OVERVIEW

The University of North Dakota embarked on the process of self-study in the spring of 2011. The aims, as articulated by then-Provost Paul LeBel, were:

- To meet the needs of the Higher Learning Commission reaccreditation process by ensuring that all necessary research, data collection, analysis, evaluation, and writing is completed in a timely and high quality manner.
- To benefit the University by sharpening our understanding of our progress and challenges in carrying out UND’s mission and fostering success in achieving the vision and priorities as articulated in the Exceptional UND initiative.

Through the insights gained via the self-study process and through initiatives growing out of findings within the process, the University will continue movement toward the Exceptional UND goals of:

1. Enriching the student experience;
2. Encouraging gathering;
3. Facilitating collaboration;
4. Expanding UND’s presence;
5. Enhancing quality of life.

That self-study process has been completed through the combined efforts of well more than 100 faculty, staff, and students who served as members of the Steering Committee, a criterion group team, or a support team. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide a brief overview of the self-study process and findings.

However, members of the University community are strongly encouraged to read relevant portions of the full self-study, available now on UND’s Higher Learning Commission webpage.

The Self-Study Process

In the fall of 2010, Provost Paul LeBel appointed a three person team to begin planning for the 2013 reaffirmation of accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission and to serve, with him, as members of an Executive Committee for that process. By February of 2011, Executive Committee members Joan Hawthorne (Director of Assessment and Regional Accreditation), Pat O’Neill (Professor of Economics), and Donna Pearson (Associate Professor of Teaching & Learning) presented Provost LeBel with a proposed timeline and a short list of potential co-chairs for each of the criterion areas to be examined in the self-study. Provost LeBel selected and appointed co-chairs for each criterion area, and those co-chairs, in conjunction with members of the Executive Committee, constituted a Steering Committee for the reaccreditation process. Co-chairs appointed in the spring of 2011 included the following individuals:

- Criterion 1: Roxanne Hurley (Nursing) and Steve Moser (BPA)
  ○ Moser was later replaced by Jeff Powell (Dean of Students Office)
- Criterion 2: Kathy Gershman (Educational Research) and Cara Halgren (Dean of Students Office)
  ○ Halgren was later replaced by Brett Goodwin (Biology)
• Criterion 3: Jim Mochoruk (History) and Lori Robison (English)

• Criterion 4: Mark Hoffman (Chemistry) and Donovan Widmer (Art & Design)
  ○ Janna Schill (Clinical Lab Sciences) was later added as a third co-chair for the criterion

• Criterion 5: Peggy Lucke (Finance & Operations) and Jeff Sun (Educational Leadership)

Steve Light, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, joined the Executive Committee and Steering Committee in the fall of 2011.

By the conclusion of the 2010-11 academic year, Steering Committee members had issued an invitation for volunteers to serve on the various criterion teams. The list of volunteers was supplemented through focused recruiting intended to add expertise specific to the various criterion areas with the result that more than 100 people were organized into criterion teams by the time work began. Groups began meeting early in the following fall, and their first year of work was focused on identifying and collecting resource material, documents, and evidence to address each of the five criteria for reaccreditation and the many “core components” and “sub-components” for each criterion area.

Teams delved into the various criterion areas in what was essentially an extended, collaborative, qualitative research project. Their aim was to collect relevant information and then analyze what had been collected in order to draw conclusions and prepare arguments about the challenges and strengths of the institution. By the end of the 2011-12 academic year, most of the research needed to analyze UND’s efforts, achievements, and challenges related to the various criteria and components had been completed.

A Technical Support Team comprised of people with technical expertise was formed under the leadership of Lori Swinney to ensure that documents and resources used within each of the various chapters would be archived and available to link within the final, all-electronic version of the self-study. A second support team began work in the fall of 2012. Under the leadership of Pat O’Neill, a Publicity Task Force began taking initial steps in planning opportunities for members of the University community to hear about and provide response to criterion group findings.

Criterion groups devoted 2012-13 to writing and revising. Drafts of chapters were prepared and revised in the fall semester, with additional revisions and editing occurring throughout the spring. The spring of 2013 also provided criterion teams with their first opportunity to present their findings to campus audiences. Members of the Publicity Task Force organized a series of open forums, held during the spring semester, which provided interested faculty, staff, and students with opportunities to learn more about reaccreditation and self-study findings related to each of the five criteria for reaccreditation. To ensure feedback opportunities were available for members of the campus community unable to attend forums, chapter drafts were also made available on UND’s Higher Learning Commission website. The forums themselves were available for streaming as well. Comments received in response to chapter reviews were forwarded to criterion co-chairs and, where possible, incorporated into chapter drafts.
As chapters were finalized, members of the technical support team worked in close collaboration with team writers and co-chairs to ensure that each document providing evidence regarding the various findings was linked and accessible at the appropriate point in the document. At the same time, an introductory chapter was written by members of the Executive Committee. Additional documents were also produced by the Executive Committee, including a compliance chapter, describing UND’s efforts in relation to each of a series of mandated federal requirements for institutions, an institutional snapshot, and other supporting information.

Two additional support teams began work in the summer of 2013. The first was a Design and Layout Team, comprised of staff within the Office of the Vice President for University & Public Affairs. That team, under the leadership of David Konerza, worked closely with members of the Technical Support team, co-chairs, and the Executive Committee to produce final versions of all necessary documents and supporting evidence. The second was a Logistics Team, under the leadership of Donna Pearson. That team focused on ensuring that members of the HLC visiting team would have a comfortable and productive experience at UND, from hotel reservations to transportation, meeting arrangements, and technical support.

It is through these efforts and the work of these many individuals and teams that the final version of UND’s self-study process was completed. During the fall of 2013, prior to the visit of the HLC team, members of the campus community will have opportunities to learn more about the self-study findings and to begin the process of applying information “to benefit the University by sharpening our understanding of our progress and challenges in carrying out UND’s mission and fostering success in achieving the vision and priorities as articulated in the Exceptional UND initiative,” as promised by Provost LeBel at the onset of the process.

**Accreditation Criteria and Exceptional UND**

The aim of the self-study, from the beginning, has been to ensure that the work completed for reaccreditation would continue to benefit UND long after the HLC visit is completed. With that in mind and with the help of the Publicity Task Force, the self-study process was purposefully linked to the Exceptional UND vision and agenda. Figure 1 demonstrates one way of visualizing the alignment, showing the institutional mission as the ground in which teaching, research, and service, the three core responsibilities of a University, occur. Each area of responsibility needs to be conducted in ways consistent with the five HLC criteria in order to ensure institutional quality.

Using teaching as an example, connections between the work of the University and the HLC criteria for reaccreditation become clear. Teaching is a responsibility that derives from UND’s institutional mission (Criterion 1). Whether courses are offered on campus or at a distance, teaching needs to be carried out with integrity (Criterion 2). Thus, the University must protect academic freedom and ensure that students should be made aware of grading practices and policies – both important for reasons of ethics and integrity. Both teaching and learning (Criterion 3) must demonstrate high quality, which includes, among other things, having an appropriately educated
Figure 1
Visual Alignment of HLC and Exceptional UND Connection

UND’S MISSION

TEACHING
RESEARCH
SERVICE

HLC
Quality Standard

MISSION
INTEGRITY
T&L: QUALITY
T&L: ASSESSMENT
RESOURCES & PLANNING

EXPERIENCE
GATHER
COLLABORATE
EXPAND
ENHANCE
faculty supported through services like the Chester Fritz Library and the Office of Instructional Development. Maintaining teaching and learning quality also means ensuring appropriate support services for students, such as student orientation, laboratories, and cutting edge learning spaces like the new SCALE-UP classroom. Teaching must be followed by assessment (Criterion 4) to ensure that learning outcomes achieved are consistent with what is intended by faculty, and the institution must pay attention to concerns like retention and graduation rates to ensure that the University’s commitments to students are fulfilled. And none of those quality standards can be fully met unless the institution as a whole is managing its resources and planning (Criterion 5) in ways that allow every step of the process to occur as intended.

It is through the quality teaching, research, and service, carried out in ways consistent with these five HLC criteria, that the Exceptional UND vision is fulfilled.

- The student experience is enriched;
- Gatherings are encouraged;
- Collaboration is facilitated;
- UND’s presence is expanded;
- The quality of life for faculty and staff is enriched.

However, the relationship between Exceptional UND and the HLC criteria for institutional quality is both supportive and circular: while achieving quality measures becomes the foundation for achievement of the Exceptional UND priorities, pursuing those priorities also improves the quality of the entire institution as measured by the five accreditation criteria.

Linking the Self-Study and Exceptional UND: Looking Forward

The relationship of the five HLC criteria for reaccreditation to the Exceptional UND vision is evident in every chapter of the self-study. In the chapter on Criterion 3, Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support, for example, readers learn that UND has become a better University through Exceptional UND initiatives like the new SCALE-UP classroom and First-Year Seminar program – both of which were designed as strategies for the priority of enriching the student experience. In the chapter on Criterion 1, Mission, team members report on programs that fulfill the mission beyond the boundaries of campus, citing, for example, the art exhibits at the Empire Theatre, an Exceptional UND initiative aimed at expanding UND’s presence.

Although alignment between self-study findings related to the five HLC quality criteria and the Exceptional UND priorities is already clear, the next steps in UND’s future will involve finding new ways to build on the self-study. As promised by past-Provost LeBel and reaffirmed by current-Provost Thomas DiLorenzo, the institution will use self-study findings, which identify areas of need and opportunities for growth as well as areas of strength, to continue making progress toward the institutional mission and vision. Key findings regarding each of the five criterion areas are described in the pages that follow.
CRITERION ONE
MISSION

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

Overview

The University’s mission statement is both broad and specific in its scope, and it continues to be the basis for implementation of the University’s strategic vision. In the decade since the 2003 HLC visit, a revised mission statement has not been considered, but this self-study identifies a need for establishing a regular process for review and revision or re-approval of the mission. However, the self-study process also demonstrated that the mission continues to function as an accurate and effective map for institutional decision making.

UND engages in institutional planning based on its mission. This is evidenced through two separate strategic plans and the current Exceptional UND Strategic Initiative. Numerous units have engaged in more focused strategic planning or visioning. This planning has been conducted in alignment with the University’s mission and vision, and more recently, Exceptional UND. The University’s mission serves as the framework for the institution’s strategic vision and planning, guiding institutional operations at all levels within the organization.

Exceptional UND includes five priorities that serve to define the campus community’s shared vision for the future. These priorities, identified through a process involving campus-wide input, provide guidance as the mission of the institution is enacted. The five strategic priorities are:

1. Enriching the student experience;
2. Encouraging gathering;
3. Facilitating collaboration;
4. Expanding UND’s presence;
5. Enhancing quality of life.

Annual Report templates for both academic and nonacademic units have been revised to align with the five strategic priorities, and evidence of how each institutional unit is meeting the UND mission and charting progress toward the priorities of the University has been collected annually beginning in the academic year of 2011-12. Since Exceptional UND is still early in its implementation, full measures of achievements and institutional transformation are not yet available. However, achievements are already being documented and plans for measures of effectiveness have been developed.

Academic programs, student support services, and the institutional enrollment profile are consistent with UND’s mission as can be demonstrated by a wide variety of examples. To promote student success, for example, UND provides appropriate support services, meeting students’ needs from admission to graduation. In 2006, UND built a $20 million Wellness Center. The institution has increased availability of key study spaces, such as within the Chester Fritz Library, and it has provided classroom spaces intentionally designed to be conducive to effective
student learning. The Chester Fritz Library has increased the number of scholarly electronic resources available, including journals, books and government documents. In addition, the Library has created digitally formatted collections from its unique Special Collections texts, images, and videos.

UND’s enrollment profile is not specified within the mission. However, the institution serves students living in resident housing, in Greek houses, and in the community, as well as students living elsewhere and taking courses at a distance. UND’s approximately 220 fields of study span all levels of education and draw students from the nation and the world. This diversity in student populations is appropriate for an institution with the breadth of mission that characterizes UND. In the fall of 2012, UND’s 15,250 students came from every state, eight Canadian provinces, and more than 50 nations. A significant population of international students comes to UND as a result of programs provided through the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, especially programs in flight training and related fields.

Within UND’s mission is a statement on Diversity and Pluralism. Consistent with that statement, President Kelley created the UND Diversity Advisory Council (DAC) in December of 2010. The Council replaced the Diversity Advisory Subcommittee of the Council on Campus Climate. The DAC completed an environmental scan that included a SWOT analysis of nine key background documents, developed mission and vision statements, created operating procedures, and made recommendations to move the campus forward on its commitment to diversity. The University intends to hire for a new senior-level leadership position in order to strengthen and further advance the University’s commitment to diversity and pluralism.

UND has a special constitutional mission to serve American Indian students. Many academic and student support programs focused on Native Americans have been developed on campus, and they draw significant numbers of students to the University. In 2012-13, slightly over 2 percent of the University’s students identified themselves as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Although this represents a small proportion of the overall student population, it remains a significant number.

Several departments and academic programs have responsibilities that include supporting academic success for a diverse student population. There are currently 15 centers and service units available to support members of diverse communities on campus. The UND Office of International Programs promotes and supports international education through study abroad opportunities, as well as providing support for the UND’s international population in a wide variety of ways. Events such as Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, Feast of Nations, and International Nights featuring a wide variety of ethnic meals from across the world are supported by UND and held on campus each year to celebrate diversity on campus, in the community, and around the globe. These events advance the campus environment and enhance the quality of life for faculty, staff, and students.

Exceptional UND articulates a shared vision of purpose and resources focused on service to the state of North Dakota as well as people across the state, the region, the nation, and the global community. Online and Distance Education, a
part of the Office of Extended Learning, facilitates the delivery of the University’s courses, graduate certificates, and degree programs in online and distance formats, both within North Dakota and beyond. It also offers an array of nonacademic courses for individuals seeking career or personal development.

UND achieved full status as a Carnegie Foundation Engaged Campus in 2010. The Center for Community Engagement takes primary responsibility for increasing service learning and other experiential learning opportunities and for promoting and supporting public scholarship. Partnerships in service are a key component of UND’s Engaged Campus activities. A joint Master of Public Health (MPH) program was started as a partnership between UND and North Dakota State University (NDSU), for example, and the Nonprofit Leadership Program serves the public through curricular opportunities. The Center for Rural Health at the School of Medicine & Health Sciences has been designated as one of six national rural health research centers by the federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

UND sponsors a wide variety of public service activities that respond to the needs of external constituencies, communities, and stakeholders. Events such as the “Wake Up to UND” breakfast (an annual event, co-sponsored by the Grand Forks/ East Grand Forks Chamber of Commerce and the University) and a “Be Connected” event, in partnership with the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals, demonstrate the connection between the University and the local community.

The University’s economic impact on the state totals more than $1 billion annually as a result of the research, education, economic development, employment, and public outreach activities occurring through the institution, consistent with the mission. This is linked in no small part to recent initiatives, innovations, and successes at the University.

Areas of Strength

- The Exceptional UND Strategic Vision has brought inspiration, innovation, and intentionality to developing many new initiatives throughout the campus community; those initiatives are advancing the University’s mission for the future.
- There is strong congruence between academic program mission statements and the UND mission statement.
- We are keenly aware of the diversity of the society in which we operate and are striving to meet the needs of the people we serve.
- Under the current administration we have advanced key elements of our mission through the creation of the Diversity Advisory Council and the Vice President for University & Public Affairs.
- UND plays a distinctive role, in partnership with our surrounding community, in enriching the intellectual, economic, cultural, and social vitality of Greater Grand Forks and the state of North Dakota.
Opportunities for Improvement

• Since the mission statement itself has not been reviewed for some time, it is recommended that the institution initiate a review process and establish a timeline for regular review.

• Campus units should continue work to align their own strategic plans to the Exceptional UND priorities and the University mission and vision statements.

• Improved coordination of public service activities and efforts to carry the message of UND to external constituents should be continued.

• Strengthening observation and awareness of the region and increasing networking with other institutions, agencies, and organizations can help the University identify needs and opportunities for participation.

Looking Forward

• The institution should hire a senior leader in diversity and inclusion to facilitate coordinated efforts to advance our mission.

• The institution should continue to support the role of the Vice President for University & Public Affairs in providing print and online directories of public service programs and in carrying the message of UND’s service to the public and external constituents.
CRITERION TWO
INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

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

Overview

UND is committed to ethical and responsible conduct. Achievement of the institution’s highest aspirations for integrity poses clear challenges. Despite that, the University has developed policies which are fair and ethical, the institution is committed to freedom of expression, it ensures the responsible discovery and application of knowledge, and it exerts significant effort to present itself clearly and completely to students and the public. The University also acts with integrity in its relationship with its governing board, particularly in relation to institutional autonomy and the freedom to make decisions that are in the best interest of the institution.

The issues addressed in Criterion 2 were investigated through an extensive search for documents that presented University and governing board policies. Researchers conducted the document search first from the perspective of a naïve student, faculty member, or member of the general public. Team members asked themselves questions like these: “How might a faculty member look for information in a case of suspected academic dishonesty?” “How might a prospective student look for details on a particular program of interest?” “How might a student, staff, or faculty member experiencing discrimination seek out policies, resources, and assistance?”

Team members began these searches by using the UND home page and the A-Z Index but then broadened as various University personnel were contacted to fill in information gaps. The search sought out information on policies and actions concerning a wide range of topics including the Campus Quality Survey, the Code of Conduct, the Code of Student Life, conflict of interest, discrimination, ethics, the Faculty Handbook, Human Resources, legislative bills, nepotism, news accounts, the North Dakota State Constitution, the North Dakota State University System, the Pathways to Success program, personnel issues, policy manuals, privacy, recruiting, the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) meetings, student life, student responsibilities, student rights, the UND constitution, and departmental information from across UND.

After documenting the existence of various policies and procedures, committee members corresponded with and/or interviewed significant persons in positions of responsibility related to those policies and procedures. These individuals included the Chancellor, SBHE members, members of UND’s executive team, UND’s Affirmative Action Officer, the Director of Human Resources and Payroll Services, the University’s legal counsel, and the Information Technology Security Officer. These interviews served to flesh out the policies and gather evidence regarding implementation and effectiveness.

The evidence collected suggested that UND strives to operate ethically and transparently based on having a wide-range of policies in place, making extensive efforts to disseminate information publicly and appropriately, and having strategies for
enforcement in cases where breaches of ethical conduct occur.

At the same time, there is room for improvement. Some of the policies were more difficult to find than is desirable, and policies are not always clearly communicated to campus constituencies. Some of the problems identified, especially those related to research issues, appeared to be a result of the rapid growth of the research enterprise at UND. Finally, the interviews with members of the SBHE, the Chancellor, and senior UND leadership provided evidence that the State Board, functioning as UND's governing body, acted autonomously and, within the constraints of a state-wide system, with the best interest of the University in mind.

Areas of Strength

• UND presents itself clearly and completely to students and the public. Most information is clearly listed, is redundant, and can be found on many different sites with minimal effort.

• The SBHE, as UND's governing board, endeavors to make decisions that serve the best interests of the University. The board also endeavors to ensure that UND operates with integrity. Given the structure of higher education in North Dakota and the constraints under which the Board functions, this demonstrates a real commitment to the University.

• A number of SBHE actions demonstrate their commitment to improving the entire NDUS, including UND. An additional number of actions demonstrate their commitment to protecting and improving UND specifically. There is cautious optimism that current changes in the entire NDUS and the SBHE will continue to strengthen UND's integrity and support continuing success.

• The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to academic freedom and the pursuit of truth, and policies supporting these are long-standing.

• The University ensures that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly. A great many policies have been developed in support of ethical operations in both academic and research areas.

Opportunities for Improvement

• Ensuring systematic analysis of grievances and other disputes would enable identification of problematic patterns. The newly created Ombuds position will help address information needs in this area.

• Work to improve the website for the Office of Research is underway at this time. The new website is expected to improve communication regarding key policies.

• Maintaining critical research records in paper form is unwieldy and retrieval is problematic. A committee is working to address the need for a better system.
Next Steps

- Research policies are not always understood by faculty, staff, and students. Better communication of such policies is necessary to avoid problems that could result from incomplete knowledge about the existence or meaning of key policies.

- Clarifying the lines of responsibility for implementation and enforcement of academic dishonesty policies would be useful for students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

- In view of evolving standards for ethical research, the University should consider mandating training for all graduate students and making training widely available for faculty and staff.
CRITERION THREE
TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

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

Overview

UND provides a high quality education by a number of measures. Degree programs offered at the University are current and appropriate. The institution provides students with high-quality educational experiences. We provide the resources and support necessary to help students learn effectively and in an enriched educational environment.

Members of the Criterion 3 team reached these conclusions after a thorough exploration of topics including the Essential Studies Program, student research opportunities, student advising, student support, learning spaces, support for faculty and staff, and faculty evaluation. Each section of the chapter on Criterion 3 examines UND’s actions in relation to one aspect of what’s required to create a “high quality” educational experience.

One marker of high quality explored in the chapter is the extent to which academic departments and units have defined educational goals for students. Another departmental standard relates to the thoroughness with which teaching and learning effectiveness is emphasized equally across all modes of delivery. Other aspects of the criterion required close examination of the Essential Studies program, the institutional commitment to providing access to research opportunities for students, the University’s efforts to educate students about diversity, and the emphasis on ensuring that students are offered opportunities to develop skills “adaptable to a changing environment.” The education, training, and development of faculty and staff themselves are examined. Are faculty and staff carefully credentialed and evaluated? Do they have adequate supports of various kinds? Are they able to work closely with students and to provide students with the support, attention, and advising that students need to succeed at UND? The chapter concludes with a consideration of the University’s academic infrastructure—its buildings, libraries, and collections—and the University’s co-curricular opportunities as means of exploring how well the campus supports student learning.

The picture that emerges from this study is of an institution that fulfills its commitment to teaching and learning: the University offers its students many of the benefits of both a smaller teaching-centered institution combined with those of a larger research-focused institution. In addition, UND is striving to become even more student-centered by devoting resources and efforts to creating a better, more effective learning environment for students. This commitment to enriching the student learning experience is clearly articulated within the University’s Exceptional UND strategic vision. The Exceptional UND website documents many initiatives that have emerged as strategies for moving the institution toward enriching the student experience (along with the other Exceptional UND goals). Among those that strengthen teaching and learning are the following examples:
• Rigorous and engaging first-year undergraduate experiences, such as seminars, linked courses, and learning communities;

• Deep learning opportunities such as undergraduate research, experiential and service learning, and study abroad;

• Adaptive, convenient, and personalized attention to student success;

• Environment and programs that embrace diversity, understanding, and fellowship.

The institution is clearly working very hard—both through initiatives like those highlighted and through many other institutional practices—to meet the demands of higher education in the twenty-first century and advance a transformative strategic vision. However, the chapter also points to the challenge of meeting these demands within the constraints of limited resources. The University does not always have the resources that increasing student enrollments, enhanced student services, online and distance program delivery, and demands for greater accountability seem to necessitate. Among the institution’s assets is a hard-working faculty and staff; concerns remain, however, with transparency, resource allocation, and means of supporting growth in ways that are both smart and strategic.

Areas of Strength

• Student learning goals, associated with an improved culture of outcomes assessment, are defined and articulated for general education, and for undergraduate and graduate programs.

• Our general education program, Essential Studies, has been thoroughly revised and updated. This program is enabling great strides in making academic priorities of general education, inquiry, and education about diversity. The Essential Studies program was recognized by the Association for General and Liberal Studies for excellence in the design and implementation of Essential Studies.

• UND faculty is of a high quality and is regularly evaluated. Students report satisfaction with mentoring from faculty. Excellent professional development is available to enable continued excellence.

• A well-qualified staff promotes strong and regularly improving student support in key areas linked to priorities like enrollment planning and management and retention.

• Professional development for teaching and learning with technology is strong, as is technological support more generally.

• Several student-centered teaching and learning initiatives are currently underway to advance the Exceptional UND strategic vision and priorities. Areas noted include undergraduate research, First-Year Experience initiatives, and the new SCALE-UP classroom spaces.
Executive Summary

• Despite the university’s progress in enhancing teaching and learning spaces, there is a demonstrated need for additional space and renovations, including technology enhancements.

• Library resources are stretched, and in order to maintain quality support for the academic and research enterprises, may need additional funding to provide current and needed books, subscriptions, and electronic resources.

Next Steps

• Conduct an institutional analysis of workloads and faculty and staff salaries as another step toward addressing workload and salary issues raised by the HLC team in 2003.

• Continue to prioritize improvement of academic spaces, including those for both teaching and research, and seek both public and private funding resources through ongoing collaboration among the University, the Alumni Association and Foundation, the state, and private donors.

• Continue aligning the University mission and the Exceptional UND strategic vision with initiatives that clearly advance each, and especially identify and allocate resources for initiatives that facilitate teaching and learning excellence, as well as research and scholarly/creative activity, in support of delivering a “high quality education.”

Opportunities for Improvement

• Greater emphasis on consistency across delivery modes should be enhanced through quality control strategies.

• State-mandated common course numbering diminishes faculty control over transfer courses. This is a special concern regarding Essential Studies competencies developed through special emphasis course requirements which may instead be met through transferred courses including those taken as AP or dual-credit.

• Increasing numbers of courses are now taught in non-traditional formats, often including online. Additional attention is needed to ensure adequate course oversight, including improving response rates on student evaluation forms and ensuring consistency of quality across delivery modes.

• Transitional difficulties continue to affect the Essential Studies program, with some faculty and academic advisors still unclear about the program and therefore challenged to support it adequately. Additional efforts should be made to address this issue.

• Strong academic advising exists in many areas of the university, but may still vary in quality, especially when faculty act as primary advisors. Enhancing advising resources should be a priority.

• Faculty and staff workloads remain high and, as noted in the Assurance section of the 2003 Team Report, this is an area that should be addressed.
CRITERION FOUR
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 process designed to promote continuous improvement.

Overview
UND demonstrates a commitment to the evaluation and improvement of the curriculum and programs that it delivers to its students. Exceptional UND articulates a vision and a set of strategic priorities which, consistent with the institutional mission, are driving decision-making across the institution. One of the strategic priorities within Exceptional UND is “enrich the student learning experience,” and the campus commitment to that priority undergirds the emphasis on continuous evaluation and improvement.

The first component of Criterion 4 includes a focus on the policies and practices used by the institution to ensure the quality of UND’s educational programs. UND demonstrates a number of strengths in this area. For example, the University exercises appropriate oversight regarding the quality and equivalency of the credits it transcripts, both for courses completed at UND and for those for which transfer credit is awarded. In addition, academic programs across campus regularly choose to seek external accreditation by related professional bodies, including for programs where accreditation is not essential. Furthermore, UND pays attention to the success of its graduates, regularly evaluating and reviewing outcomes through various program and institutional survey practices.

Assessment of student learning is a significant component of Criterion 4. In the decade since the last comprehensive visit in 2003, UND has made significant progress in the area of assessment. As with any improvement process, additional work continues to be needed. As a whole, faculty and staff recognize that the practice of assessment is important and that incorporating assessment results into decisions made about pedagogy and curriculum improves student-learning outcomes.

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) conducts regular reviews of departmental assessment activities that are outlined in assessment plans posted on the committee site and documented in the assessment section of the Annual Report. The UAC also reviews and updates the University Assessment Plan regularly. In addition to the efforts of the UAC, faculty and staff in individual colleges and programs across campus take responsibility for conducting and overseeing assessment that occurs within their own units. Through the work of many different individuals, a culture of assessment has been developed and continues to be nurtured across the institution.

A number of indicators of quality assessment and evaluation, focused on the improvement of teaching and learning, were identified through the criterion team’s research. For example, faculty and staff understood that they are expected to be involved in assessment and to report their assessment activities, including methods used, findings obtained, and loop-closing that results,
within the annual reporting process. Processes used for both undergraduate and graduate program review include an emphasis on assessment, providing program faculty with periodic occasions to revisit previous assessment findings from a big-picture perspective. The review and revalidation process for Essential Studies courses ensures that learning in a number of individual classes, including many at the lower division level, is regularly examined and discussed.

There is significant evidence showing that faculty and staff recognize that changes to curriculum and course offerings should be evidence-driven at the outset and assessed after implementation. Two recent examples demonstrate the commitment to data-driven change: the revision of the institution’s undergraduate general education program into an award-winning program known as Essential Studies, and the implementation of interdisciplinary First Year Experience courses.

The third area of focus within Criterion 4 is on the institution’s attention to student retention, persistence, and completion of its degrees and certificate programs. Recent work on improving student retention has occurred through the formation of a joint venture involving the Divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Members of the Enrollment Management Planning Committee (EMPC) are drawing on the work of many individuals across the different colleges and student services offices to explore best practices which will serve as the basis for making recommendations designed to enhance student retention, persistence, and completion at UND.

The University has made substantial progress in the areas of assessment and information collection over the last decade, although areas of need remain. Many changes were spurred by the Higher Learning Commission report that followed the comprehensive visit in 2003, but progress has continued beyond initial efforts that sometimes were focused on compliance rather than improvement. While improvements are still needed, a stronger culture of evidence has been created and, as is especially noticeable in institution-level initiatives, is becoming an expectation. UND has experienced visible success in ensuring that assessment is part of the conversation regarding any new initiatives, both at the front end – when determining needs and possible program shape – and in planning for the future and identifying key indicators that will be used to determine program efficacy. This is a compelling indication of the seriousness with which assessment and evaluation are viewed at the University.

Areas of Strength

- At an institutional level, there is a clear recognition of the need for change to be evidence-driven and for changes to be evidence-tested.
- There is general recognition within both academic and non-academic programs that the practice of assessment is important and aids in the improvement of student learning outcomes.
- All departments are required to engage in assessment of learning within programs of study.
- Assessment and analysis are required to be described in annual reports.
• Periodic review of both undergraduate and graduate programs provides an overarching perspective, encompassing information from annual reviews, accreditation reviews, and Essential Studies course revalidations.

• UND exercises appropriate oversight regarding the quality and equivalency of the credits it transcripts, whether completed at UND or through transfer.

• Departments and colleges use assessment data to make decisions designed to improve student learning.

Opportunities for Improvement

• Academic and non-academic programs should continue their assessment practices and improve on them, bearing in mind the goal of making use of findings for program improvement.

• Continuing emphasis on regular and systematic documentation of assessment results and findings remains essential.

• The quality of assessment activities across campus is uneven with some departments and programs regularly engaged in useful practices leading to program improvements while others continue to struggle.

• Mechanisms need to be established to assist departments that have not yet been able to make strong and regular use of assessment.

• Ongoing efforts to engage additional faculty in assessment continue to be important and could be further facilitated by evaluation systems for promotion and tenure that more clearly articulate expectations for and place value on this kind of work.

• Funding models should be developed that reward data-driven decisions, including at the departmental level.
CRITERION FIVE
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.

Overview

Criterion 5 asks the University to consider whether it (a) operates with sufficient resources (i.e., fiscal and personnel) and infrastructure (i.e., physical and technological); (b) has appropriate governance and administrative structures for effective leadership and collaboration; (c) engages in effective planning and resource allocation; and (d) demonstrates efforts to continuously improve the institution. In studying these four areas, criterion team members examined how well the University fulfills its mission, improves the quality of its educational offerings, and prepares for future challenges and opportunities.

Over the past decade, the University experienced numerous challenges including departures that required a completely new leadership team and an NCAA ruling that led to a long, embroiled battle over the University’s athletic logo. In spite of these events, UND moved forward by paying attention to efforts that would impact its resource base, planning activities, and steps toward institutional effectiveness. The University’s strengths in the area of resources, planning, and institutional effectiveness have aided institutional success. These strengths may be summed-up under three key themes: a strong foundation of resources and infrastructure building, a decision-making process that emphasizes inclusion and participation in thoughtful (though limited) planning and action, and an organizational culture that values continuous improvement.

UND has a strong foundation of resources and infrastructure that make it possible to fulfill its mission of teaching, research, and service. The University’s steady revenue stream and controlled levels of expenditures have reflected the fiscal stewardship exercised by institutional leaders. In addition, UND has demonstrated care for one of its greatest assets: its people. The University has invested in its faculty and staff by dedicating significant resources to salary increases and offering professional development opportunities to its already well-qualified personnel. UND has also paid attention to its campus environment. It has conducted planned capital improvements and construction projects as well as elevated its technological infrastructure.

The University’s policies and procedures demonstrate the value the institution places on inclusion and participatory governance. Decisions are made largely through the committee structure to ensure full vetting of issues and input from multiple constituencies. Furthermore, key stakeholders, particularly those associated with the UND Foundation, which partners with the University in reaching out to alumni and other friends, are invited to offer feedback, when appropriate, that can assist in advancing the institution. While this approach has led to thoughtful planning and actions, one concern has been that specific directions and concrete objectives are not fully articulated. Clearly defining
objectives could enable even greater success for the institution.

A third strength is UND’s culture of continuous improvement. The University embodies a culture of improvement that enhances the educational environment, as exemplified by recent support for programs in molecular and integrative biology, petroleum engineering, chemical engineering, public health, medicine, entrepreneurship, and the digital humanities. The University values such change when systematic processes provide evidence of mission-driven opportunities that could lead to improvement.

However, members of the Criterion 5 team also identified a number of area of need related to resources, planning, and institutional effectiveness. Three broad themes emerged in this area.

First, the campus planning process requires more deliberate and cohesive actions to enable the University to fulfill the Exceptional UND vision. While the five Exceptional UND priorities provide a vision for the University, a more clearly defined and articulated planning process that fully integrates academic planning, campus master planning process, and resource allocation would offer more guidance for implementing the vision. Similarly, increased coordination across departments and divisions in defining and prioritizing goals, objectives, and strategic actions along with performance indicators would guide decision-making and provide measures of progress in achieving the Exceptional UND priorities.

Second, in conjunction with a comprehensive campus master planning process, there is a need for a campus space management policy as well as a more detailed plan to address deferred maintenance and related funding needs. While the University maintains a beautiful campus, space utilization is a concern in some key aspects of the institution. In addition, the research enterprise could be strengthened through improved laboratory spaces and staffing to support research administration activities.

Third, with the reorganization of campus technology support units, attention should be paid to regaining and maintaining the momentum of the Core Technology Plan, with a special focus on maintaining a technological infrastructure suitable for a research University. Further, with the increasing demand for timely and relevant data, consistent data definitions and reporting standards are needed to allow standardized outputs to and from colleges and divisions.

These issues suggest that future reorganizations will present potential challenges for the University as the Exceptional UND vision continues to be pursued. A University-wide planning team could provide efficient and effective coordination of these multiple steps and plans.

In addition, UND will likely face new and complex challenges in future years. For instance, as a state entity, the University must be responsive in addressing the state’s needs and comply with operational mandates. Thus, as with the recent adoption of a new funding model, UND (responding to eventually-codified SBHE policies) must move quickly to align internal practices with the state’s approach while maintaining operational integrity. Similarly, as research universities become increasingly complex to meet accountability requirements and compete for scarce resources, the University will need to be strategic in addressing the changing environment. However, UND has demonstrated its capacity
as an organization to learn from experience and transform those lessons into principles for future action.

The University is equipped to face future challenges as it has overcome many significant distractions and continually refocused attention on its vision and plans for the future. With the nickname controversy resolved and a stable institutional leadership team, the University has been able to move from a tactical to a strategic leadership approach. Equally important, University leaders have embraced the growing national attention being given to student success by collaborations bridging the Divisions of Student and Academic Affairs. These joint efforts break the metaphorical silos typically found in higher education and realign institutional focus on support for student learning and enhancement of the academic experience. UND is well-positioned to continue its role as a research University serving the state and society, and it possesses the time, energy, and dedication to move forward within the vision of an Exceptional UND.

Areas of Strength

- The University has a strong foundation of resources and stable streams of revenue, which are a reflection of careful fiscal stewardship.
- The University has made fiscal choices that prioritize investing in the key resources of faculty and staff.
- UND has conducted planned capital improvements and construction projects and is elevating its technological infrastructure.
- UND uses a decision-making process that is inclusive, participative, and functional.
- The University has a strategic vision generated by campus conversations on Exceptional UND, with priorities that have generated initiatives to enrich the student experience, encourage gathering, facilitate collaboration, expand UND’s presence, and enhance the quality of life.
- Exceptional UND has guided strategic decision making under the current administration and encouraged intentional collaboration across the Divisions of Academic Affairs, Finance & Operations, and Student Affairs, while facilitating innovation at the college, school, or unit level.
- The University has an organizational culture that values continuous improvement.

Opportunities for Improvement

- While campus planning processes have led to thoughtful planning, they require more deliberate and cohesive action steps to fully support the Exceptional UND vision.
- There is a need for a campus space management policy and a more detailed master plan to address deferred maintenance and related funding needs.
- With the reorganization of the campus technology infrastructure nearing completion, UND should focus on regaining and maintaining the momentum established under the Core Technology Plan.
Next Steps

• Continue building on strengths of the University’s new senior leadership team.

• Continue moving forward to advance University priorities following the resolution of the Fighting Sioux nickname and logo controversies.

• Adapt quickly and appropriately to changes emanating from the North Dakota University System and the State Board of Higher Education’s evolving vision and revised policies.

• Continue to emphasize activities that bridge the Divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs in an effort to improve the student learning environment and experiences and facilitate student success in meaningful and measurable ways.