

Mission and Vision Presentation
MnSCU Board of Trustees
April 20, 2011
Earl H. Potter III, President

Mission: “We prepare our students for life, work and citizenship in the twenty-first century”

Vision: “Through active discovery, applied knowledge and creative interaction, we positively transform our students and the communities where they live and work.”

I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk about our proposed new mission and vision statements for St. Cloud State University and to update you on the state of our university and its future. These statements are direct, clear and in line with the extraordinary changes we have brought to life on our campus – changes that have emerged as a result of good, collaborative work to inspire and influence every aspect of a St. Cloud education.

And just as MnSCU’s planning processes are focused on how to serve Minnesotans and to increase their opportunities to succeed through education, St. Cloud State’s planning, reorganization and goal-setting have been created with a sense of place and with certain realities in mind.

St. Cloud State is located in Central Minnesota, where the majority of our students grew up. They come to us with their expectations and their dreams, with an understanding that we will show them the way to their future.

We also recognize that our university community is welcoming an increasingly diverse mix of learners. This spring we have 1,076 international students from 86 countries enrolled, and more than 9 percent of our 18,300 students are students of color born in the United States. Our student veteran population has grown to 525, and 23 percent of our students are over 25.

The last four years of goal-setting and planning have been focused on helping us create a learning environment that offers each one of our students the academic and personal experiences that will help them succeed not just in the workplace, but in life.

Throughout this process of change through reorganization we asked ourselves, “What is our job.” And then we asked, “What kind of place do we have to create in order to do that job?” And finally, we asked, “What evidence do we have that we are doing the job and will do it even better in the future”?

Our reorganization process has been campus-wide and thorough. It has been accelerated by economic challenges, but the impetus for the changes we have imagined, designed and put in

place has been far deeper than mandated budget cuts. It's the call for greater accountability in public higher education. It's demographic trends that will change the shape and character of our student body ... new industries, familiar jobs and career paths disappearing, and a global economy that has changed the meaning of "a relevant education" Powerful forces are pressing for change, and we are answering the call.

Even more significant than the expectation of change itself is the speed at which change must occur. The pace of change in the world is creating unprecedented urgency for higher education in general and for us in particular.

You and I have seen striking changes during our time in the workplace. But just imagine what our 21st century students will encounter in their lifetimes. Our programs must not only be relevant and rigorous, they must be nimble enough to be responsive to a changing environment. We would be hard pressed to find any academic or training programs that can guarantee that what is taught today will not be outdated in 20, 10 or even 5 years. What we teach today must allow our graduates to gain an education that helps them be flexible enough to keep on learning and to keep growing far beyond commencement.

In order to meet these needs, our campus community has engaged in serious and lively conversations that have led to a complete restructuring of our university's academic programs and colleges. We began with strategic planning and program appraisal and moved forward towards a new academic structure with support systems that together more focused academic programming will offer a well-rounded education for our students.

To get to this point we have analyzed our purpose, clarified our priorities, sharpened our focus and built a framework for a new university ready and able to deliver on the promise of a new mission and vision.

First, we engaged in active strategic and operational planning, giving careful consideration throughout to aligning with the Strategic Plan of MnSCU. Our Strategic Action Plan, completed in 2008, was organized around the following Distinctive Characteristics that we believe must be our focus if we are to achieve our goals:

- Accessibility that leads to success
- Education that drives knowledge into action
- A portfolio of distinctive programs
- Character that reflects our region
- And Institutional capacity for excellence and innovation.

As you can see these distinctive characteristics -- identified through strategic planning as essential strengths or qualities -- are in line with Board Strategic Directions.

Some profound changes emerged from this process. In December we announced a complete reorganization of our academic programs and colleges – going from five academic colleges to six autonomous colleges and schools with two schools embedded in each of the colleges.

This new organizational framework uses professionally focused schools as its primary organizing structure. All these changes have the purpose of enhancing the rigor and relevance of our academic programs, facilitating interdisciplinary work and innovation and making our programs more nimble – better able to change with the changing needs of those who benefit from a St. Cloud State education.

We also had a primary goal of providing a more integrated student experience. To that end we identified four learning commitments we deemed essential elements of a St. Cloud State education. They are:

- Active and applied learning -- Active Learning is many things. It is service learning, engagement with faculty in research, producing works of art for performances and shows as well as internships and practicum experiences. Every one of our students must have the opportunity to put classroom learning into practice.
- Community engagement – Community engagement is both the means for developing essential skills and an objective that we have for our graduates...that each graduate should be prepared to be an engaged citizen and have the inclination to be engaged.
- Sustainability – Sustainability is a concept that embraces more than our physical environment. In its broadest sense it also includes social justice practices that reduce, we would hope eliminate the waste of human potential.
- Global and cultural understanding – We live in a global community for which the “owner’s manual” is a work in progress. Understanding yourself and your own world in the context of this larger reality must be a central feature of a practical education for the 21st Century.

These commitments frame a learning space that provides a special place for our students... a place within which our faculty can help our students achieve their dreams. Please allow me to introduce you to the faces of some outstanding St. Cloud State students who are living evidence of how SCSU prepares its graduates for life and work in the 21st century. Their educational path exemplifies the kind of complete learning experience we aspire to give all our students:

- Meet Amanda Bardonner, a junior international business and marketing major from Wausau, Wisconsin, who has been an outstanding Student Government president during

a time of unprecedeted challenges. With extraordinary aplomb, she fielded questions this fall about the students' role in supporting athletics and initiated the ultimately successful referendum to increase student fees to – as some put it – save football. The process resulted in a record student voter turnout. Under Amanda's leadership, student government also has launched an Ad Hoc Committee on Student Safety to consider ways to deal with the proliferation of crime in south side neighborhoods and supported efforts to build better relationships between students and the community. This past week has been particularly busy for Amanda. She spearheaded another student vote on the recommendation brought forth by our Smoking Policy Task Force to eliminate use of tobacco on campus by the year 2012. And she was elected to serve as the MSUSA state chair.

- You may have heard about our poster boy – and I mean that literally -- for community engagement, Kent Koch. His story has been hard to miss, as regional and national media have featured his unusual experience—that of being elected mayor of his hometown of Loretto, Minnesota. Kent is a senior finance major who is building his skills as a leader in Loretto and at SCSU by serving as a captain on the Husky baseball team and continuing his service on the Student Athlete Advisory Council. He will graduate this spring with a degree in finance and a wealth of practical experience derived from the opportunities he chose from among a host of engagement options available to SCSU students.
- The four senior technology management majors you see here exemplify outstanding accomplishments in sustainability – an important aspect of education for the 2^{1st} century. In a senior project for their environmental technology class, they elected to work with the St. Cloud State University Community Garden folks, who asked them to create an irrigation plan that would accommodate needs of the garden, be easy to operate and use collected rain water as the main water supply. They created a design for an expanded garden and creation of an irrigation center where the equipment to run it will be placed. The impact of this project on student environmentalists Joe Vos of St. Cloud, Nicholas Janssen of Marshall, Eric Olson of Ogilvie, and Michael Hicks of Litchfield goes beyond a classroom assignment. It is an experience that has had life-altering impact on four students whose careers and personal passion for tending the physical environment will continue to intersect. Beyond the physical impact of their work, these students have also encountered the impact of the Garden on the development of social capital in our neighborhood and beyond ... and thus have experienced sustainability in its broadest sense.
- Meet Shanika Perara, champion equestrian, outstanding marketing student, university Ambassador, and seasoned fundraiser for global causes. She represents the many students who are engaged in preparing for a career in a global community. In her first internship with Epicor Software, the Mahtomedi native sold \$10 million in business

software over the phone. She turned down offers of a full-time job to keep her options open, including a second successful internship with HealthPartners. But it was her work with the Minnesota Friendship Foundation that earned Shani the Minnesota Woman of Achievement Award. She was honored for fundraising efforts that led to the rebuilding of 50 homes in her parents' home country of Sri Lanka after a devastating tsunami.

These are the faces of St. Cloud State University – faces that represent the thousands of students who come here each year expecting us to have a clear idea of where we are taking this institution. We do...and that is to the best possible place from which our graduates can launch their futures. Our students can hold their own with the best in the country. Employers of our graduates say this is so.

Among the principles that guide us are a commitment to diversity ... which means success for every one of our students, the commitment to honor the spirit embedded in the agreements we have with our bargaining units, a commitment to transparency, to openness and the facts of our circumstances. These commitments are embedded in the mission and vision statements we have proposed. Our mission is a simple statement of the task we have been given by the people of Minnesota. Our vision is our answer to how we will fulfill this charge... a vision that includes a commitment to success for all of our students. I would like to share two powerful examples of how we are realizing these commitments.

The first is the work of Ethnic Studies Professor Robert Johnson, whose efforts have sustained our Access and Opportunity program for the last 24 years. This program is a partnership with St. Cloud Technical and Community College and our local school districts that is designed to increase participation in college prep course work among underrepresented groups. For 24 years Dr. Johnson's residential math-sciences and computer camps have provided life-altering experiences to more than 3,100 students from grades 2 to 12. Dr. Johnson says his records show that 881 former participants in his pipeline summer programs have gone on to pursue higher education, with at least 112 of these students enrolled at SCSU. Another 566 have entered other MnSCU institutions. That's making a difference.

At St. Cloud State University our faculty excel at creating educational experiences that integrate learning that occurs in the classroom with the application of learning in the wider world. One of the best examples I've seen of this kind of learning process was the preparation and presentation of the Holocaust oratorio, "To Be Certain of the Dawn". This project brought together 200 St. Cloud State students, faculty and community members to prepare and perform the oratorio created in tribute to those who lost their lives and the survivors of the Holocaust by a prominent Catholic cleric. The oratorio was composed Stephen Paulus in partnership with librettist Michael Dennis Browne.

On their tour our St. Cloud State group gave several concerts, but it was their culminating performance at Natzweiler-Struthof that left the indelible mark on their hearts. Natzweiler-

Struthoff is a former Nazi concentration camp in France, complete with barbed wire and a crematorium. This was the setting for the concert for an audience that included Holocaust survivors who watched and listened in profound appreciation as 200 singers and musicians from Minnesota delivered a blend of haunting and hopeful music and lyrics, backed by projected images of Jewish children who did not survive. When it was finished, there was silence. Then tears.

To say this was an extraordinary event in the life of our campus and in the lives of each individual involved is an understatement. It was one of those remarkable active learning experiences that integrated engagement of community, exposure to other cultures and art, student reflection – understanding element of global history which continues to be important to them. Amazed, motivated to continue education – sustained interest in learning – Changed their lives forever. Everyone who got involved in this experience, from the organizers to the faculty to the students, invested talent and skill and energy in an effort as unsettling as it was wonderful. This video offers a glimpse into the depth of the transformative effects of this experience:

(*Oratorio* video <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/admissions/oratorio.asp>)

This is what we are at our best, and when we are at our best we are very very special.

We have proposed mission and vision statements that we believe capture what we want to be. But perhaps more important than the words of these statements is the way we bring them to life. The words may be said of any institution. The learning experiences are pure St. Cloud State University. They are what differentiates us. We have made extraordinary progress in our efforts to adapt and improve to meet the changing needs of our students and the world in which they live and work. And with your approval and your leadership, we will continue to do so.