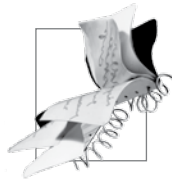


9
CHAPTER NINE
*Retrospect and
Prospect*





Chapter Nine:

Retrospect and Prospect

What We Have Learned from the Self-Study

Preparing the self-study was a valuable learning experience for all those who were involved in its development. UNL is a large and complex operation. This activity brought together a wealth of information, ideas and perspectives as we endeavored to describe the work of the university. As those who worked most directly with the production of the self-study often said, “no one knows all there is to know about this university – or even a big portion of it.” It took the input and expertise of many people to supply the information needed to write this document. And in the process, we all learned more about our university.

It is now essential that we find ways to share this experience with the university community at large, for what we have learned tells a significant and, in many ways, exciting story. Our future success requires that faculty and staff at the university know more about it as a whole, not just the areas in which they operate. This is especially the case as we develop more collaborations and cross-fertilizations among our many specialties and focus our work more directly in the areas of greatest potential and need.

During the fall semester, and perhaps throughout the 2006-07 academic year, we will use a variety of approaches to help the university community, as well as our key constituents, learn more about the story this self-study tells. We will provide information through e-mails, the *Scarlet*, *Daily Nebraskan* and alumni publications. We will host various kinds of forums and unit meetings in our efforts to share the self-study with the broadest audience possible.

We will discuss with our colleagues and constituents what we've learned, our accomplishments, our strengths, our challenges and our prospects. We reflect on these matters in sections that follow.

The traditional view of a university as a gathering of young people in a residential community where knowledge was discovered, preserved and disseminated was undergoing change, perhaps transformation. New kinds of students in many locations now asked for what they thought a university could provide, some of it hardly above instruction in trades. The new president and his board might well have to reshape higher education, providing immediately useful training without neglecting the philosophical underpinnings of higher education. The increasing demands on the University for transferable technology and the availability of private funding for directed research threatened to modify the historically independent mission of higher education. In a competitive world where intellectual skills were in both practical and ideal demand, the future shape of higher education would be wonderful to observe. Opportunities in Nebraska had not yet been exhausted.

Robert Knoll

Prairie University, 1995, Page 189 (Describing the prospects for the university in 1995)

What have we learned in doing the self-study?

We learned several important lessons as we developed the self-study.

The basic character of our university was established early.

This character continues to serve us well and should always be at the forefront of our planning. It's OK to be a Nebraska institution with Nebraska roots while at the same time being engaged with the global community. As Charles Bessey demonstrated in our formative years, scientists can make major disciplinary contributions with national and international implications while focusing on issues of importance to Nebraska and to our university.

Balance is important in our endeavor.

We must find that balance between institution-wide planning and local initiative that will produce the best results. What happens on the institutional level will provide essential direction. What happens on the unit level will provide the creative spark to realize that direction. Balance is also necessary between special initiatives and those “bedrock” activities that we want to carry out as a higher education institution. Both are indispensable to our success. We will better realize this balance if we engage thoughtfully in our strategic planning and collect information about the results of our activities that we then use for further development and planning.

Excellence in the undergraduate teaching mission is of great importance to UNL.

We invest heavily to help faculty and students engage most productively in the teaching and learning enterprise. Often faculty who join us from other higher education institutions tell us that teaching is more valued here than where they had been. We have some evidence of success from these investments. Faculty have received national recognition for their teaching improvement efforts; students have scored well on professional and licensure examinations. The chancellor has said our students should have experiences that reflect the richness of a major research university. A number of UNL programs, such as the UCARE program, are providing important opportunities for students to be involved in research with faculty and under the guidance of faculty. We need to continue to increase these opportunities and work harder to integrate research experiences into regular course offerings as well. Continued conversations about teaching and learning at UNL are essential to

support the pride we take in our teaching mission. This may be even more important given the teaching-learning environment that today's undergraduates inhabit, one very different from that experienced by faculty when they were students.

Efforts to redevelop our general education program hold promise to prepare all UNL students to live and work in a culturally and technologically diverse society.

The faculty working on the general education revision have developed some overall institutional objectives to serve as the basis for students' general education experiences at UNL. Feedback received to this point, externally as well as internally, suggests this is both a highly challenging and promising way to go about our program revision. We, like many large institutions, have not yet developed a strong sense of what we want all of our students to have achieved when they graduate. The general education program revision holds promise for accomplishing this, as well as for developing a method of assessing the overall achievement of our graduates over time.

From its very beginning we have advocated diversity in our teaching and in our faculty and student body.

We are not located in a very racially diverse state, so it may well be that regardless of good faith efforts, we may never achieve the racial diversity of institutions in states with greater and more diverse populations. But these good faith efforts must continue and must be redoubled. Nebraska is currently experiencing a higher degree of immigration of people from other countries than it has for a number of decades. Appreciating and understanding racial and ethnic diversity will be vital to our state's success. And we must also champion diversity on other dimensions. We had an early start as a higher education institution in providing programs for students with various forms of disability. We must continue to build in this direction. As an institution we have had some notable successes in establishing international programs, but we can do much more in this arena. Conversations are in process relative to this and task forces, emerging from our academic strategic planning effort, are now providing guidelines for future expansion of these efforts. Our highly successful distance programs have been one avenue for bringing us students with greater diversity in age and experience. We must be certain, too, that we seek faculty who bring us diversity in terms of their scholarly approaches, and whose research is mindful of the diverse populations we serve.

A major purpose of our academic strategic planning process is to “bring things together.”

As is evident in Chapter 5 (Criterion 2) we are a planning organization. But we will get better results from our resources if we make certain these plans are related to and directed toward common goals and purposes. To succeed in adhering to a vigorous direction for our work, we need to refine our database so that it provides the information needed to assess what our products are and how to improve them. An important step in the months ahead is to link our goals and our database. This task is highly challenging and most likely will be achieved only in part but must be addressed nonetheless. We need continuing discussion about what we mean by excellence and the identification of the areas in which we will become excellent. That’s what our prioritization exercise is about. These discussions must be ongoing, especially given the dynamic nature of the society in which we work.

We must seek the most successful ways to communicate with and listen to our stakeholders and constituents.

While communicating with our stakeholders always has been important, it is of special significance today when the university is seeking to sharpen its focus. We want to retain and enhance our relevance to Nebraskans and also respond to national and international issues and needs. The dilemma for any land-grant institution is to balance the demands of constituents for solutions to contemporary problems against the critical role the university plays in preparing for the future. Important work is under way in the university about how to communicate our intent and our achievements most effectively to our constituents. It needs to continue.



Since our last accreditation visit, we have worked harder to establish priorities and use benchmarks for identifying our progress.

Being effective at establishing and meeting priorities is critical to the future of our institution. Our academic strategic planning initiative has been put in place in part to take us to the next step in targeting resources to priorities and ensuring constant evaluation of what we do. Engaging the faculty actively in this work is essential to making the best decisions.

How have we met the accreditation criteria?

We have summarized briefly below the major ways in which the University of Nebraska–Lincoln has met and continues to meet accreditation criteria.

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity.

We have had a strong sense of purpose throughout our history as an institution. Our commitment to our tripartite mission and to carrying out our responsibilities as both a land-grant and an AAU institution is clear in all that we do. Recent activities have produced a renewed sense of mission. The *2020 Vision* report and our statement of core values provide us with our direction for the years ahead as an institution.

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future.

We have been highly involved in planning, both internally and with partners. Comparisons with other universities indicate that we use our resources efficiently and economically. Our new academic strategic planning initiative has the promise to bring our planning efforts together in ways that will ensure that our resources are targeted to our goals and to important state, national and international needs.

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching.

We have invested heavily in supporting faculty and students in the teaching-learning process and have been recognized nationally for this. Our students fare well in national licensure and other examinations. The importance of undergraduate teaching was demonstrated in the priority it was given when we recently faced a major budget reduction. Over the last decade we have progressed considerably in making attention to outcomes assessment a part of our institutional culture.

Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge.

We have achieved major advances in the strength of our research productivity in recent years. Our scientists and other scholars are important leaders in a number of fields. By any measure we are on an upward path in terms of research and scholarly productivity.

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service.

We continue to honor our land-grant tradition by being highly active in outreach activities through which we apply the results of our research and scholarship to real-world problems and situations. We demonstrate a strong commitment to translating scholarly knowledge into practice and respond effectively both to ongoing and current needs of our constituents.

Being a Future-Oriented Organization.

Our core values statement along with reports such as the *2020 Vision* focus us on the future. Our academic strategic planning process provides an important tool to ensure that we are responding appropriately to the changing environments in which we work. We continue to enhance our technology capabilities and to use technology to conduct research and teaching in new and effective ways.

Being a Learning-Focused Organization.

Our attention to the development of our outcomes-assessment capacity is reflective of our focus on learning. We are constantly looking for ways

to support the learning of our students, constituents, staff and faculty. The development of the Office of Undergraduate Studies, the Initiative for Teaching and Learning Excellence and the Peer Review of Teaching Project exemplify our commitment to enhancing teaching and learning. We have made a wide range of resources available to teachers and learners to help them achieve at the highest level.

Being a Connected Organization.

Our commitment to a culture of service through outreach is strong. We are responsive to the needs of our state and beyond and are well connected with our constituents. We are increasingly involved in collaboration with other organizations. Important discussions about the directions of our institution take place on a continuing basis through our organizations such as the Academic Planning Committee, the Academic Senate, special ad hoc task forces, and our strategic planning process. We study ourselves as an institution through processes such as the Gallup® survey.

Being a Distinctive Organization.

Our history provides us our distinctive character. We emphasize our tripartite mission and the importance of the interrelationships among these dimensions of our work. We relate closely to our state, providing a range of services. We are accountable to our state. As every chancellor learns quickly upon assuming that position, the people of Nebraska believe we are their university. We have a commitment to diversity in a broad sense, starting in the early years of our history when we were among the earliest institutions to embrace women in graduate programs and African Americans on the athletic field to today when we provide strong support to students with disabilities and have teacher education programs targeted to increase the number of Native American and Hispanic teachers in the state. We are self-reflective, as can be seen in our many planning activities, and committed to continuous improvement.

What have we found to be our strengths?

Doing the self-study made us even more aware of certain strengths we have as an institution which must continue to be honored and developed; we discuss these attributes here.

Our relationship with the state is one in which the state expects much of the university and the university of the state.

Mutual expectations for our accomplishment and support creates a healthy situation but requires constant vigilance to maintain. We provide intellectual and cultural leadership to the state and educate

its leaders. We conduct research important to the state and bring the results of this research to those who need them through active outreach programs. The state sends us many of its young people — and increasingly those older than the traditional college-age population and those seeking continuing education — to educate, and it provides us strong state and private funding. People in the state are truly interested in the university; we must continue to demonstrate that we are interested in them. We are located in a state where there is a flat hierarchy that promotes accessibility of the university to the state and the state to the university. We pride ourselves in being a responsive institution.

We take our tripartite mission most seriously.

We are a research institution with extraordinary focus on teaching and engagement. We believe strongly that teaching, research and engagement support each other and work diligently to see that each informs the others.

We have a strong sense of direction.

We know who we are and what we want to accomplish. We believe that this is essential for the future of the university. Our Core Values express our commitments; the history of our institution provides us our bearings. We are aligning our priorities with national and international priorities as well as with the needs of the state. We will carry out those activities in which we can make excellent, vital contributions.

We have a strong momentum in our quest for excellence.

The last decade has been one of significant accomplishment and progress at UNL. We have raised our sights and have made important strides in becoming a top research institution without decreasing the quality of our work in teaching and outreach.

We have initiated an academic strategic planning process to capitalize on this direction and momentum.

Through strategic planning we hope to increase our ability to operate in cross-disciplinary and collaborative approaches to accomplish our goals. And we hope to use the process to help us use our resources in the most effective ways.

What do we see for the years ahead?

The environment in which higher education is working is changing markedly and rapidly. Among the developments that must get our attention are these:

- As Frank Newman and others have pointed out in the book *The Future of Higher Education*, we are seeing an intensifying competition among higher education institutions. Higher education is being restructured from a regulated public sector to a market environment. The implications of these developments are many and



significant. Our academic strategic planning process must enable us to respond to these conditions.

- As Thomas Friedman has vividly described, we are living in a flat world. The implications of this for our faculty and students, and for our state, are powerful. What is the role of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in enabling the state of Nebraska to compete successfully in this world? Certainly it is a highly important role and perhaps calls for more from the university than ever before. We must use our planning process to make certain that our resources are being placed on the most important work.
- Students are changing. Descriptions such as those included in Rebekah Nathan’s *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* and Richard Light’s *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* suggest to us that we must be constantly alert to how best to work with our students. We believe our renewed attention to general education will serve these new students well.
- Clearly the pace and impact of change are accelerating. Higher education has often been criticized as being resistant to change; this must not describe us. We cannot be an excellent institution if we are not able to adjust our programs to areas of greatest need that are appropriate for us to address. This provides yet another challenge to our strategic planning. In these times of dramatic change, relying on our core values as an institution will be essential so that we do not lose our direction.



How are we preparing for the years ahead?

We have selected our own version of academic strategic planning to help us prepare for and respond to the challenges of our future as an institution. We believe that this approach will enable us to build on our heritage as an institution and use our resources most effectively to ensure excellent performance in the future. We requested permission of the Higher Learning Commission to do a customized/special emphasis accreditation review as a route to enhancing the way we do strategic planning. We are confident that we meet the five criteria for academic accreditation that have been established by the Higher Learning Commission. We wanted to do a self-study that would take us beyond those criteria. We are making an effort to develop an academic strategic planning process that will have meaning as we administer the university on a daily basis. Thus we established our work in academic strategic planning as the centerpiece of this review. We believe this effort will help us improve our academic strategic planning process both because of the attention we will give it and because of the response that the visiting review team will provide. We look forward to their comments and observations.

As the reader can tell, we take our missions — teaching and learning, research and discovery, outreach and engagement — most seriously. We are proud to have the opportunity to conduct such important work. Being part of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln is a privilege for all who work and learn here.

We believe: “There is no place like Nebraska!”