Why is Transformational Change Needed?

At the dawn of the 21st century, the educational experience at all stages of an education has become increasingly difficult to characterize. It is no longer safe to assume that we know who our learners are, who the teachers are, what the actual curriculum should be, what pathways students will take to obtain their education and where the most important learning will take place (e.g., in the classroom, in the community, in the workplace). Many changes, ranging from socioeconomic to geopolitical to demographic and cultural, have been so profound that all of the fundamentals are changing: what should be learned, how it should be learned, and when it should be learned. The compact between the teacher and the learner is changing as the responsibility for coherence ceases to rest in the hands of individual institutions or departments or instructors. No longer can individual instructors safely assume that their students will have had common experiences before they enroll in a particular class. Nor is it often the case that education is the central purpose of the lives of our contemporary students.

Among the critical issues that will shape the capacity and motivation of our nation’s postsecondary institutions to respond to the changing nature of knowledge production and the New Economy are (a) the rapidly changing state of knowledge and how knowledge is used; (b) the increasing fluidity of disciplines, by which we mean the convergence and integration of fields and methodologies---a phenomenon rarely reflected in the design or content of the undergraduate or masters level curriculum; (c) new technologies that create new opportunities for us to model, simulate, and conduct joint experimentation in cyberspace-supported collaborative environments; (d) new undergraduate populations with different motivations, educational objectives and histories of participation and success in advanced education; (e) a rapidly changing professoriate made up increasingly of people with part-time or contingent (term) appointments; (f) a proliferation of pathways and options available to students with a resulting educational environment that is complex, difficult to navigate that can easily lead to fragmentation of experiences and goals; (g) an inability to depend in the future on an endlessly growing supply of high skills, well-educated life-long learners, both domestic and international, to fill the new jobs being created in our
knowledge-based and global economy; and (h) new expectations for college graduates and new demands in the workplace; (i) new pressures to provide access to quality education as a component of community and economic development (e.g. Rochester); and, (j) new public demands for productivity, affordability and accountability.

It is also essential that we focus on the design and productivity of our core operations. We are in danger of pricing higher education out of the reach of those segments of our population who are least able and willing to bear the responsibility and attending debt burden that society persists in passing from the taxpayer to our students and their families. Without new ways of financing higher education, we will continue to see institutions slashing their budgets and raising their tuition whenever there is an economic downturn, while failing to make the changes in their campus operations, cost structure and academic programs that would make them more financially viable. It is time to practice the three R’s: Revenue enhancement, Restructuring and cost Reduction. At the same time, we must continuously improve the quality that students and communities can expect in return for their investment in postsecondary education. While we are doing that, we must stand out from the crowd if we are to attract and serve students who have many other choices.

These changing realities, as well as others that will impact the resources available to our postsecondary institutions and the policy environments in which they operate have set loose powerful socioeconomic forces that will shape the educational landscape in ways that we are only just beginning to understand. They will affect what people need to learn, when they need to learn, and where and how they will learn. These same forces will also reshape our own roles as educators and change our working relationships with other educational institutions and with employers and policymakers.

The first four Centers of Excellence offer an early response to the rapidly changing educational landscape. Although the Centers are new and there is not yet enough material for a case study, we will all want to follow their progress carefully because they represent highly visible ways in which MnSCU institutions, working with industry, are beginning to respond to the challenges enumerated above.

Case Study in Institutional Change: A Blueprint for the 21st Century

Our approach to developing the University for the 21st Century at Winona State University takes into account the complex environments in which we now operate. We will work together in ways that model the use of 21st century skills. As we undertake the implementation of our Learning for the 21st Century plans we have a number of starting premises. We are
rethinking what learning means, who our students are, how, in cooperation with our colleagues in MnSCU and in P-12, we can close the gap in participation and educational achievement among various sectors of our society and support the continuous learning that modern society demands. To articulate our educational philosophy[1], the education we offer our students must prepare them to be intentional learners who are

- empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
- informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
- responsible for their own actions and concerned for the public good.

The New University Phase. WSU has spent two years engaged in a process of study and experimentation to explore the implications of its mission and to define what it will mean to be educated in the 21st century and, most importantly, what kind of environment we must create to support an education for a new era and how we must educate for a new time and place. This process was supported by the formation of several implementation groups that developed plans in the following areas:

Academic initiatives: This group made recommendations on the basic design of the undergraduate experience and the components that would introduce an integrated and coherent learning model. Included were

1. Portfolio Development and Review (Majors and University Studies).
2. Interdisciplinary Approach to University Studies (1st two yrs., learning communities).
3. Interdisciplinary Centers of Distinction (National Child Protection Training Center, Center for Mississippi River Studies).
4. Out of class experiences (internships [local and distant], service learning, travel study [domestic and international], field study, study abroad, etc.).
5. Academically-oriented student employment opportunities (in all projects)
6. Research and Capstone experiences (Project Kaleidoscope, community of practice on undergraduate research)

Experiential Learning Institute: This represents WSU’s approach to the scholarship of teaching and learning and how this kind of research and development can support the introduction of Learning for the 21st Century (our new name for the Winona Experience). Underlying this component is an expectation that everyone at WSU is a learner, everyone is an educator
and all of us can use our energy and creativity to make WSU an exemplary university. This represents our investment in both faculty and staff.

Wellness and Fitness: This project is focused on integrating the various campus support services that promote mental and physical health and fitness for everyone as well as to assist students who encounter difficulties that might compromise their ability to learn. These plans represent the form-giving goals for the expansion of Memorial Hall in order to create a wellness center and classrooms and laboratories for our academic programs that relate to wellness and fitness.

Technology/portals: This group developed a new design for access to basic student services and set up the specifications for a technology platform that will support the creation of student portfolios that guide educational and career planning and document progress toward individual educational goals. Additionally, WSU has been a pioneer in the use of instructional technology.

Campus activities coordination: This work group developed recommendations concerning coordination and expansion of campus activities including lectures and special events and the integration of these experiences into the curriculum with the goal of creating a more engaged and connected university community.

Integrative academic services: Many institutions now co-locate related student services such as financial aid, registrar, admissions, career counseling and the like. WSU has used the past two years to engage in a radical redesign and integration of these services.

WSU-Rochester Center multicultural learning initiative: This works uses Rochester as a living laboratory in which to study and understand the social and economic effects of a rapidly changing community that is growing more diverse.

Linking community to learning: This group has designed a lifelong career development and planning approach that will assist students from the time they first contact WSU and support them throughout their undergraduate years and beyond. This group also has designed new approaches to economic and community development and an infrastructure to support university/community partnerships.

The Expansion Phase. After two years of planning, the Winona Experience - now known as the Learning for the 21st Century initiative -- was ready for implementation. To mark this transition, the phase we entered this fall is called the Expansion Phase. The Expansion Phase has three components.

The Academic Initiative Package
This is the highly visible part of the Learning for the 21st Century Expansion. Projects will include attention to the first year experience,
portfolios/coaching and academic/career planning, interdisciplinary activities, college-level initiatives, for the most part in the context of the disciplines, and projects that enhance the learning environment, such as new approaches to teaching large classes (i.e. megasections.) Of special importance will be our launching of a new approach to faculty and staff development that is built upon a basic framework of research and development that focuses upon the processes of learning and teaching. Current projects that advance this line of work include plans to create a joint faculty/staff development program with SE Technical College to facilitate better use of our respective assets and the Center of Excellence in Health Sciences Education and Practice that will enable us to provide “on-demand” professional development to the health care workforce. We will apply what we learn to our own workforce and to our partnerships with other sectors, such as P-12 education, government agencies and not-for-profits.

Expansion of our Core: Supporting The University of the 21st Century. This component will be less visible to the campus as a whole, but just as important. We will create the capacity to support an engaging and integrative approach to learning. It will include the infrastructure for career development, enhancements to our IT platform that will support portfolios, instructional design, and coordination of campus activities that will enhance the learning experience. Another expansion of the core is in Advancement, where we will create greater capacity to seek external support for our students and for program development and delivery to allow us to build on the quality programs we have in the absence of adequate funding from the state. This represents the Revenue enhancement portion of the Three R’s.

Redesign and Integration of Core Services. Innovation and experimentation always place heavy demands on the basic functions of an institution and require the development of additional capacity to handle the business of the institution in productive ways. Our goal is to free up valuable time to engage in creative thinking and time to build new working relationships. At the same time, our enrollment has grown much faster in recent years than our resource base and we must redesign our core to support our larger student body. This year we will be examining how we do the basic work of the campuses in those areas that most directly affect the work of our faculty, staff and students, with the intention of redesigning these basic functions--our core--to ensure that they can sustain the additional demands of the Expansion Phase. A foundational project in this category is Integrative Academic Services (IAS). The goal of IAS is to ensure that students do not need to learn how the institution works in order to make it work for them. Our own
organizational structure, distribution of roles and responsibilities, and ways of doing business should be transparent to students. They should not have to know how we conduct our work in order to transact business with us or to get their questions answered. In turn, this will free many of our staff to use their time very differently, in much more meaningful and supportive ways to help students be successful.
The other aspects of examining our core are buried more deeply in the fabric of our daily work. We will start with the processes we use to recruit and hire new faculty and staff and the processes we use to contract for external goods and services. Once these are completed, we will go on to other projects designed to enhance our core capacity.
Learning in a 21st Century Institution: Change as a Scholarly Act.
As we implement our own approach to learning in the 21st century, WSU is modeling the qualities of education put to good use---the concept of a university as a laboratory for exploring coherence, scholarship and citizenship and the qualities of a 21st century education.
To accomplish these goals, a University must be a true learning organization where change itself is both intentional and a scholarly act.
To accomplish this consistency of behavior a University must accomplish four tasks. We are attending to each of these very directly. The particular projects are shown in parentheses.
1. Instill a discipline of reflection and a culture of evidence, insisting that everyone back up their opinions with real information, not just perceptions (expanded accountability, benchmarking and assessment, evaluation built into the design of projects and proposals, assessment workshops.)
2. Create new patterns of conversation that encourage and support the involvement of everyone in defining the issues that will be important in building the organization. (learning communities and communities of practice, listening sessions and other strategies for talking with students)
3. Adopt a philosophy of experimentation and the active management of reasonable risks. (challenge grants, competitively awarded project funding, support for the scholarship of learning and teaching)
4. Create new ways to facilitate access to information so that everyone can make informed choices. (the open notebook—an electronic institutional portfolio)
According to David Garvin[2], “a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.” That is our goal, to become a true learning organization that creates an educational environment that will support learning for the 21st century.
Getting underway.
In the spring of 2005, the Office of Academic Affairs put out a call to the university community for implementation plans that would begin the expansion phase of the initiative. In response, Academic Affairs received 38 Implementation Plans requesting a total of $1.5 million to begin expanding the initiative. Several of the proposals "overlapped" and were considered as a group -- for example, five different plans were submitted based on supporting or designing travel or field studies. A tightly focused award package of initiatives was funded using reallocated base funds totaling approximately $500,000 and roughly $700,000 from tuition for innovative initiatives. Some elements of the package were derived from submitted implementation plans; others blended ideas from two or more sources.
The formulation of the slate of funded projects was guided by a set of clear guidelines. The projects had to offer the promise of producing visible, measurable and compelling evidence of the impact of the ideas underlying Learning for the 21st Century, expand the experience of L21 to a broader community of faculty and students, experiment with new models of learning for students, faculty and staff, and/or create new partnerships and collaborations that would extend the student experience beyond the classroom and beyond the campus. The final package of projects had the following characteristics---
· Experimenting with emerging models that support new ways of learning, with an emphasis on qualities of an educated person
· Exposing students to unfamiliar perspectives and learning environments
· Emphasizing integration and transference of knowledge
· Drawing on expanded linkages and partnerships in SE Minnesota region and beyond
The proposals that were competitive had high qualitative and quantitative impact on students and the most potential to expand participation in L21 activities, were economically feasible, practical, and, in some instances revenue-generating, offered the potential for long-term sustainability and increasing acceptance by students, faculty and staff and would yield early, visible, measurable outcomes and a scholarly basis for planning further expansion.
Faculty and staff whose projects were not funded were invited to take part in learning communities associated with the funded projects, to discuss further development of their ideas with their dean or division director and were especially invited to take part in and contributed to faculty/staff professional development events. Our goal is to help keep interested faculty and staff
involved and to help them formulate their ideas in a more compelling and actionable manner for future competitions.

The four key elements of the current academic innovation agenda are:

- **First-year Experience**
- **Learning Portfolios/Coaching**
- **Interdisciplinary Initiatives**
- **Enhancing the Learning Environment**

The individual plans or "grouped" plans that received funding align with these four key elements, and they are innovative, visible and compelling learning experiences. In addition, the package includes infrastructure initiatives to support innovation and lay a foundation for future transformation.

There are also other ways in which the university community can continue to participate in the Learning for the 21st Century initiative, in addition to the funded projects. These include exploring interests through learning communities and taking advantage of professional development opportunities resources. Most of the current projects also provide funding for students who will participate in the work. This allows us to provide more student employment that is academically meaningful and that builds skills that students need for the 21st century.

Aside from the Academic Agenda, core functions and infrastructure also were provided reallocated money. The total package consisted of academic innovation (34% of the total funding package), expanded infrastructure (28%), core functions (38%) and a modest number of small challenge grants supported from carry forward funds from FY 05.

On November 2, 2005, the Vice President for Academic Affairs issued a call for a second round of proposals to support Learning for the 21st century with an emphasis on interdisciplinary initiatives and/or community-based learning which can include coursework, projects and events and research.

**Charting Our Course**

As we enter the Expansion Phase, we are also designing what we are calling an Open Lab Notebook that will record our observations and data, define our experiments, and offer evidence of our progress. The Notebook will be an electronic institutional portfolio.
For core functions, we are using national benchmark data to guide our levels of investments and our measurement of productivity and quality of our campus operations. For infrastructure, we will be using performance data to determine how well our new integrative services are serving our students and faculty and assisting our staff in working together differently. We are designing these new measures as we prepare to implement our integrative academic services components. For our academic innovation funds, most of which are directed at the implementation of the plans developed by our study groups and supported through successful proposals submitted in response to our call for proposals in May 2005, we are using assessments generated by our participation in several national studies, including a longitudinal study of student learning organized by the AAC&U based on assessments developed by the Council for Aid to Education and supported by the Lumina Foundation. Our intention is to produce publishable findings that focus on substantive change in individual classes as well as demonstrations of institutional adaptation and change. We are interested in exploring the claims for the value of research on learning and teaching on the design and delivery of educational programs. These activities will serve to support the next phase of Learning for the 21st century as we move to full-scale implementation and sustainability.

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Policy issues
1. The concepts that are incorporated into how MnSCU distributes resources—concepts of costs, productivity, benchmarks
2. Policies that support collaboration among institutions with distinctive strengths.
3. Support for projects that entail some risk.
4. Assessment strategies that capture the quality of collaboration as well as community impact in addition to learning outcomes.