Charting the Future

Today, the MnSCU Board of Trustees will review the final version of Charting the Future. Although our Hopes and Dreams process preceded and was quite different in approach from Charting the Future, some areas overlap. You may remember that our process led us to focus on five priorities: People, Programs, Price, Place, and Pride. Some of these themes overlap with Charting: Price, for example, corresponds with the Affordability theme evident in Charting the Future. When we have used the term People as part of our hopes and dreams, we have spoken of diversity as a major component – another theme in Charting the Future. In addition, the report has a lot to say about academic programming, something we have also chosen as one of our themes. Although our process and structure are very different from those associated with Charting the Future, there is a complementarity that I think we can harness to enhance our success.

Chancellor Rosenstone’s challenge to the workgroups was to think about how we will respond to forces affecting higher education, including new technology, new competition, changes in student demographics, and finances. From our perspective at Winona State University, the core question is: how can we preserve those elements that have made WSU great over the years and innovate to serve the underserved while maintaining enrollment and affordability in challenging times? We will have to answer that question for ourselves, but I don’t believe “Charting the Future” limits or deters us from achieving our unique destiny.

I’m proud of the role Winona State University played in the process. I’m proud that there were more WSU representatives on the workgroups than from any other institution. I’m proud that WSU employees and members of the Winona community engaged in debates and discussions about Charting the Future thoughtfully, seriously, and passionately. As such, it may be that WSU had a more substantial influence on improving this report than any other MnSCU institution. Several themes clearly emerged at WSU as we discussed Charting the Future. Those themes included:

1. Preserving the distinctiveness of our campuses
2. Maintaining affordability
3. Vigorously supporting diversity
4. Retaining decentralized processes, such as for digitally-enhanced learning
5. Supporting the liberal arts and sciences
6. Saving resources through shared services to reinvest in academics.

WSU won’t find everything we suggested in this final draft, but we did very well in influencing its direction. Support for affordability, student success, and diversity has been clarified and strengthened. Centralization has been rejected as a catchall solution. The notion of e-learning has been broadened from online courses to include in-classroom technology, an area where WSU excels. The liberal arts and sciences are more clearly valued. The value of shared services that lead to savings for reinvestment in academics is recognized. Our HealthForce collaborative is held up as an exemplar of how others might work together.

Even so, Charting the Future is not meant to be a strategic plan for WSU. It needs to serve the whole system, so parts of it will apply less to us than to community or technical colleges or the System Office. I’m sure there will remain sections that we will continue to debate.
What was once true remains true, and I’ve said it in the cover letter that President Joe Opatz and I appended to the final version of *Charting the Future* as we delivered it to the Trustees:

"Our system is strong because our campuses are strong, diverse, and distinctive. The distinctiveness of each campus must be enhanced even as they work closely together to address the needs of students and Minnesota. Our diversity of program offerings will remain and flourish in the years to come, as will our commitment to incorporating the voice of faculty, staff, and student voice through shared governance. Each campus must remain distinctive, allowing each student a range of program offerings to find the right educational fit for his or her educational aspirations. The missions of our technical colleges, community colleges, and universities are discrete but interdependent."

I believe this statement is truest of Winona State University: as long as we work together, WSU will always be the most distinctive institution in our system and one of the finest in the region. Everything to which we set our heads, hearts, hands and spirits can be realized. As we chart our future, as we make our hopes and dreams come to life, it will be through our people, our programs, our price, our place, and our pride.

What will our future look like? Here’s the set of envisioning statements that hundreds of WSU community members helped write during Welcome Week:

- WSU will be the epitome of a welcoming, diverse, collegial, invigorating, fun, inclusive, transparent, and civil university, developing meaningful relationships within our communities and celebrating the achievements of its members
- WSU will offer the most innovative, relevant, and highest-quality programs, engaging our students and our extended communities to recognize the world we will inherit. We will strive for excellence through integrated academics, cultural life, wellness, technology, scholarship, research, and civic responsibility
- WSU will offer the highest value of any university education without compromising on high quality by maintaining affordability, and by fundraising for scholarships and endowed positions and by finding efficiencies
- WSU will be the model of a well-maintained, beautiful, sustainable, engaged, safe, and healthy campus
- Because of our people, our programs, our price, and our place, WSU’s pride will create lifelong relationships with students, enhance employee recruitment and retention, and foster investment from donors, alumni and alumnae, and the community.

This is the future we will chart.

Sincerely yours,
Scott R. Olson

A link to the final version of *Charting the Future* will be added as soon as it becomes available.