Minnesota State University, Mankato

Report of Findings:

Campus Interviews and Discussion Groups

March 6, 2017

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Interviews and Discussion Groups
Conducted November 2016 – January 2017

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Project Goals and Parameters

Interview and discussion group sessions were conducted with key stakeholders of Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). The purpose was to understand the university campus climate and its potential impact on diversity and inclusion (D&I).

A culture of change naturally results when new people and ideas are blended with the status quo. However, any beneficial changes are jeopardized without an environment and climate that embraces differences. For D&I to flourish, it is vital the existing environment and climate feel safe and secure for all stakeholders. It is also important stakeholders do not feel their identities diminished as changes from D&I emerge. Unless these baselines are met, established stakeholders will find it difficult to accept others into their circles. Similarly, underrepresented stakeholders will find it difficult to find common ground and harmony with established groups.

Interviews and discussion group sessions were designed with these concepts in mind and centered on MNSU's vision. Our goals were to ascertain stakeholder thoughts on how safe and secure they feel, how welcomed and recognized they feel, how comfortable they are taking risks with other groups and stakeholders, and how strongly they feel they can make a difference in their role(s). These areas are pivotal to building and sustaining inclusive communities and cultures.

The stakeholders who participated in the sessions included administrators, faculty, staff, students and community members. Completed sessions are summarized within this report. In addition, preliminary findings were used to incorporate inquiries into the campus-wide survey. In total, 24 sessions were completed:

MNSU Sessions	Sessions Completed
Interviews	
Administration	1
Faculty	2
Staff	3
Students	5
Nearby Community	1
Total Interviews	12
Discussion Groups	
Administration	2
Faculty	--
Staff	--
Faculty/Staff	7
Students	3
Nearby Community	0
Total Groups	12
Total Sessions	24

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A number of categories were chosen to reflect pertinent areas that influence the operation of the institution:

Category	MNSU Climate – Influential Areas (18)	
1	**Facilities and Campus Security**	
	1	Clean and safe facilities
	2	Sufficient campus security
2	**Campus Resources**	
	3	State-of-the-art facilities
	4	State-of-the-art technology and computers
	5	Established campus systems, funding, resources and support
3	**Institutional Leadership and Communication**	
	6	Strong college leadership and support
	7	Strong and consistent communication from leadership
4	**Well-being and Healthy Relationships**	
	8	Healthy relationships among staff
	9	Healthy relationships among faculty
	10	Encouragement and assistance to belong and participate
	11	Strong sense of community on campus
	12	Welcoming community close to campus
5	**Rigorous Academics**	
	13	Ample faculty and support
	14	Solid and comprehensive academic offerings
	15	Sufficient global outreach and partnerships
6	**Embracing Others and Differences**	
	16	Hospitable campus environment and activities
	17	Strong engagement with all campus cultures and groups
	18	Authentic appreciation for engagement with different cultures

Session findings are summarized by stakeholder and category. In a few instances, stakeholder findings were duplicated under different categories.

Administration

Facilities and Campus Security

Participating administrators expressed pride in their campus and facilities. Ongoing efforts by administrators to improve the physical facilities have received considerable support.

Campus Resources

Administrators acknowledged several positive areas: professional development, institutional technology, undergraduate research, student recruitment, athletics, relevant student experiences, resource allocations.

There are several areas requiring attention: high workloads, excessive paperwork, time-consuming management reporting systems, limited resources and tight budgets, low compensation for recruiting & retaining, long-standing/insular faculty leaders, insufficient financial aid.

Institutional Leadership and Communication

Many constructive areas stood out for administrators: leader development, competitiveness in marketplace, student government leadership & shared governance, student recruitment, administration and faculty relations, strong presidential leadership.

Areas that need addressing were expressed: lack of funding and budget autonomy, unclear focus from trustees and system, slow movement on initiatives and problems, risk-adverse counsel, lack of decisiveness, department silos, inadequate ability to reward and punish, too many meetings, sluggish process of shared governance, need for more student engagement, greater need for outreach.

Well-being and Healthy Relationships

Favorable areas for administrators include: welcoming campus and culture, student empowerment, practical and applied student experiences, community connections.

Areas of concern include: lack of proactive intervention, high intensity work environment, employee lack of accountability for performance, open complaints, faculty intransigence, leadership connection to ground-level activities, limited resources, limited time, minimal investment in human growth, policies/procedures that are student barriers, trust among teammates, inability to be critical of each other.

Rigorous Academics

Administrators shared the following areas where they are having success: leader development, passionate and engaged faculty, teaching-focused environment, experiential and applied projects for students.

Areas that require greater focus: coordination of student logistics such as course rescheduling and program mapping, academic advising, support & incentives for student travel/study abroad, student recruitment and retention, continual assessment and updating of curriculum, successful grant writing.

Embracing Others and Differences

Administrators feel positive about the following areas: commitment to diversity, international student enrollment, welcoming campus, ongoing conversations on building and maintaining diversity.

Areas that require greater attention: expanded curriculum, multi-disciplinary diversity, applied grants, interacting with local area that lacks diversity.

Notable Findings and Commentary - Administration

Administration actively encourages D&I and supports several priorities that connect individuals and groups. They fund and support facilities and campus organizations that encompass a wide range of stakeholders and affinity groups. MNSU is well regarded for its efforts to create a welcoming and multi-cultural environment. Because of their remarkable efforts to acknowledge and bring different cultures together, there is greater need for relationship and community building. This is a natural next step to honor differences. However, they face many barriers that undermine efforts toward this goal. The most significant barriers illuminated through the interviews and discussion groups: limited funds and resources, not enough prioritization of the many priorities from Administration, sluggish communication and movement from Administration when addressing challenges to strategies and initiatives, and a perception of indecisiveness. There also appears to be limited trust among administrators to speak openly about challenges they see and experience. The Cabinet should do more to ensure they work together as a unified body, especially as they tackle so many initiatives that are negatively impacted due to limited time and resources. It is important for administrators to share barriers and bottlenecks that frustrate and hinder efforts. This has led to conflicting perceptions among administrators and between administrators and other stakeholders (e.g., professional development is going well versus professional development is lacking; leader communications are good versus "Where is the president?").

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Staff and Faculty

Facilities and Campus Security

Staff and faculty are pleased with campus facilities, furnishings, landscaping and emergency response capabilities. Overall, the facilities are clean and have benefitted from extensive renovations.

Some staff and faculty expressed concerns over safe spaces on campus including workplace and classroom areas. Some also expressed concerns about bathroom cleanliness.

Campus Resources

Staff and faculty acknowledged many positive areas for MNSU: ability to attract financial support, numerous student services, work opportunities for student workers, library services and support, recruitment of undergraduate and international students, professional development for faculty, project-based learning programs and preparation, clearly articulated compensation levels.

There were also a number of areas in need of attention and support: lack of sufficient advising – particularly transfer and non-traditional students, poorly publicized student resources that are hard to find on MNSU website, budget constraints coupled with high education costs, financial struggles of many students, inequitable allocation of university resources, lack of research funding and support, extensive paperwork and data collection with cumbersome analysis, inadequate training for new IT platforms, need for more student support services – application/registration/financial aid processes, lack of awareness of professional development opportunities and resources.

Institutional Leadership and Communication

Staff and faculty are supportive and complimentary of leadership in several areas: collaborative leadership and shared governance efforts, greater data-driven information, strong fiscal management and communications regarding fiscal decisions, execution of "big idea" thinking, vision for applying technology, ability to attract diverse students and nurture diverse cultures, collaboration between offices, respect of MnSCU.

Staff and faculty are concerned in a number of areas as well: need for more gradual and incremental growth, shifting goals and multiple initiatives, lack of clear direction and mandates from MnSCU, a silo management approach that impacts academic freedom, rare reception of staff/faculty ideas, insufficient communication from administration, high burnout and employee turnover, cumbersome bureaucracy and differing rules for departments, reluctance to collaborate among

colleagues, lack of discipline for supervisors who violate rules, excessive reporting, imbalance of resource allocations.

Well-being and Healthy Relationships

Staff and faculty think the institution does well in many areas that impact well-being and relations: student processes and procedures including discipline, good support for student activities and events, dedicated faculty and facilitators, good culture and environment, many positive interactions on campus, tutoring and health services, relatively affordable education.

Staff and faculty expressed concern in a number of areas that impact well-being and relations: excessive micromanagement, need for better communication between departments, favoritism in hiring and promotion, lack of expertise for some supervisors, open harassment and unresolved offenses – employees and students, slow response to grievances, trust issues, work and time pressures, too much committee time, little time to socialize, need for more advancement opportunities, need for more stress relief opportunities, need for strengthened advising.

Rigorous Academics

Staff and faculty were positive about several academic areas: solid and comprehensive academic offerings, good general education curriculum, reasonable levels of academic freedom, state-of-the-art technology that allows connections on and off campus,

Staff and faculty shared areas that could use more attention: growth and evolution of curriculum through periodic re-designs, uneven advising, need for more research/publication collaboration and support, more graduate research funding, more interdisciplinary collaboration, more communication on what constitutes transfer credits, greater ability to monitor incomplete grades and track advanced competencies in system, need to incorporate more certificate programs into offerings, need for improved student writing skills.

Embracing Others and Differences

Staff and faculty praise MNSU efforts to attract diverse students. This has resulted in steadily increasing minority and international enrollment. It has also led to diversity in other areas such as women in engineering programs and older students pursuing degrees. In addition, the increase in distance learning and contextual education has added layers of diverse thinking.

Staff and faculty also have concerns about diversity efforts and accomplishments: lack of diverse staff and faculty throughout institution and leadership, limited active

searches for diverse candidates – particularly domestic-based candidates, lack of cultural awareness and competency for many stakeholders, limited nurturing and retention of diverse employees and students – particularly persons of color, need for more diverse role models, lack of sensitivity to unique perspectives of students and employees, poor responsiveness to social justice and racial equity issues, limited funding to create equitable situations and conditions for diverse persons, polarized U.S. political climate.

Notable Findings and Commentary – Staff and Faculty

Staff and faculty are largely supportive of MNSU's mission and goals of the institution. They would welcome greater diversity on the leadership team to reflect institution goals and strategies. They want to see greater communication between departments to support student needs (less silo approaches). They appear to want more collaborative solutions with leaders and management to address economic tightness and resource constraints. They would also appreciate greater acknowledgment of pressures and stress with more outlets for relief. Given the expectations and workloads they face, there appears to be a perception that staff and faculty compensation packages are relatively low, and they are sacrificing unequally versus leaders and management.

Staff and faculty would appreciate their perspectives considered in a wider view of what it takes to protect and enhance the mission of institution. As management and staff/faculty understand and acknowledge sacrifices on both sides, they are better able to develop goals in which both management and employees (including unions) reach solidarity.

Students and Nearby Community

Facilities and Campus Security

Students are gratified with MNSU facilities and the benefits that accompany them: international center, student union, gym and training equipment, campus rock wall, safe spaces such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Center. They appreciate the number of spaces available to hang out and study. They also acknowledge the upkeep and continued improvements to campus facilities.

Several female students expressed concerns over security on campus. They did not think the present level of guards, cameras, lighting and emergency responders was enough to keep them safe. They also would like to see improvements to safety warnings when assaults occur and more consequences. In addition, they did not think existing sexual consent awareness and training has much substance, while the sexual harassment policy needs revising. Female students would also like to see greater attention to maintaining sanitary products in bathrooms (when needed, they are usually the last resort available). Students expressed concerns over

campus parking fees and fines and suggested the need for longer periods of free parking (e.g., after 5 PM). They also mentioned the need for greater bus transit (e.g., Route 1B South) on Fridays to serve students who stay on or near campus most weekends. Other areas of concern: need for gender-neutral bathrooms, limited study rooms in library, limited space in student centers, lack of environmental compost bins, limited accommodations from Accessibility Services, few ethnic/cultural fraternities and sororities.

Campus Resources

Students are positive about many areas: student resources to manage education and system efficiencies to navigate majors and credits, Institutional Diversity and the various registered student organizations (e.g., International, Women's, LGBT), expanding study-abroad programs, accessibility services for disabled, meal plans that allow students to eat despite balances due, and promotion of cultural events.

Students expressed some concerns about campus resources: excessive use of access codes (textbooks, TopHat), greater options to meet dietary needs, scholarships and search tools for available resources, policies that barely distinguish free speech and hate speech, limited number of advisors, extra FAFSA steps that prevent work study opportunities, high textbook expenses and limited reserves in library, work study compensation that does not cover living expenses, lacking of funding for student groups, limited resources for single parents including child care. One area that stirred up high emotion was institutional reliance on Wells Fargo banking services. Students were upset over issued credit cards, late fees and loan rates. They were also troubled MNSU did relatively little to promote their competitive credit union.

Institutional Leadership and Communication

Students shared a significant positive about leadership: their expressed passion for students and educational success.

The also shared many concerns about leadership: tough access to administrators, difficult to schedule time with faculty and staff, toxic environments from some professors with few consequences, little diversity within faculty and staff, slow responsiveness to student concerns and feedback, few evaluations and assessments of faculty, limited financial advising for students, little accountability when mistakes are made by Administration, lack of communication from leadership.

Well-being and Healthy Relationships

Students are appreciative in several areas: caring facilitators and directors of educational programs, registered student organizations and diverse student organizations, opportunities to participate in inclusive programs covering a variety of interests, diversity within MNSU's community health program.

Students think several areas need attention: high debt, living obligations and financial stresses, little reaching out beyond affinity groups, need for more campus-wide community events and cultural immersion experiences, little diversity up the social ladder, rising mental health, balance and stress issues, unsupportive faculty members, lack of unity among various cultural groups. Female students would like to see greater respect afforded to sexual assault survivors and resources such as survivor groups, along with more "bystander" awareness training for men.

Rigorous Academics

Students, particularly diverse students, are positive about many areas: general Ed course offerings that satisfy diverse cultures requirements, professors who understand and work with single parents and challenges, expanding programs to study abroad, increase of diverse faculty in College of Business.

Students have concerns in some academic areas: advisors' interests in student progress, lack of subject tutors, lack of sensitivity to student workloads, challenges of switching majors, inflexibility with students' military obligations, lack of awareness and sensitivity to students with disabilities (e.g., ban on using laptop computer for notes), classroom structures that inhibits interaction with classmates.

Embracing Others and Differences

Students are appreciative in several areas: space and practice to explore other cultures, Institutional Diversity department with supportive employees and student input, opportunities to pursue interests within registered student organizations, professors who embrace marginalized groups, institutional encouragement of cultural events.

Students have concerns in a number of areas: Greek fraternities need greater awareness and sensitivity to cultures and sexual consent policies, need assessment of local law enforcement in relative to people of color and sexual assault victims, need to convey history of Mankato toward Native Americans, need for more inclusivity in Honors programs, more training on relevant language and education for different cultures, lack of job appeal and competitive compensation for diverse staff and faculty, limited resources and funding issues for diversity department, restrictive scholarships for students of color, polarized U.S. political environment, need for MNSU leadership in community with little diversity.

Notable Findings and Commentary – Students/Community

Students are eager to pursue their education and life goals, but a substantial number are operating with limited resources. For many, this adds undue pressure to their efforts to succeed. To manage these stressors, students require accessible support structures. Their ability to find support on campus is key for health and wellbeing. While MNSU provides several support structures on campus, many students do not feel amply supported. When these feelings are widespread, it is difficult to cultivate strong and resilient communities.

A small, but telling example of student anxiety and frustration are their concerns over Well Fargo banking. Students indicated they thought MNSU was more concerned about its relationship with the bank than its relationships with students. Since Wells Fargo is focused on making profits versus educating students, students seem to feel they are commodities more than valued persons at MNSU. Rightly or wrongly, this negative perception is amplified because of the stresses they face.

Since students face challenges on both personal and environmental levels, MNSU must do more to acknowledge obstacles and provide greater support structures. These steps are needed to diminish concerns and anxieties and build trust. But just as important is a need for regular and ongoing communications to let students know how valuable they are to the institution.

Final Summary and Comments

Over the years, MNSU has built a great culture of inclusion on campus. Yet, this growth is threatened. Throughout our sessions, many stakeholders expressed concerns about a perpetual climate of pressure and stress with minimal relief as they perform their roles. Relationships become tense and strained when there is little time for stakeholders to rejuvenate and heal. Accordingly, diversity and inclusion have been and will continue to be negatively impacted in this climate.

We recommend MNSU do more to build and nurture its human assets. Steps that must become hallmarks for MNSU are listening and responding to stakeholder needs and concerns. They act as pressure-relief valves for stakeholders. It is also important that management share their concerns and challenges (e.g., legislative appropriations, budget constraints). This allows subordinates and other stakeholders to acknowledge the wider picture and participate in solutions. These steps will require relationship- and community-building approaches and exercises to deeply integrate into the fabric of the institution. We also recommend MNSU continue to build a more diverse leadership team to support a diverse student body and do more to increase interaction and communication between departments. These efforts can only support the fundamental goals of educating and nurturing students to be better world citizens.

During the execution of this project, we found the mission and vision of MNSU to be important parts of the institutional culture. They will become even stronger parts as leaders acknowledge problems and challenges and co-opt stakeholders to share responsibilities in solving them.