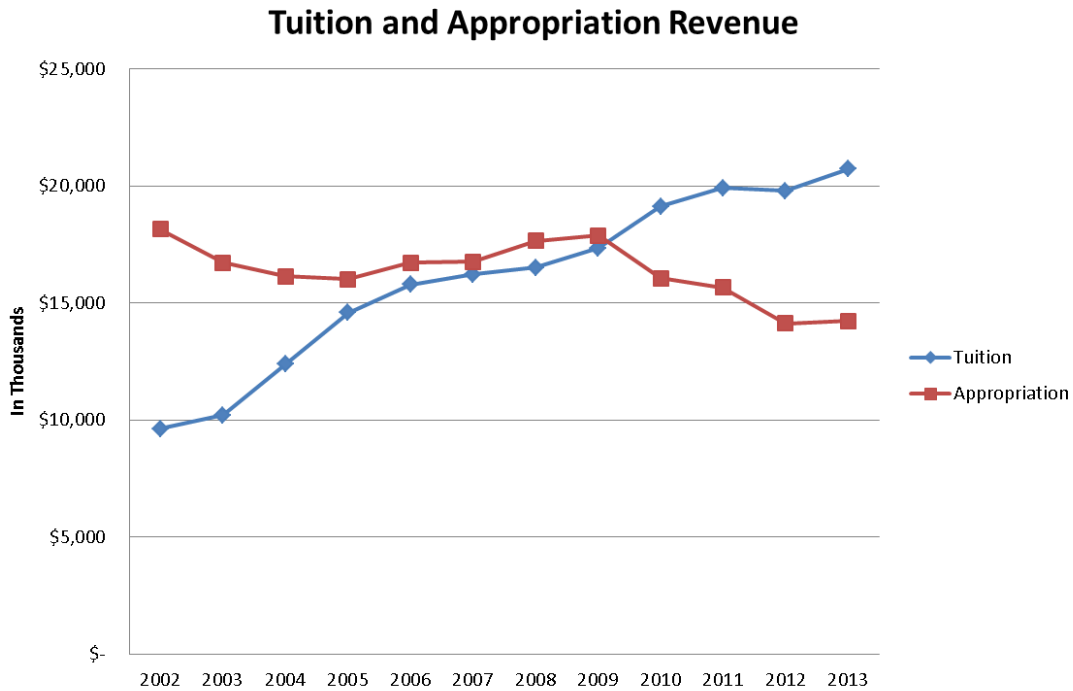
*TABLE 5.1 OVERALL REVENUES 2004-2012*

*EXCLUDING CAPITAL-TYPE ITEMS AND WITH SCHOLARSHIP ALLOWANCE, IN THOUSANDS*

Year	Tuition	Appropriation	Other
2004	8,363	16,136	12,745
2005	10,230	16,022	13,849
2006	11,291	16,724	13,399
2007	11,153	16,759	13,865
2008	11,378	17,660	15,024
2009	12,109	17,887	14,782
2010	12,935	16,053	17,657
2011	13,167	15,660	18,673
2012	12,740	14,120	16,736

As with most state universities and as described earlier and evident in the table above, the appropriation received from the state has declined over the past years because of economic and political changes. The base appropriation received by SMSU has declined by approximately \$2 million since 2004. Throughout this period the University has maintained effective delivery of educational programs despite declining state resources, in part due to its ability until the last year to raise tuition as needed to help cover expenses. Figure 5.2 SMSU Tuition and Appropriation Revenue provides a visual of this trend, mirroring the System-wide distribution shown earlier in Figure 5.1 MnSCU System Percentages of Tuition and State Appropriation:

FIGURE 5.2 SMSU GROSS TUITION AND APPROPRIATION REVENUE



In terms of the System’s appropriation, SMSU received 2.87% of the base allocation to the 31 MnSCU institutions in fiscal year 2014. Based on the financial statements for the year ending June 30, 2013, operating appropriations accounted for just 32% of SMSU’s total revenue as compared to year ending June 30, 2004, in which operating appropriations accounted for 42% of total revenue (not including other revenues).

As the state appropriation has decreased, the percentage of revenue from tuition has therefore increased, shown in Figure 5.2 above. Tuition, net of scholarship allowance, accounted for almost 30% of total revenues in 2012. Table 5.2 displays the average tuition cost and percent change in tuition since 2004:

TABLE 5.2 SMSU TUITION & FEES RATES AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE 2004 – 2014

Based on Undergraduate on campus rates

Year	Combined Tuition & Fees per credit	Annual % change	
FY2003	140.69	9.79%	
FY2004	158.24	12.47%	
FY2005	181.29	14.57%	
FY2006	194.47	7.27%	started banding
FY2007	206.96	6.42%	
FY2008	216.41	4.57%	
FY2009	222.16	2.66%	
FY2010	230.11	3.58%	Mitigated with federal stimulus
FY2011	240.56	4.54%	Mitigated with federal stimulus
FY2012	256.99	6.83%	Increase from mitigated rate
FY2013	267.94	4.26%	
FY2014	267.94	0.00%	

In 2013, the legislature voted to freeze tuition, rates for fiscal years 2014 and 2015, as noted earlier. This freeze is one factor in SMSU’s current financial status, described in greater detail in a later section.

*Reserves*

In order to improve the University’s financial condition, and in an effort to prepare for unexpected revenue shortfalls or unanticipated expense, the University has strategically increased its general operating fund reserves over the last decade. General fund reserves have increased from 2% of previous year’s revenues to 5% of previous year’s revenue, which falls within the MnSCU system policy requirement of 5-7%. SMSU’s general fund balance, which is carried forward from one year to the next, has grown from approximately \$3 million in 2004 to \$11.7 million at the end of the 2013 fiscal year. The general fund balance of \$11.7 million is divided into two components: restricted and unrestricted fund balance. The “restricted” balance (\$700,000 as of June 30, 2013) is limited to use by parties external to the university. The “unrestricted” balance has been designated for use in one of three ways: designated for programs (balances that have been designated for specific purposes); designated for reserves; and undesignated (balances not restricted, designated, or reserved by the institution but can be used for future fiscal year balancing). As of June 30, 2013, SMSU’s unrestricted general fund balance was \$5.7 million designated for programs, \$2.2 million designated for reserves, and \$3.1 undesignated.

*Foundation*

The Southwest Minnesota State University Foundation is a component unit of Southwest Minnesota State University and includes the University’s Alumni Association and Mustang Booster Club (athletics) in its assets. Since the previous review in 2004, the Foundation has completed a successful capital campaign. The “Campaign for Southwest” was a \$17.2 million dollar fund-raising campaign to build support for Southwest Minnesota State University. It closed successfully on June 30, 2009,

surpassing its goal with just over \$24 million in contributions and pledges. Campaign priorities and the dollars that were raised in support of those initiatives included the following:

- Support for students and faculty - \$10 million goal; dollars contributed and pledged: \$14 million
  - to enhance undergraduate scholarships, increase the library acquisitions endowment, provide new and upgraded technology in support of research and learning, and establish an endowment to support curricular innovation and development
- Support for Signature Programs -\$4 million goal; dollars contributed and pledged: \$2.5 million
  - to provide support for the Culinary program component of the Hotel/Restaurant Industries program; establish an endowment to support the environmental sciences program with a focus on developing curriculum in sustainable agriculture and the science of agriculture; and enhance the endowments that provide support for liberal arts, fine and performing arts, education and business
- Support for Campus Projects - \$3.2 million goal; dollars contributed and pledged: \$7.5 million
  - Specific projects included renovation of HRI, Culinary and science laboratories; development of the Alumni Plaza to provide recreational, socializing and walking areas between the new Student Center, R/A Facility and Residence Halls; and support for the new Regional Event Center that was partially funded by both public and private dollars. The facility houses regional, cultural, entertainment, educational, and sporting events on campus.
- Total Dollars contributed and pledged: \$24 million

The Foundation volunteers, SMSU Alumni Association, Mustang Booster Club, and Advancement and Athletics staff members currently work with over 4,000 donors and raise more than \$3 million annually. As the youngest MnSCU university in an out-state location (Metropolitan State located in the Twin Cities was founded later but serves a much larger enrollment), SMSU accomplishes this while having the smallest pool of alumni within the MnSCU universities. (see Table 5.3).

*TABLE 5.3 NUMBERS OF ALUMNI OF RECORD AT MNSCU INSTITUTIONS (AS OF 2013, ACCORDING TO THE COUNCIL FOR AID TO EDUCATION, VOLUNTARY SUPPORT OF EDUCATION REPORT)*

<b>MnSCU Institution</b>	<b>Alumni of Record</b>
Bemidji State University	48,263
Metropolitan State University	30,507
Minnesota State University, Mankato	111,665
Minnesota State University, Moorhead	59,584
St. Cloud State University	111,100
Southwest Minnesota State University	17,378
Winona State University	54,391

In FY13, the Foundation received \$3,926,050 in contributions, revenue, and support, and contributed \$827,321 in scholarships to SMSU students while contributing back a total of \$1,670,042 in total support to the University. Separately audited financial statements for the Foundation can be found in the same report along with SMSU financial reports in the “Annual Financial Report” submitted to the

System Office (available in Materials Set II, or the most recent report is available [online](#), with older reports found in the archives link; the last four reports are also available in e-resources).

*Patterns of Expenditures*

Table 5.4 identifies patterns of expenditure and commitment of financial resources to accomplishing the University's mission and goals. Table 5.5 shows patterns of expenditure as percentages of total general University expenditures (IPEDS data). While the University has experienced financial challenges in recent years, it has maintained patterns that demonstrate commitment to its educational purposes and that have remained fairly constant since the last HLC review.

*TABLE 5.4 SMSU EXPENDITURES IN DOLLARS 2009 - 2013  
(IPEDS DATA, YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, IN THOUSANDS)*

<b>IPEDS Functional Classification</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Academic support	4,340	4,651	4,917	4,366	4,443
Institutional support	6,089	6,169	5,767	6,473	6,212
Instruction	18,882	19,092	19,934	18,009	19,250
Public service	780	870	870	1,158	1,062
Research	-	6	-	-	-
Student services	8,753	8,289	8,494	8,179	8,481
Auxiliary enterprises	8,528	7,979	7,576	6,918	7,044
Scholarships & fellowships	549	872	769	321	653
Less interest expense	(670)	(927)	(1,005)	(968)	(890)
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>47,251</b>	<b>47,001</b>	<b>47,322</b>	<b>44,456</b>	<b>46,255</b>

*TABLE 5.5 SMSU EXPENDITURES IN PERCENTAGES 2009 - 2013  
(IPEDS DATA, YEAR ENDING JUNE 30)*

<b>IPEDS Functional Classification</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Academic support	9.2%	9.9%	10.4%	9.8%	9.6%
Institutional support	12.9%	13.1%	12.2%	14.6%	13.4%
Instruction	40.0%	40.6%	42.1%	40.5%	41.6%
Public service	1.7%	1.9%	1.8%	2.6%	2.3%
Research	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Student services	18.5%	17.6%	17.9%	18.4%	18.3%
Auxiliary enterprises	18.0%	17.0%	16.0%	15.6%	15.2%
Scholarships & fellowships	1.2%	1.9%	1.6%	0.7%	1.4%
Less interest expense	-1.4%	-2.0%	-2.1%	-2.2%	-1.9%
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



The primary overall expenditure is in the form of employee salaries and benefits. As described in the [Introduction](#), SMSU employees are covered by one of seven union contracts or employment plans. Unions include the Inter-Faculty Organization (IFO), Minnesota State University Association of Administrative and Service Faculty (MSUAASF), AFSCME, Middle Management Association (MMA), and Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE). Plans include the Commissioner's Plan and the Managerial Plan. SMSU administrators are at-will employees covered by the MnSCU Administrator's plan. (All contracts and plans are available in Materials Set II.) The IFO and MSUAASF contracts are negotiated by MnSCU labor relations, but all other contracts and plans are negotiated by the [Minnesota Management and Budget \(MMB\)](#) Division of the State of Minnesota. Therefore, the MnSCU system is subject to the negotiated contract changes by MMB.

Because of tight budget situations not only for higher education but the state of Minnesota, in fiscal years 2004 and 2005 there were no general wage adjustments (increases), but employees received step or performance increases as allowed by contract. In fiscal years 2006 and 2007, employees received 2% per year increases plus step and performance increases. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, employees received 3.25% per year general wage increases, and some contracts and plans allowed for step increases. All employees were subject to a salary freeze in fiscal years 2010, 2011, and 2012. The most recent contract, which ended June 30, 2013, was not settled until late into the second year of the two year contract. Increases in salaries were received by all employees.

A change in budget policy has occurred in the past few years. Academic and administrative departments were allowed in previous years to carry forward funds left in their operating budgets from one year to the next. Rather than seeing funds used for one-time large purchases as might be expected, balances continued to grow for many departments. In fiscal year 2012 a change was made to sweep the leftover operating budgets back to the university general carryover to be used for other purposes. Part of this change was made in light of tightening budgets.

---

## SMSU'S CURRENT FISCAL PICTURE

### *Current Financial Situation*

In fiscal year 2014 the University had an unanticipated reduction in enrollment; therefore, tuition revenue has not met projections. Along with the reduction in enrollment, the legislature did not complete their appropriation budget and language changes for higher education in Minnesota until the final day of the legislative session in May of 2013, only six weeks prior to the start of the new fiscal year. The University had planned a fiscal year 2014 budget based on receiving approximately \$450,000 in new appropriations along with approximately \$500,000 generated from a 3% tuition increase, which was supported by the statewide student association. Unfortunately, the final appropriation received by the System included language freezing tuition rates for the biennium, as noted earlier, and thus was only enough appropriation to replace the lost tuition revenue. In addition, Minnesota's Office of Management and Budget (MMB) settled statewide union contracts at a rate higher than what they had said to use for planning estimates for the 2014-2015 biennium. Therefore, the amount of funding received by the legislature, already reduced to only being a replacement of expected tuition revenue, was not sufficient to cover increases to salaries and benefits.

The University administration has emphasized transparency of financial information and working with the constituency groups throughout the University to look for efficiencies, reductions in expenditures, and revenue enhancements for fiscal year 2015. Budget meetings with the SmSUFA

budget committee members took place regularly (every two weeks) in the fall of 2013. These meetings initiated discussions related to the finances of the University in many areas such as the program analysis system (PAS) developed for use in program reviews, budgets in all areas of the University including student organizations, general fund, athletic funding, financial aid, financial statements, Revenue Fund, and others. These meetings were offered in the spring of 2014 to members of other unions. The intent was to keep the meetings small enough for good discussion, to have transparency of financial information, and to increase the budget and financial knowledge of non-finance employees.

On February 7, 2014, a [Planning and Budget Day](#) was held campus-wide to identify ways that all programs can aid in reducing expenditures and/or increasing revenues. Breakout sessions were led by faculty members. A multitude of ideas were presented from this day that upon implementation should greatly reduce expenditures, especially within the adjunct and overload budget. (A list of the break-out groups' suggestions can be found in [D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers](#).) An [online form](#) where anyone could submit questions or suggestions was posted on the Vice President for Finance and's website. As part of the iterative process, many of these suggestions were taken into consideration. Although many great ideas and efforts were made for spending reductions, the administration, after review of many quantitative and qualitative factors and reviewing department and program responses, had to make the difficult decision to discontinue programs. Two minors, one major, and one degree within a program have been identified for program discontinuance in fiscal year 2015. These include the Geology Minor, the French Minor, the major in Spanish (previously suspended) and the BS in Chemistry. Chemistry currently offers both a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Arts and will continue to offer the Bachelor of Arts. The Spanish minor has been suspended as well. The University plans to continue to offer lower-level courses in French and Spanish. Work is already underway with the other universities within the System to create a world languages program system-wide. The Geology Minor was being phased out already.

Board Early Separation Incentives (BESI) were offered to targeted programs and departments on campus. Although this will increase expenditures in the current fiscal year, the intent is to have an immediate and lasting effect on future budgets by not filling behind the retirement, reorganizing or restructuring, and/or filling behind the retirement with an individual at a lower salary level than the retiree.

The recent fiscal shortfall has caused review of all areas of the University in a search for savings and efficiencies, not only in order to cover the shortfall in this biennium but also to strengthen the positioning of the University moving forward. In order to accomplish this task, the administration established a five-part test to review expenditures and potential growth measures:

1. Will this distinguish us from other institutions and help attract potential students?
2. Will this contribute to the success of our current students and increase retention?
3. Will this maintain the integrity and enhance the quality of our institution?
4. Will this generate additional revenue for investing in our future?
5. If this is something we must do, is this the best way to do it or should we look for other ways to accomplish our goals?

The University worked diligently in the spring of 2014 to balance the fiscal year 2015 budget. Because of enrollment declines in fiscal year 2014, current demographics and other factors, enrollment is projected to be down in fiscal year 2015, also resulting in lower planned tuition revenue. Along with increased costs, the University estimated a \$3.2 million deficit. This deficit was eliminated through increased revenue options and cost sharing along with reductions in expenditures. These reductions in expenditures included not filling vacancies or filling behind some retirements, reducing operating and fixed expenditure, and using some one-time shifts in costs. Revenue increases were obtained from the ability to increase graduate tuition rates and adding some service charges to certain courses that had higher costs. The MnSCU System requested a supplemental budget increase in the 2014 legislative session to fund the structural deficit placed on the system by the underfunding of the biennial budget, the MMB contract settlements, and the expectation to settle MnSCU contracts and plans at a similar level to the contracts settled by MMB. The legislature passed a supplemental budget of an additional \$17 million for the MnSCU system in fiscal year 2015 and released the language on the \$17 million one-time funding from the 2014 session so that those funds could be used for contract and plan settlements. SMSU's share of this additional \$17 million in funding is about \$500,000.

*Composite Financial Index (CFI)*

The University's Composite Financial Index (CFI) has seen ups and downs. Table 5.6 provides a summary of the ratios that comprise the final index number over the past six years. The years ending June 30, 2008 and 2010 were the last years in which SMSU received significant capital appropriations for renovations, \$9.66 million and \$7.0 million respectively. Capital appropriations significantly dropped in the following years: 2009 - \$1.46 million; 2011 - \$1.94 million; 2012 - \$1.17 million; and 2013 - \$.41 million. Capital appropriations aid the ratios since the revenue is recorded but the projects are capitalized, therefore not adding expense to the Statement of Revenues, Expenses, and Net Position. Even though the ratios are not ideal, the primary reserve ratio and the viability ratio have steadily improved over the years.

TABLE 5.6 COMPOSITE FINANCIAL INDEX INCLUDING FOUNDATION RATIOS 2008 - 2013

<b>COMPOSITE FINANCIAL INDEX</b>								
<b>with FOUNDATION</b>								
<b>For Years Ending June 30</b>								
			<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Primary Reserve</b>			0.87	0.75	0.62	0.44	0.37	0.44
<b>Return on Net Assets</b>			0.14	0.12	0.44	0.96	(0.07)	1.93
<b>Viability</b>			0.51	0.39	0.33	0.23	0.22	0.26
<b>Operating Margin</b>			(0.15)	(0.33)	(0.11)	(0.20)	(0.10)	0.72
<b>Composite</b>			1.36	0.93	1.28	1.43	0.41	3.35

It has only been the last seven to eight years that the CFI has become one of the more prominent factors in looking at higher education institutions' financial health. Prior to that, many felt that if fund balances and cash balances stayed steady or increased, then the institutions' financial needs were being met.

Depreciation and debt service are two factors affecting the operating margin ratio in particular. Since the year ended June 30, 2003, SMSU's annual depreciation expense has increased by \$2,533,540, of which \$850,066 is attributed to the Revenue Fund. The Revenue Fund added a new residence hall and renovated and added on to the Student Center to replace the building lost to fire for a total of \$32,329,593 over that time. Likewise, through general obligation bonds, including capital projects and the Higher Education Asset Preservation and Replacement (HEAPR) program, the University completed building and renovations totaling \$45,675,599. By 2020, total per year depreciation within the Revenue Fund will decrease by about \$300,000 annually. There may be some infrastructure work that is needed in the residence halls prior to 2020 that may increase depreciation but not to the amount that it will decrease. Debt service obligations exist for Sweetland Hall until 2030.

The diminished financial resources of the University's portion of the Revenue Fund, particularly Residential Life, continue to be of concern. The debt service and depreciation added from the building of Sweetland Hall in fiscal year 2009 along with occupancy issues have burdened the financial resources of the Revenue Fund. The lower-than-projected freshmen classes of fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2014, combined with long-term debt service commitments, translate into long-range challenges for the University's Revenue Fund. The administration is committed to do all that is necessary to make this a prosperous operation and understand that it will take time and a concerted effort.

Depreciation and debt service will continue to improve over time as depreciation decreases and as the debt service is paid off. A workout plan for the Revenue Fund is in place. SMSU currently submits quarterly reports to the Facilities Office of the MnSCU System Office as part of a workout plan for the Revenue Fund. The plan includes repayment of a \$250,000 loan from the Revenue Fund bond fund to help supplement cash flow. The first payment of a seven-year payback was made July 1, 2012. With increased scrutiny of the revenues and drastically reduced expenses within the Revenue Fund, overall financial health has improved in small increments and is close to meeting projections within the workout plan. Occupancy has not increased to the level yet needed; while Sweetland Hall is almost always fully occupied, the occupancy of all university beds is approximately 70%, a factor which remains a concern as it affects the Revenue Fund and CFI. There is little to no room for further reductions to expenses within Residence Life, and therefore, the University must work on occupancy. Residence Life staff has been tasked with finding additional ways to increase occupancy, and early indications of occupancy for Fall 2014 are positive.

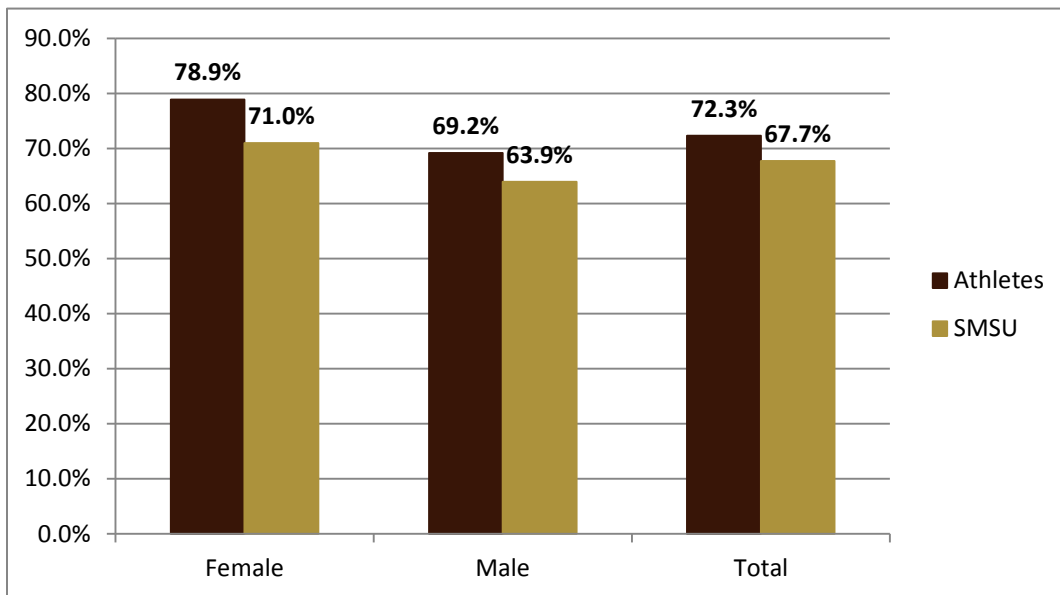
#### *Increasing Revenue*

Enrollment growth and revenue enhancements are key to future financial success. In the fall of 2013, an RN-to-BSN program enrolled its first students. This program was able to progress through the planning stages with hiring a full-time director in fiscal year 2012 because of outside funding received from Avera Hospital. Progress was made on additional program offerings to be offered in the School of Ag, and more work is currently underway to enhance the Ag program. These programs, which were developed in partnership with business and community leaders as well as the area community and technical colleges, demonstrate how SMSU is responding to market-driven needs in

this region of the state and highlight the importance of collaboration and partnerships across the region to provide access and meet the needs of southwest Minnesota and beyond. SMSU has added cross-country and track and field. This influx of athletes is bringing new students to the University who might not have attended otherwise. The University continues to look for growth potential. New programs or expansion of existing programs must meet the five-part test (noted earlier) established by the President. Existing programs have been positioned for growth, and admissions efforts are strategically focused on identified groups of potential students. Building upon current efforts to enhance the University’s academic reputation, reducing operating costs, and effectively managing financial risks are commitments of the University.

An improvement in the retention rate would also increase enrollment leading to more revenue. An administrative line has been restructured in order for the University to hire a Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success, who started in July of 2014. This Vice President will provide leadership vital to increasing the retention rate. Committee structures have also been reviewed in order to support ongoing retention and recruitment efforts, resulting in a Strategic Enrollment Management committee with membership from across the University, which will also begin work in Fall 2014. In fiscal year 2012 the University added an Office of Student Success (described in [Criterion 1A2](#) “Student Support” and related assessment and retention detail in [Criterion 4C2/4C3](#)), which is charged with providing services and programs such as an early warning alert system and mentoring programs to aid in the retention of students. Related to the addition of track and field noted in the paragraph above, SMSU athletes show a higher retention rate than the general student population (see Figure 5.3; further detail regarding student-athlete retention using NCAA reporting methods, which calculate retention across all class levels and by sport, can be found in e-resources); this should hold true within the new program also and result in a positive bottom line impact.

*FIGURE 5.3 TEN YEAR COMPOSITE RETENTION RATES BY GENDER: NEW ENTERING ATHLETES AND TOTAL NEW ENTERING FRESHMEN*



More information regarding enrollment efforts can be found in [Criterion 4C](#).

The Foundation and Mustang Boosters continue their efforts to raise additional monies and determine the best methods for sharing and distributing appropriate proceeds. The Foundation Board of Directors has developed a new strategic plan (located in D2L documents for HLC peer reviewers) to help prioritize their endeavors.

Through these varied efforts, SMSU will continue to meet its financial obligations while providing access to higher education opportunities developed in collaboration with its regional partners.

---

## PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Built primarily in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the 215 acre campus consists of 26 accessible buildings, with an interconnected core of academic and student services buildings. The campus has undergone extensive renovation in the last 10 years. A new student and conference center and a major library renovation were completed in 2005. The SMSU Foundation constructed student apartments that opened in 2007. That same year, several science labs were renovated and the softball and football practice fields were constructed. A \$16 million Regional Event Center opened in 2008, and Sweetland Hall, SMSU's newest residence hall, opened in 2009. Culinology®, hospitality management, and science labs underwent a \$9 million renovation that was completed in summer 2011. An additional \$1.2 million of infrastructure upgrades, including greener and more efficient light fixtures, were completed in 2012.

There is approximately \$33.6 million of deferred maintenance for academic and administrative buildings. Deferred maintenance projects are normally funded through bonding by the State of Minnesota and appropriated to MnSCU through the Higher Education Asset Preservation and Replacement program (HEAPR). Some deferred maintenance projects could be funded by internal general operating revenue, but SMSU has not had the financial capacity to do so recently. The approved funding level and priority list of the system will determine the amount of HEAPR funding that SMSU receives. In fiscal year 2014 MnSCU requested \$130.6 million in HEAPR funding; the legislature approved \$42.5 million of HEAPR funding for MnSCU during the 2014 legislative cycle. Of that amount, SMSU will receive \$333,000 to replace electrical system equipment within our substation. Revenue Fund buildings have a deferred maintenance backlog of \$7.4 million, and these projects must be paid through operating funds and/or bonding through the Revenue Fund, which has separate bonding authority.

SMSU will begin updating its [Campus Master Plan](#) in the fall of 2014. The update was put on hold until President Gores arrived. It also gives the University community time to work on the reaccreditation self-study, which will hopefully bring a better understanding of the university as a whole to the community before the master plan process begins.

Other information relevant to physical infrastructure can be found in [Criterion 3D4](#).

---

## HUMAN RESOURCES

SMSU saw a decline in approximately 27 FTE employees between fiscal years 2004 and 2014, many of whom were in non-faculty areas. However, some areas also added positions, such as in specialized services like accounting and the addition of a Director of College Now, and reorganization of existing positions created the opportunity to restructure without adding new lines, such as the Vice President for Enrollment Management & Student Success. The University's number of faculty declined minimally, allowing for adequate programming of courses. Many service areas have had declines in

the number of employees such as Career Services, which had 2 full-time employees prior to the fall of 2008 and since then has had one full-time employee and a graduate assistant. The Office of Business Services had 15 full-time employees and now operates with 11.75 full-time equivalents. Some of these reductions have been met with efficiencies, better processes, and more technology, but some have resulted in fewer services available to students. Table 5.7 below shows the change in FTE numbers of employees in the different employee units from fiscal years 2004 to 2014.

TABLE 5.7 COMPARISON OF FTE NUMBERS OF EMPLOYEES PER UNIT FISCAL YEARS 2004 TO 2014

Type of Employee Unit	2004 FTE number of employees	2013 FTE number of employees	2014 FTE Number of Employees
Craft Unit (employees in skilled trades such as plumber, electrician, etc.) AFSCME Unit 202	8	6.34	6
Service Unit – includes General Maintenance Workers, groundskeepers, security officers – AFSCME 203	30	26	25
Clerical Unit– employees perform customer service, clerical and other administrative functions. AFSCME 206	41.75	30.7	30.66
Technical Unit – Employees provide technical work such as the Library technicians and laboratory assistants – AFSCME 207	9.5	8.75	7.87
MAPE (Minnesota Association of Professional Employees) bargaining unit (specialized services such as accounting, technology, and facilities)– Unit 214	16.5	20.42	20.42
MMA (Middle Management Association) - Comprised of supervisory employees who provide professional and technical services along with supervising	7	8	7

employees. Unit 216			
I/O faculty bargaining unit – teaching faculty	142.35	133.25	136.61
MSUAASF service faculty bargaining unit – consists of non-teaching faculty who serve in professional positions in academic and student-oriented departments. Unit 211	58.43	55.6	59.41
MnSCU Administrators Plan – Administrators who create or formulate, influence, or manage policy for the University. Unit 220	10.81	12.4	13
Commissioner’s Plan – consists of non-managerial employees who are not covered by a collective bargaining unit	5	3	3
Managerial Plan – Covers classified and unclassified employees in positions identified by the Commissioner of MBB as managerial	1	1	2
Total FTE Employees	330.34	305.46	310.97

More detailed information about faculty numbers can be found in [Criterion 3C1](#). Preliminary 2015 numbers will be available at the time of the review team’s arrival, as the University expects shifts in some of these numbers since some employees took BESI offers in response to the current biennium’s fiscal shortfall, with some positions replaced and others not.

## TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Much of the description regarding technological infrastructure can be found in other criteria chapters, specifically in [Criterion 2A](#) “Technology and Integrity” and [Criterion 3D4](#). As described in those sections, SMSU has sufficient technological support and has done extensive work updating technology on campus. SMSU’s Information Technology Services (ITS) Office created a strategic planning process for technologies on campus. The [ITS strategic plan](#) has four major directions:

- A highly technologically literate and informed campus community.



- A reliable, accessible, secure and advanced technology infrastructure.
- A clearly understood, customer-service oriented and agile information technology services organization.
- Support for tools and processes that enable increased efficiency and innovation across all areas of the University.

To help it realize the strategic directions, SMSU is engaged in a number of partnerships. SMSU is a member of the Southwest/West Central Higher Education Organization for Telecommunications and Technology ([SHOT](#)). SHOT is one of six regional consortia that comprise the Learning Network of Minnesota. SHOT provides telecommunications network services to its member higher education institutions. These services include video conferencing, voice, web conferencing and online media management. SMSU is also a member of Minnesota Tele-Media (MTM). MTM is a cooperative regionally-based educational telecommunications organization. As a member of MNSCU, SMSU makes extensive use of the Desire to Learn (D2L) platform for online course delivery and also actively uses MNSCU's Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) to help students track progress towards their degrees, and efficiently transfer credits from other accredited institutions. SMSU's McFarland Library is a member of [MINITEX](#), an information and resource sharing program of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and the University of Minnesota Libraries. The Library is also a member of [MnPALS](#), a consortium of MnSCU libraries, state government libraries, and private colleges and universities. PALS provides library automation software support and services.

SMSU students are well served by the technologies described above as well as others specifically geared to student needs. SMSU has a student technology fee, with decisions regarding distribution of technology fee funds made by the technology fee committee, which has a student majority membership. Every year, SMSU's student-oriented technologies are reviewed by this committee, and then decisions are made to perform upgrades, make new investments and meet student demands for technology services. Other examples of technologies that serve SMSU students include easily accessible Wi-Fi across campus and a multi-purpose software system known as the SA Link that allows all SMSU student clubs and organizations to post activities, recruit/retain members, and send/receive vital club information.

Other examples of technological infrastructure can be found in Criterion 5C5.

*5A2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to any superordinate entity.*

As described in Criterion 5A1, the budget process has many steps and stages to ensure that allocations are made appropriately and in accord with standard higher education practices as well as in alignment with SMSU's mission. As noted in 5A1, the budget is prepared using parameters provided by the System Office and declared by the Board of Trustees, such as economic forecasts or limits to tuition increases. Further, budgets are developed on campus taking into account the priorities and strategic plans of the university after much discussion at President's Cabinet, at All University meetings, at Union Meet and Confers, and at Student Meet and Discusses. Finally, SMSU's budget is reviewed and submitted as part of the overall MnSCU System budget. The "Patterns of Expenditures" section in 5A1 provides detail regarding SMSU's allocation of funds and how educational purposes are not adversely affected by other resource allocations. In addition, Criterion 5C1 supplies examples of how SMSU allocates resources in accordance with its strategic planning.

The only disbursement to superordinate entities occurs in relation to Revenue Fund expenses for one of the residence halls. The Revenue Fund, which consists of the Residence Life Operating Fund, the Student Union Operating Fund, and their corresponding renewal and replacement funds, are self-funded operations. The authority to operate Revenue Funds was created in 1955 by Minnesota statute 136F.90-136F.98, which also gives the system bonding authority for non-academic buildings. All bond sales must be approved by the Board of Trustees. All Revenue Fund debt and expenses are funded through user fees. No tuition or state appropriation can be used to pay debt. Each year consultation with students must be completed for student union fees and room and meal plan amounts.

Sweetland Hall, SMSU's newest residence hall, was completed in 2008. Although there were rooms available, the original residence halls were built in such a way that full renovation was more expensive than building new and the configuration of our original halls were not conducive to student needs and wants. One residence hall complex, F Hall, which had the largest amount of deferred maintenance, was demolished prior to the building of Sweetland Hall. As noted earlier, even though freshmen are required in most circumstances to live on campus, SMSU residence halls are underutilized; occupancy runs about 70%, which is far lower than is needed. Debt service payments and the reduced occupancy have strained the financial situation of the Revenue Fund. The University obtained a loan to assist in cash flow in fiscal year 2011 from the Revenue Funds held at the System Office with repayment beginning in July 2012, with the agreement that the University provide financial information to the System Office revenue staff on a quarterly basis. The financial situation is improving.

*5A3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.*

SMSU has consistently developed, evaluated, revised, and updated the mission statement and the goals incorporated into the mission statements. The strategic planning documents are evidence of the university's commitment to developing realistic goals in light of SMSU's organization, resources, and opportunities. Goals are developed with input from stakeholders, and departments within SMSU are charged with the responsibility to accomplish the objective within the resources provided. In 2007, The Brown and Gold Task Force developed and refined the mission, vision and core values that currently guide the institution. The most recent [Strategic Directions \(2012-2017\)](#) developed for Southwest were aligned with system-wide strategic directives and presidential work plans under the leadership of *interim* President Wood. The [Southwest Minnesota Higher Education study](#) affirmed SMSU's goals and mission while encouraging the University to engage in further collaborations, one of President Gores' key themes. President Gores has engaged the University Strategic Planning Committee to evaluate the current set of goals to ensure that they are still relevant and attainable or if they need to be modified. In doing so, the committee and University will be keeping in sight the new strategic direction titled "[Charting the Future](#)" outlined by Chancellor Rosenstone and the MnSCU Board of Trustees, as its components move from proposal to enactment stages. Through these measures, the campus community is working to better align our strategic directions with those of the entire system.

*5A4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.*

The University ensures its employees are the best possible choices through a rigorous system of recruitment and interviews prior to hiring. Searches are completed using a committee format so that

various areas are included in the hiring process with the final decision that of the hiring supervisor after thorough consultation with the search committee. (See also Criterion 2A “Integrity with Regard to Personnel.”)

For all non-faculty positions a performance evaluation process is maintained for regular reviews including a review after an initial probationary period and annual performance reviews thereafter to provide feedback to employees for their continued development. An achievement award process is available by contract for some unions and plans, allowing for recognition of outstanding work by individuals or groups of employees working as a team. A fund is maintained for which employees may request funds for training that is related to their positions but not mandatory. This must be approved by the respective supervisor and then approved through a classified training committee. A professional development day is provided usually in May for staff annually since 2007 (see [sample agenda from 2014](#)). The day commences with a presenter and then multiple breakout sessions. The day wraps up with a lunch and another speaker, usually an employee of SMSU. Training that is specific to positions is often provided by departments, and many times is available through the System Office. Many areas have professional development organizations that have training availability. All new supervisors and managers must attend training that is provided by the System Office specific to new supervisors.

Service faculty began having professional development days also in fall of 2012 and have had days geared toward assessment and planning along with other subjects. Two trainings took place in fiscal year 2013. A training day did not occur in the fall of 2013, but one did occur in the spring of 2014. By contract, service faculty have professional development funds available to assist with the costs of professional development. These funds are distributed to each MSUAASF member on a yearly basis as allowed by contract. They also have a competitive professional improvement fund in which members can apply for grants to assist with professional improvement. MSUAASF members are contractually eligible for sabbaticals, although none have been taken in the last ten years.

A Professional Development day for IFO faculty has taken place at the beginning of every fall and spring semester, as part of the duty days before teaching begins ([a sample of topics from 2008-2014](#) is available in e-resources). In the past several years, a concerted effort has been made to open up faculty professional development days to all interested staff and service faculty as well, with breakout sessions that facilitated by and interest office members from across campus, such as sessions focused on advising, retention, civic engagement, and using different technologies available on campus. (Professional Development day agendas are in e-resources.)

As described in [Criterion 3C4](#), a number of additional avenues exist for faculty professional development. Faculty have professional study and travel funds available annually as allowed by contract. These funds are to assist with professional development expenses for travel expenses in relation to professional development and also may pay for professional books and journals, electronic subscriptions, software, and equipment that are not routinely purchased by the University. Faculty have professional improvement funds available as a grant on a competitive basis that is available also to assist with professional development expenses. Faculty are also eligible for sabbatical leave to enhance professional development, support department/unit goals, and/or meet the instructional, service, or research priorities of the University. Eligibility requirements are outlined in the IFO contract. If faculty meet the requirements, they must submit a satisfactory plan which must be approved by the President/designee. A written report of results must be submitted at the conclusion of the leave.

Further information on training, qualifications, the integrity of the hiring process, and evaluation are described in Criteria [2A](#), [3A1](#), [3A3](#) (College Now instructors), and [4A4](#).

*5A5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.*

SMSU has very consistent and well-defined budget development (described in Criterion 5A1) and monitoring systems in place. All University financials are managed through a statewide system that has inherent checks and balances supported by institutional procedures. The MnSCU system has its own accounting system which must reconcile monthly with the State of Minnesota's accounting system. Each institution is required to quarterly report compliance to the System Office verifying that the local bank account reconciliation is complete and reconciled, that the ISRS (MnSCU system) to SWIFT (state system) reconciliations are complete and reconciled, and that the institution has had no overdrafts within the local bank account.

Individual cost center budget requests are submitted annually and are reviewed and managed by division administrators. All approved budgets are available for public review, and staff has instant access to data for review and decision-making. Cost center-responsible persons have access to their cost centers within the University's accounting system and can instantly access their accounts and run reports as needed. Monthly management reports are generated and disbursed for review by administration.

Annual financial audits were conducted by an independent auditing firm for years ending June 30, 2003, to June 30, 2013, to ensure adherence to policies and procedures as well accuracy of financial reporting. The University had had few if any comments from this external audit and has always received unqualified opinions. The System Office, with approval of the Board of Trustees, has decided to reduce the number of individual institution audits to four campuses beginning with the year ending June 30, 2014. SMSU will continue to produce an individual financial statement, but it will not be separately audited; rather, it will be audited only as a piece of the system-wide audit. The Revenue Fund is audited at the system level separately from the rest of the financial so as to meet bonding requirements.

MnSCU's internal audit division will increase its Control and Compliance audits in light of fewer institutions having separate external financial audits. Internal Audit also completes many programmatic audits, some of which recently have included payroll, purchasing cards, banking controls, auxiliary services, and information technology issues, along with other topics. Each campus is assigned an internal auditor specific to their campus. The internal auditors follow up quarterly with the campuses regarding any audit findings both from internal audits and from external audits. As noted in [Criterion 2](#), SMSU currently has six unresolved findings, five from the fiscal year 2012 payroll audit that have had satisfactory progress on the campus but are awaiting system office action for resolution and one finding from the purchasing card audit that has an action plan with a resolution date no later than February 1, 2015.

The Office of Legislative Auditors (OLA) has the option to include any MnSCU institutions in their annual audit plan. Recent OLA audits have centered on general obligation bond fund projects.

## CORE COMPONENT 5B. THE INSTITUTION'S GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES PROMOTE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES THAT ENABLE THE INSTITUTION TO FULFILL ITS MISSION.

Southwest Minnesota State University's (SMSU) governance and administrative structures facilitate the leadership and support needed to execute the University's mission and strategic objectives. As already described, SMSU is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system which is governed by a Board of Trustees, consisting of 15 members. The Board has policy responsibility for system planning, academic programs, fiscal management, personnel, admissions requirements, tuition and fees, and rules and regulations. The Board of Trustees is responsible for hiring the university president, to whom it delegates the administration of the institution. (For further description of MnSCU and the Board of Trustees, see [Criterion 2C.](#)) The President's Cabinet is the senior management team on campus who leads the day-to-day operations of the university, and includes the following administrators:

- Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
- Vice President for Finance and Administration
- Dean of Students /Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
- Dean of the College of Business, Education, Graduate and Professional Studies
- Dean of the College of Arts, Letters and Sciences
- Vice President for Advancement & Foundation Executive Director
- Director of Athletics
- Chief Information Officer
- Affirmative Action Officer
- Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success
- 

The [organizational chart](#) showing SMSU's administrative, academic affairs, student affairs, advancement and governance structures is available to the public on the [President's website](#). The University's leadership works closely leadership from the five bargaining units and two employment plans (see earlier list under "Patterns of Expenditure" section) and the Student Association in the development of policies, procedures, and strategic planning, and in addressing the fiscal health of the university through a number of collaborative processes, all of which are described in more detail below.

As a State of Minnesota-assisted institution, SMSU maintains strong relationships with various branches of the Minnesota State Legislature, the MnSCU System Office including the Chancellor and Vice Chancellors of MnSCU, and local legislators. Fostering these relationships has helped the university align its mission and strategic objectives with the initiatives and priorities of the State and system office.

*5B1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight for the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.*

As described in [Criterion 2C](#), SMSU is a member of the MnSCU system of 31 four-year universities and two-year colleges. The System is governed by a 15-member Board of Trustees appointed by the governor and approved by the Minnesota State Senate. The Board has policy responsibility for system planning, academic programs, fiscal management, personnel, admission requirements, tuition and fees, and rules and regulations. SMSU's budget, strategic plan, and presidential work plan must

all be approved by the Board of Trustees. In addition, SMSU is routinely audited by the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing as well as by an independent auditing firm (noted in Criterion 5A5).

SMSU shares with the governing board as well as other external agencies a number of annual reports that assess the financial and academic policies and practices, and ensures we are meeting the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the institution. The following are examples of the variety of reporting with which the governing board would receive or consult, and all can be found in e-resources:

- Office of the President
  - Annual Presidential Work Plan
  - Annual SMSU Strategic Direction
- Finance and Administration
  - Annual Financial Reports
  - Annual Financial Audits
  - Facilities Master Planning /Deferred Maintenance Reports (FRRM system updated annually)
- Academic and Student Affairs
  - Annual Academic Program Reviews
  - Annual Department Program Reviews
  - Annual College Reports and Summaries
  - National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships Self-Study
  - Student Affairs Assessment
- Advancement
  - Annual Foundation Audits
  - SMSU Foundation Strategic Plan (completed every five years)
  - Council for Aid to Higher Education Report
- Athletics
  - Annual Equity in Athletics Data Analysis (reported to US Department of Education)
  - NCAA Financial Report
  - NCAA Academic Performance Census
  - NCAA Academic Success Rate Report
  - NCAA Institution Self-Study Guide (completed every five years)
  - Department of Athletics Self-Study Report (completed every two years)

See also Criterion 5D1 for additional narrative regarding documentation of performance.

*5B2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies – including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students – in the institution’s governance.*

SMSU’s governance process at the campus level involves a number of practices promoting the communication and sharing of information engaging the internal constituents of the institution in the development and implementation of policies and procedures. Many of these practices have been referenced or described via examples in earlier criteria and sections and are listed again here.

The University is led by the senior leadership, which convenes weekly to discuss and manage the day-to-day operation of the University at President’s Cabinet meetings. The President, Vice Presidents and the Directors are all responsible for building the agendas for the Cabinet meetings. Many of the topics discussed in President’s Cabinet are shared with the bargaining units and Student Association at the monthly meetings with each group.

The governance structure is partly determined by Minnesota’s collective bargaining laws. Under Minnesota law, collective bargaining agreements are negotiated at the state level rather than on the

campuses. Each bargaining unit participates in the governance of the institution in accordance with the statutory language and with provisions in the Master Agreements, or labor plans (all bargaining unit master agreements and labor plans are located in Materials Set II for reference; see [Criterion 2A](#) for more information). Below is a list of the various governance structures that are in place to communicate, develop, and assess the institution's policies, procedures, and strategic objectives.

#### *Meet and Confers*

The President and members of the Cabinet have monthly scheduled [Meet and Confers](#) with each of the five bargaining units to share views and concerns on the overall operation and governance of the University. The groups on both sides contribute to building the monthly agenda. The President and an appointed Vice President will meet with the leadership of the bargaining units prior to the Meet and Confer to discuss the agenda items so there is a clear understanding to the purpose of the agenda items.

#### *Meet and Discuss*

Members of Student Association also engage in monthly meetings with the President and members of the Cabinet in a process called [Meet and Discuss](#). The meeting allows senior management and student leaders to share views and concerns of the operation and governance of the university. The President of the University and of the Student Association have set meetings to discuss the agenda items for the upcoming Meet and Discuss. On many occasions, the Meet and Discuss process has yielded the opportunity for the President or members of the Cabinet to present at the Student Association meetings to provide our students with a greater understanding of the university's operation, budget, policies, and procedures.

#### *Committee Work*

SMSU has a substantial number of [All-University committees](#) in place to maintain, develop, implement, and assess institutional policies and procedures. The bargaining unit and administrative representation on the committees are agreed upon through the Meet and Confer/discuss process. Each committee is assigned a chair to schedule the meetings, set the agenda and conduct the business of the meetings. In addition to the university committees, bargaining units, departments, the Student Association, and other student groups such as the Residence Hall Association or the Student Activities Fee Allocation Committee also have committee structures that in effect involve all constituents on campus in various levels of governance (for example, see the [SmSUFA list of faculty committees](#)).

#### *Strategic Planning Process*

Over the last 10 years, SMSU has engaged the campus community in strategic planning to develop the university's strategic direction. During this time period, SMSU has had three presidents who each effectively, but very differently, conducted the strategic planning process. (See also the description of strategic planning in [Criterion 1](#).) The process has aided the University in successfully developing, assessing and revising the annual strategic directions, objectives and ultimately transformed the institution's mission and vision statements. Strategic planning has had university-wide participation and continues to be a healthy exercise and positive assessment of SMSU's growth and areas of opportunity. More detailed information on strategic planning can be found in Core Component 5C.

### *All-University Meetings*

The President, at strategic times throughout the academic year, will address the campus community to provide updates on the university budget, operation, or areas of growth for the institution. The President consults with the members of the Cabinet to schedule the All-University Meetings. The schedule of All-University Meetings is shared through the Meet and Confer/Discuss process, and all the internal constituents of the campus are invited. (Recent examples of All-University Meetings, sometimes called All-University Conversations or Campus Conversations, can be found on the [President's website](#), though sometimes such conversations are hosted by other offices, such as the five All-University Conversations on the criterion chapter drafts for the HLC Self-Study.)

### *5B3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.*

SMSU administration, faculty, staff and students work together in a shared governance environment to handle issues surrounding academic policies, procedures and requirements. The President's Cabinet is committed to collaborating with all bargaining units to facilitate these collaborative efforts. The variety of forums and processes described in Criterion 5B1 enable this collaboration to occur. Examples of shared governance have been shared in other criteria chapters: the revision of the mission statement in [Criterion 1A](#), the transformation of general studies and development of the new Liberal Education Program (LEP) in Criterion [3B1/3B2](#), and the work done by the Advising Task Force described in [Criterion 3D3](#).

An annual example of the shared governance process is the development of the academic calendar. Though semester start dates are determined by the System Office, the rest of the calendar is developed locally. All units on campus, including students, are deeply involved in this process. The calendar goes through a number of iterations and compromises before being finalized through the Meet and Confer/discuss process.

Two other recent examples, the Program Analysis System and the Make-Up Work and Missed Class Policy, described in depth below, illustrate this subcomponent. The first began as a conversation at President's Cabinet in an effort to address a deficit in the biennial budget. The second transpired from a conversation at a Meet and Discuss between the President, Cabinet members, and the representatives from Student Association.

#### *Program Analysis System*

A [Program Analysis System \(PAS\)](#) was developed and implemented in 2012 to aid the University in making data-based decisions in the assessment of academic programs. The system was designed in collaboration between Academic Affairs and Business Services to create efficiencies in evaluating instructional cost, growth potential, and the overall financial health of the academic program. The PAS includes lower-level discipline course work, upper-level discipline course work, and graduate-level discipline course work.



The purpose of PAS is to gather data about the cost of academic programs across all instructional units. The PAS has evolved into two methods, one using an average cost of instruction based on total costs of the University, not specific to a program, for both direct and indirect costs and the other using direct costs specific to a program and adding the indirect costs as calculated on an average for the entire university. The PAS uses both direct costs and indirect costs that must be covered by tuition. The state appropriation no longer covers all indirect costs of the University, so tuition must now pick up a portion of the indirect costs. The study helps to show if a program is covering a share on an average cost basis of both direct and indirect costs. PAS is a system SMSU has used to address public accountability and helps the institution make informed, data-driven decisions.

PAS was presented at the Meet and Confer/discuss processes on campus to collect feedback and answer questions to how the system will help the University address a budgetary deficit and more efficiently manage the cost of instruction within the academic programs. Given the focus in the PAS on instructional costs, the faculty were especially concerned about how PAS was structured and would be used. The Vice President for Finance and Administration discussed the PAS with the SmSUFA Budget Committee, presented to the SmSUFA Executive Committee, and [presented to the SmSUFA Faculty Assembly](#) to explain how the system assesses program costs and creates financial efficiencies.

#### *Make-up Work and Missed Class Policy*

Administration, faculty, staff and students all contributed to the development of the [Make-up Work and Missed Class policy](#). The policy was created to put in place policies and procedures for faculty and students to follow when students elect to enrich their collegiate experiences with participation in extracurricular university-sponsored events or academically-related programs. The purpose of this policy is to address situations where student participation in extracurricular activities might require absences from their registered academic courses.

This policy offers a standardized set of procedures to address scheduling conflicts in an equitable and even-handed manner supporting the student's academic rights and responsibilities and, when possible, allowing for student absences. The policy was taken through the Meet and Confer/discuss process receiving feedback from the Student Association, IFO, MSUAASF and the administration. The development and implementation of the Make-up Work and Missed Class Policy is an example of SMSU's commitment to collaboration and structuring policies and processes that positively impact the internal constituencies.

### **CORE COMPONENT 5C. THE INSTITUTION ENGAGES IN SYSTEMATIC AND INTEGRATED PLANNING.**

SMSU engages in systematic and integrated planning on a number of levels. Primary in this process is strategic planning. Strategic planning and its key role in enacting the mission is described in [Criterion 1A3](#). As noted there, the strategic plan does not exist in a vacuum but is integrated with other necessary planning components and oversight from the System Office, the state, and accrediting agencies.

The current [2012-2017 Strategic Plan](#) has the following five strategic directions:

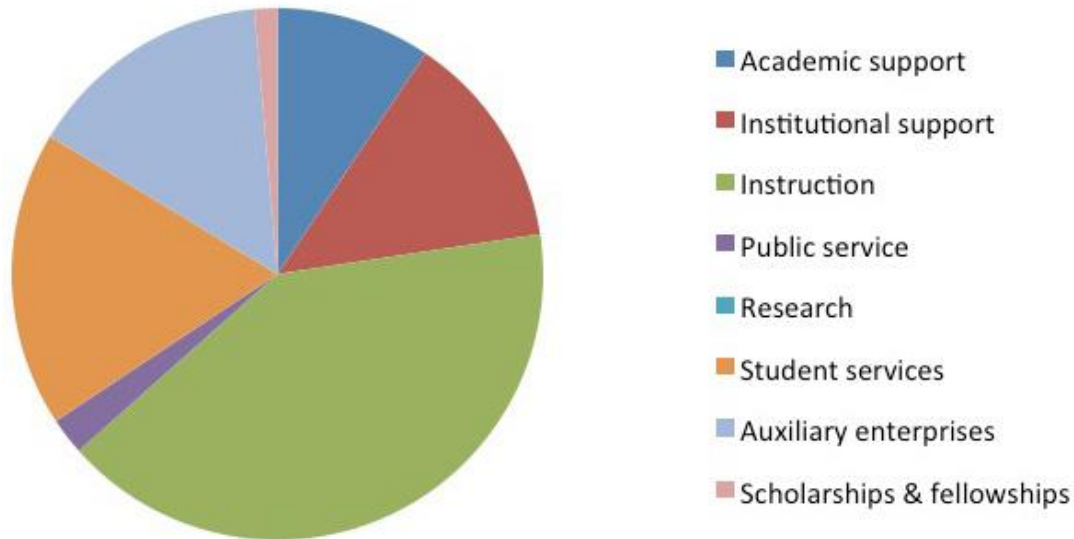
- 1) Academic Strategic Direction: Review annually all academic programs and create new programs when justified that support the changing economic and social dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 2) Enrollment Management Strategic Direction: Develop and commit to an enrollment management program to increase university enrollment both on and off campus through recruitment and retention programs.
- 3) Facilities and Equipment Strategic Direction: Modernize the campus environment and update the campus classrooms and equipment using green technology where feasible.
- 4) Community Partnerships Strategic Direction: Build partnership connections to communities, business and industry, and educational institutions within the southwest region.
- 5) Diversity Strategic Direction: Build on existing strengths in creating an environment to celebrate the accessible and diverse nature of the SMSU campus community and encourage the growth of all groups on campus.

President Gores has engaged the Strategic Planning Committee to review the current plan and consider whether or how the plan might be revised or improved. The all-University Strategic Planning Committee met several times in late Fall 2013 and Spring 2014, breaking into subcommittees based on the strategic directions. The committee found that there was room for revision in the current University Strategic Plan, and created plans for the 2014-2015 academic year to involve broad involvement from across campus. [A timeline for the 2014-2015](#) year culminates in an updated draft of the plan, including holding an All-University meeting in January of 2015 to consider and integrate the findings of the HLC evaluation to the evaluation into the strategic plan. The Committee for Institutional Assessment (CIA) has had much discussion regarding the relationship between the CIA and Strategic Planning, and has developed a model of communication between the two groups, described in [Criterion 4B1/4B4](#).

### *5C1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.*

Patterns of expenditure for instruction and academic support shown in Criterion 5A1 demonstrate the commitment of the University to its academic mission and the allocation of resources to support that mission. Figure 5.4 presents a visual of the FY13 allocation of resources, again based on IPEDS classifications; the chart demonstrates that the majority of funding goes directly to support instruction.

FIGURE 5.4 2013 PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURES



The budgeting process described earlier also in Criterion 5A1 details the steps used by the University to allocate its resources. The University is committed to supporting the educational environment and human resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Institutional priorities are established from strategic planning directions. Examples of recent allocations of resources per each of the five strategic directions in the 2012-2017 are described below. The examples demonstrate that many projects at SMSU actually contribute to more than one strategic direction; an improvement or allocation in one area also supports other goals:

- Academic strategic direction – in alignment with the goal to identify and prioritize new programs, Exercise Science has been identified as a growth program; to support the program, part of a dance studio space was converted to an Exercise Science Fitness Lab, with an internal loan to purchase equipment that will be paid for through funds raised in an agreement with the Schwan Food Company, for whom the program is providing services. This example demonstrates support not only for an academic program but also exemplifies a community partnership and an improvement to facilities.
- Enrollment Management strategic direction—as part of a recruitment effort, SMSU established three major scholarship programs beginning with the spring semester 2012. The College Now Scholarship is for students who start their education with us while in high school; the Upward Bound scholarship is for students who are first generation college students from a state- wide program, and the third scholarship is the Mustang Transfer scholarship for students who have completed 60 credits or more at another institution.
- Facilities and Equipment strategic direction -- SMSU with the Marshall Public Schools renovated the "Old Mattke Stadium" to a track and field complex with a Mondo type surface for the running track, synthetic turf soccer field, and new event sites (located north of the

stadium). The new field supports the addition of track and cross country as well as the high school track program.

- Community Partnerships strategic direction – in serving Goal 4 to promote service learning through community-based partnerships, over the past five years, SMSU has partnered with the Lynd Public School district to establish the After-School Tutoring. Center for Civic Engagement student staff assist with recruiting student volunteers and interns, who meet with Lynd school children in the Instructional Learning (IL) Building a few days a week. Numerous other examples are described in Criterion 1D.
- Diversity strategic direction – to enhance the environment and provide greater support for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, in Fall 2013, the Office moved to a new location in the Commons East building on campus. This move provided the Office with room for a computer lab, offices, study areas and a lounge for meetings and other gatherings, and also makes the Office conveniently located close to the AOS Living & Learning community.

### *5C2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.*

Assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting are integral to the operation of SMSU which is apparent from the program level to the University as a whole. At the program level, as evident in yearly reports by departments and in the 5-year program reviews (see [Criterion 4A1](#) and samples in e-resources), program planning decisions are based on assessment and evaluation that takes place in individual courses, yearly reviews, and exit assessments of each department. For example, in Education, professional testing scores are reviewed annually, areas of need are noted, and then are addressed in courses as needed. The PAS system provides an additional tool for use by departments and administration for reviewing course offerings and instructional loads. Planning decisions are made within the constraints of the budget provided to each department. Departments are given the opportunity to request additional money with rationales in the yearly budget requests.

At the University level, assessment of student learning across the full undergraduate experience drove the revision of the LEP. Described in detail in [Criterion 3B1/3B2](#), the new LEP is clearly rooted in learning outcomes, developed in agreement with the full faculty prior to the building of curriculum. When the curriculum structure was designed, faculty were supported by the administration to create a curriculum that supported the outcomes, with assurance that staffing support would follow; that support continues even in light of fiscal difficulties. The University is now engaged in assessing outcomes with the expectation that analysis of assessment data will result in further refinement of the outcomes and curriculum. The assessment budget was built to support mini-grants and the first three rounds of AHA teams, providing a duty day for the faculty involved in creating the baseline measures for the LEP. MnSCU Strategic Initiative Funding was also granted for the LEP 100 Workshop day in May of 2013, where the instructors received additional training and discussed the course with LEC members.

As described in Criterion 5A1, the strategic planning directions and the enactment of those directions frequently demonstrate the linkage between assessment, evaluation, operations, planning, and budgeting. The Science lab renovations present another example of this linkage. In this case, improvement in facilities was directly tied to academic need and assessment. The project also fit in with the System's planning and commitment to STEM. The renovations were many years in the making, as the project's several stages had to make it on the state bonding list of priorities, affecting operations and budgeting for a number of years. Another example is the University's decision to pursue hiring a Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success. The person in this role will manage operations, planning, and budgeting for recruitment and retention efforts.

A final example of linking planning to the budget comes from President Gores' set of three guiding themes (Educational Excellence and Distinctiveness; Student Learning and Success; and Meaningful Partnerships and Engagement) and the five-part test being applied to review expenditures and growth initiatives listed in 5A1.

*5C3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.*

The methods for including internal constituent groups in strategic planning processes have been described in previous sections. Over the past decade SMSU has frequently built either a half-day or a full day into the academic calendar at least once each year or has dedicated all-university meeting time to the topic. Everyone in the University community is encouraged to participate in these strategic planning discussions, including faculty, staff, students, and even citizens of the surrounding region. One of the Strategic Planning days organized by *interim* President Wood was in fact facilitated by the local school superintendent. The [public links available on the Strategic Planning website](#) document many of the meetings and provide further evidence of the inclusion of all constituents in that process.

In addition to strategic planning, other planning groups, external input, and advisory boards provide insight into internal and external perspectives.

---

## PLANNING GROUPS AND TASK FORCES

A number of departments or units on campus whose work affects cross-campus constituents develop plans either with the help of or review from personnel and students from outside of the assigned department. These plans include the Technology Strategic Plan and the Campus (Facilities) Master Plan. The Technology Strategic plan is described in Criterion 5A1. Also noted in Criterion 5A1, the Campus Master Plan is scheduled to be updated in 2014-2015, following an extension from the System Office of several years while awaiting the appointment of a permanent president.

In addition to the overall technology plan, to help with the development of internal University policies and practices, the University has created an Information Security Team (IST) that is representative of the faculty and administrative departments that are in a position to handle potentially confidential information. The IST was created in 2008 after the Meet and Confer process revealed the preference for an advisory group.

One other group that aids in the planning and oversight of a broad constituency is the Intercollegiate Athletic Advisory Committee. This committee, with membership from all units, students, Boosters, alumni, and the community, advises the President and Athletic Director on such matters as policies, procedures and programs with affect to student-athletes, the athletic staff, the university, alumni and general public.

SMSU also makes use of task forces when appropriate to help identify and develop action plans for specific purposes. A University task force is usually comprised of representation from all units and students, and often community, employer, or other external parties with interests in the subject. Recent examples of task forces include the Advising Task Force, described in [Criterion 3D3](#), and three task forces organized by interim President Wood to develop potential growth areas for the University: the RN-to-BSN Task Force, which included several representatives from health-related organizations in the community and two year schools, and resulted in the addition of the degree program within two years; the Agricultural Programs Task Force, which again included

representation from agricultural businesses as well as faculty and staff; and the 2+2 Task Force, which included Extended Learning and Academic Outreach staff and colleagues from area two year schools, designed to review current 2+2 offerings and identify additional opportunities.

---

## EXTERNAL STUDIES

An important and very visible examination of the University that included the views of many different people in the region was the [Higher Education Needs of Southwest Minnesota Study](#). As described in the Introduction, the study was commissioned by the System Office upon the retirement of President Danahar, to examine the needs of two- and four-year education in the region and to determine whether SMSU and Minnesota West Community and Technical College could or should consider stronger alignment in some form. MGT of America, a higher education consulting firm, conducted the study in Spring and early summer of 2011 through interviews, focus groups, and surveys with area business leaders and community members, staff, faculty, and students. The study's findings lead to an immediate outcome in the decision to hire separate presidents for each institution, as well as continue to influence on-going and long-term planning regarding collaborations between the institutions and the development of new programs.

SMSU has also employed the services of external consultants over the years to assess market conditions when considering significant projects. In 2009, Corcoran Communications was employed to conduct a comprehensive marketing study to assist in the development of new recruitment materials and to conduct an audit of SMSU's current website and publications. The information gleaned was used to implement changes in our publications and to enhance the messaging on the website for prospective students and their families. The full report from Corcoran (hard copy) is available in the Resource Room.

---

## ADVISORY BOARDS

Several SMSU units and departments make use of external advisory boards. These include the Foundation Board of Directors, the Teacher Advisory Board, Nursing Advisory Board, Alumni Association Board of Directors, and Mustang Booster Club Executive Board.

These boards serve their programs in a variety of ways. For example, directors on the Foundation Board are elected to three-year terms and provide counsel in fund-raising, portfolio management, strategic planning and other matters. The Culinology® and Hospitality Management Advisory Board provided strategic planning work which led to the establishment of the Culinology® program in 2006. The board consists of individuals from various sectors of the food and hospitality industries outside of SMSU. Through industry contacts and research, the advisory board recommended the development of a Culinology® program to replace the former Hotel/Restaurant Administration Program that SMSU used to have. This new program became the first four-year program in the world, and subsequent planning and resource alignment has led to significant growth, financial investments, and facility improvements to support the program.

*5C4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.*

*5C5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.*

Much of the information regarding this core component has been described in the introduction to Criterion 5 and in the budget process section. SMSU has come to expect decreased state appropriations, and creates budget projections based upon all known information and anticipated fluctuations to the extent possible. To aid the University in these efforts, in fall of 2013, President Gores established an Enrollment Analytics Team to review and analyze data related to retention and enrollment projections. This team will continue to help the new Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success. A new University committee, the Enrollment Management Committee, will also begin meeting in Fall 2014 to aid in these efforts. Other forms of data related to the MnSCU allocation model are closely studied by the Vice President of Finance and Administration as budgets are developed, and in recent years these details have been shared more deliberately with faculty, to help them understand how the allocation model in all of its complexity works.

The University takes care to develop new programs that are based on emerging regional needs. As described earlier, one of the primary themes currently being focused on centers on partnerships and collaborations, which supports the findings of the Higher Education Needs of Southwest Minnesota Study as well. The RN-to-BSN program and new ag-related programs are examples of fulfilling these needs, identified by regional stakeholders. Program reviews and annual department reports also describe needs analysis and sustainability issues, as exemplified in the Education Department's addition of a Reading licensure and Teaching English as a Second Language licensure; graduate emphases in Sport Leadership, English, and Math; and a Masters of Physical Education to meet the needs of the region.

SMSU systematically addresses emerging trends such as in technology, demographics, and globalization through components of its strategic plan; the forward-looking plan addresses these issues in its strategic directions.

Specifically, some examples of technologies that have addressed and continue to anticipate technology needs include the following:

- Continuing investment in smart classrooms, training and associated software
- E-Services offers a broad set of programs and support mechanisms, including software to assist in student advising, registration, and managing course grades
- A four-year office-computer replacement cycle (recently changed from three-year)
- The addition of a controlled-access streaming media server
- Installation of a new computer-integrated phone system
- SMSU McFarland Library's automated library system, which provides access to library holdings including a collection of ebooks that can be downloaded and interlibrary loan services, a discovery overlay to the system that enables a single search to present results from the library catalog and multiple databases, and an electronic resources management system to track database subscriptions and statistics. The Library is beta

testing an institutional repository program which may be used to provide online access to faculty and student research as well as archived institutional documents.

- The streamlined and updated E-Application Process has increased regional and statewide accessibility to SMSU's College Now Program. SMSU uses the College Now Program to partner with nearly 100 school districts and almost 4,500 students in Minnesota. College Now is accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP).
- Using Adobe Connect Technologies, SMSU cooperates with Minnesota's two-year Community and Technical Colleges to offer both hybrid and asynchronous online courses and bachelor degrees to students in SMSU's 2+2 distance learning programs.
- SMSU's Geographic Information Systems ([GIS](#)) Center houses a network of computers and related equipment to serve the GIS users, both public and private, in southwest Minnesota. The Center is available for use by students and faculty as part of regularly scheduled classes. Additionally, as a regional resource in southwest Minnesota, the Center is available for area residents as a source of data and to provide technical support through consultation, customized applications, and workshops.

In terms of demographic shifts, SMSU is highly aware of the changing demographics in the region and the potential impact on the University, both in terms of services offered or needed and in terms of recruiting and enrollment. The "Enrollment Profile" section in [Criterion 1A](#) describes current enrollment and trends at SMSU. Some of these current trends include:

- The gender distribution of SMSU's student population has a female majority.
- Students of color typically comprise less than 10% of SMSU's student enrollment.
- International students typically comprise less than 10% of SMSU's student enrollment.
- More than 75% of SMSU students typically are Minnesota residents.

In Fall 2013, the campus community was presented with [slides outlining the shifting demographics in Minnesota](#) and regarding higher education during a Campus Conversation. Attendees were asked to consider how these trends should be taken into consideration regarding SMSU's planning for the future.

The creation of SMSU's [GOLD College](#) (formerly called Senior College) has been one initiative based upon demographics in the region and reaching out to engage the community beyond traditionally-enrolled students seeking undergraduate degrees.

Globalization presents another trend that SMSU is currently encountering. SMSU's [Global Studies program](#) is being reviewed to consider additional opportunities for getting students to engage with global concepts and experiences. SMSU has also hosted students from other countries to take credits and earn certifications here. In terms of creating opportunities to bring global perspective to students on the SMSU campus, the SMSU Education Department invited a delegation of Ph.D. students from Udon Thani, Thailand. The students from Rajabhat University come to SMSU to experience a U.S. school administration program. They take an SMSU Masters in Education course as part of a three-week visit. They also travel to area high MN schools and work closely with school administrators to learn more about Minnesota's K-12 education system. SMSU also recruits international students to earn graduate and undergraduate degrees. For example, in Fall Semester 2013, a cohort of 21 graduate students from Taiwan enrolled in courses to earn an SMSU MBA degree; in Fall 2014, a cohort of 37 students from Taiwan are expected to join the University for an MBA program.



## CORE COMPONENT 5D. THE INSTITUTION WORKS SYSTEMATICALLY TO IMPROVE ITS PERFORMANCE.

Southwest Minnesota State University monitors and reviews the progress in meeting the University's goals and objectives it has established through the strategic planning process. The review is accomplished through internal and external processes in an environment of share governance to ultimately assist the university in fulfilling its mission.

### *5D1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.*

Criterion 5B2 lists out the multiple reports which provide evidence of SMSU's performance. In addition, Criterion 4 describes the annual reporting and assessment processes departments engage in, along with periodic program review. The President's Cabinet reviews these many reports and communicates the results of these reports and audits out to the campus community and posts many of the publications on the university's website for review. The President and members of the Cabinet continue to share the successes and challenges of the university and continue to look for new methods to evaluate and manage the educational, financial, legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the institution.

SMSU vice presidents and deans are responsible for a number of annual reports detailing the accomplishments and statuses of their departments and programs. The reports are assessment tools used by the senior management staff to evaluate their department's growth and challenges and to identify success stories. These reports are also utilized by the University to evaluate and document progress towards meeting the institutional goals and objectives set forth by the University's strategic plan and the Presidential Work Plan (available on campus in the Resource Room).

For example, the Provost/Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs receives an [annual report from both colleges at SMSU](#) (also available in e-resources). These documents are prepared by the deans. The deans ask each of their departments within the college to prepare an annual review that includes the current projects and initiatives of the department or programs. The projects and new initiatives have been developed to align with the University's strategic plan, as well as the mission/vision statements and the goals and objectives of their respective colleges and departments. In addition to the annual reports, the deans received Professional Development Plan (PDP) reports from each faculty member as part of the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement. The PDPs provide the deans strong supplemental reporting on the individual initiatives and programs being developed and executed by our faculty.

Externally, the extensive assessment described in the Higher Education Needs of Southwest Minnesota study described earlier provides additional evidence regarding operations. [The executive summary](#) identified areas of growth as well as potential strategies of consideration for higher education to positively impact the region through strategic alignment and partnerships. It was evident by the findings that SMSU should continue to find ways to collaborate with Minnesota West on academic programming and a shared services model.

*5D2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.*

SMSU has a number of internal and external processes in place to identify ways to improve the performance and productivity of the university and its component parts. Many of these have already been described in earlier sections of Criterion 5. Below are examples of projects and initiatives where research and assessment aided the institution in improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability.

#### *Schwan Regional Event Center (SREC)*

The construction of the SREC in 2006 was the result of a public/private partnership between SMSU and The Schwan Food Company. The facility was to address the need for a regional facility to host conferences, conventions, training sessions, academic courses, band competitions, and collegiate and high school football and soccer. Schwan, SMSU, and local legislators successfully lobbied the project in the Minnesota State Legislature to gain \$11.4 million in state bonding to support the project, to which Schwan helped procure an additional \$5 million in private donations. The SREC now serves Southwestern Minnesota as a first class facility for regional and local businesses to host a variety of events, meetings and training sessions. The facility plays host to a number of Marshall High School activities and sports and to the Minnesota State High School League Section and Quarter Final Football games, and has enhanced the game-day experience for SMSU Athletics home athletic competitions.

#### *Replacement of Light Switches*

Light switches in restrooms in the academic buildings on campus were changed to motion sensor light switches in 2010. The switch automatically turns on the lights when someone enters the restroom and turns the lights off after a set number of minutes of non-activity. This reduces the length of time restroom lights are on, which in turn reduces electrical energy consumption on the SMSU campus. The use of motion sensors also lets the University community know that SMSU is actively taking steps to reduce energy consumption in a way that people can see. SMSU received HEAPR funding to purchase and replace the light switches, aiding the University in its sustainability and financial efficiencies.

#### *Science Lab Renovations (2008-2013)*

The renovations of the science labs at SMSU enhanced the learning experience for students by training on up-to-date, state-of-the-industry technology and scientific equipment to better serve regional industry. The project consisted of:

- Renovation of 7,200 GSF of Hotel, Restaurant Administration teaching labs in the Individualized Learning Center to accommodate a Hospitality Management academic degree
- Renovation of 11,250 GSF in Science & Technology Building to remodel and update biology and chemistry labs
- Renovation of 13,595 GSF in Science & Math Building to remodel and update biology and chemistry labs

Six biology labs and five chemistry labs have been renovated and updated. The labyrinth of prep/storage areas have been simplified into one common lab prep area per floor that can be efficiently staffed, and has allowed sharing of lab materials and equipment. Some of the inefficient prep-storage spaces have been converted into dedicated spaces for on-going student scientific research projects. The addition of a “smart” science classroom in Science & Math has allowed higher order thinking skill development in analyzing the results of real-time data collection from the labs.

#### *Culinology ® and Hospitality Management*

SMSU’s Culinology ® and Hospitality Management programs required renovation of outdated facilities formerly used by a hotel and restaurant administration program that had been discontinued. Culinology ® combines culinary arts, food science, and business to meet workforce demands for new products development specialists. Food science, food safety, and new food product development are core themes. The renovation has constructed a modern facility for the re-engineered program. The remodeling and right-sizing of this university space to commercial-grade academic labs has fostered student learning and a smooth transition to industry environments.

The renovation focused on a total remodel of, and expansion into existing space, commercial grade equipment and materials, and the following spaces:

- basic skills kitchen to accommodate six identical kitchen stations
- upper level high production kitchen with areas for hot food, cold food, bakery, prep and beverage areas, and point of service computer system,
- a demonstration/teaching lab designed with industry-leading audio visual and instructional technology capabilities
- Food Science Research & Development lab
- public access gourmet dining hall for service learning opportunities

#### *Sweetland Hall/Foundation Apartments*

SMSU recognized a major need to update and diversify the options in its residential housing offerings. In 2005, the University partnered with the SMSU Foundation to construct and manage apartment style housing for SMSU students. The university also demolished one housing complex, eliminating more than \$2 million in deferred maintenance, and replaced it with a new residence hall. Sweetland Hall opened in the fall of 2009 and with brought a mix of more modern residence that were suite-style rooms with many modern amenities included air-conditioning, greater technology and improved accessibility. Coupled with the existing mix of residence halls, the University now has a diverse mix of housing options with different amenities and price points for students.

#### *Marshall Regional Track & Field Complex Renovation*

Marshall Public Schools (MPS) and SMSU entered into a partnership in 2011 to finance the renovation of Mattke Field on the campus of SMSU into a state-of-the-art track and field complex. MPS approached the SMSU Director of Athletics on the potential collaboration to address the district’s deteriorating track, located at the Marshall Middle School. A new track and field complex enabled SMSU to add women’s and men’s cross country and indoor and outdoor track and field. The addition of these sports aids the university in growing enrollment and positively impacting the institution’s Title IX compliance. The project will support many of the academic, activity and athletic s needs of MPS and SMSU. The Marshall Regional Track & Field project also demonstrates the commitment of both institutions to enhancing the economic development in the region. This facility

is designed to host regional and national competitions and activities supporting the Southwest Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission of Marshall.

#### *Library Renovation*

The McFarland Library was renovated in 2004 to reconfigure the entrance and enhance the overall function of the facility for students on its four floors. The main floor now houses the Reference Desk, the reference, periodicals, and media collections, student workstations, and the Circulation Desk. There are also two workstations available to the public. The William Whipple Art Gallery was moved to the south side of the library to provide easier public access during showings. The library features two computer labs for daily and classroom use as well as computer workstations set-up throughout the library. The new design provides students a comfortable opportunity to study individually or as a group. The Library also now houses a Writing Center and a Speech Center. Both centers are staffed by student tutors hired and trained by the respective academic departments to assist students working on papers and/or speeches.

## CRITERION 5: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

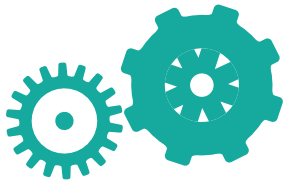
### *Strengths*

- The University exhibits a strong focus on shared governance processes, transparency, and sharing of information, particularly in regard to budget and planning.
- A variety of creative partnerships have been developed with more in progress that serve the region's stakeholders while enhancing the University's position, understanding of external perspectives, and funding.
- SMSU's staff, faculty, and administration work together to provide excellent education to their students with limited resources.
- The SMSU Foundation has grown significantly and led a highly successful capital campaign.
- The University has developed clear processes for assessing instructional costs and making decisions based on multiple types of data.
- A number of key University facilities have been renewed or rebuilt, and a strong technology plan drives ongoing improvements and access for all constituents.
- The University has greatly strengthened the linkages between planning, budgeting, assessment, and evaluation.

### *Recommendations*

- Continue to work on factors negatively affecting the financial health of the University, as reflected in the CFI ratios and raising the overall CFI as possible, including a continued effort to reduce deferred maintenance.
- Continue to review the strategic plan and engage the strategic planning committee, as President Gores has already done, to ensure the strategic plan is thorough and addresses presidential emphases.
- Continue recently increased efforts to involve all constituents in budgeting and planning analysis and to operate with as much transparency as possible regarding these factors, especially decisions about how to handle budget shortfalls.

- Explore new programs and other revenue growth areas while ensuring new initiatives have the necessary funds in place to support them
- Continue to track and improve retention efforts and consider retention goals.
- Develop recruitment strategies in alignment with the University's awareness of the changing demographics in its service region and its commitment to diversity.



[www.SMSU.edu](http://www.SMSU.edu)

*A member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.  
ADA Accessible. Equal Opportunity Educator and Employer.*



*Published by:*

Southwest Minnesota State University  
1501 State Street · Marshall MN 56258  
[www.SMSU.edu/go/HLC](http://www.SMSU.edu/go/HLC)