

# **ASSURANCE SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

MISSOURI SOUTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY  
Joplin, Missouri

March 31 – April 2, 2008

FOR

### **The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

### **EVALUATION TEAM**

Robert C Guell, Professor of Economics, Indiana State University, Terra Haute, Indiana 47809

Andrew P. Manion, Provost, Aurora University, Aurora, Illinois 60506 (Co-Chair)

Karla T. Mugler, Associate Provost and Dean of University College, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325

Jan Shane Murphy, Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois 61790

Renee Neely, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico 88130 (Chair)

David M. Sammeth, Professor of Chemistry, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, New Mexico 87701

Kay K. Schallenkamp, President, Black Hills State University, Spearfish, South Dakota 57799

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## **I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**

### **A. Purpose of Visit**

On March 31 – April 2, 2008, the team visited Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive visit for continued accreditation. The team also reviewed two requests for institutional change related to offering joint master's degree programs with other state universities. MSSU is seeking approval to offer the Master of Arts in History in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Saint Louis and the Master of Business Administration in cooperation with Northwest Missouri State University.

### **B. Organizational Context**

Missouri Southern State University was founded in 1937 as Joplin Junior College. When the Junior College District of Jasper County was created in 1964, it became Jasper County Junior College. The following year, the Missouri General Assembly paved the way for the senior college, and in 1967 Missouri Southern College opened at its present site. In 1977, the institution became Missouri Southern State College. Through approval of the Missouri General Assembly, MSSU acquired its mission focus on international or global education in 1995. The name changed again in 2003 to Missouri Southern State University-Joplin, and Joplin was dropped in 2005.

The University is located in Southwest Missouri in the city of Joplin. The city has become a cultural and population center for the four-state region, and the University significantly enriches and serves that region. It offers 11 associate, 41 baccalaureate and 6 graduate programs.

Since the last comprehensive visit, MSSU experienced a period of financial uncertainty. From 2001 to 2003, the Missouri institutions could receive no funding level guarantee from the State. Tuition increased significantly, and MSSU, in part because of the tuition increase and in part because of increased competition from other universities, saw a decrease in enrollments of about 600 students. Gradually state support has stabilized, and MSSU has shown good stewardship of its resources.

At the time of the visit, MSSU was undergoing major administrative changes. In August 2007, the president that had been in office for 25 years retired. The Vice President for Business Affairs assumed interim responsibilities as president while a national search was conducted. The new president arrived on campus two months prior to the site visit. The current academic vice president had accepted a position at another institution and would be leaving immediately after the team concluded the site visit. The Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences was appointed the Vice President for Academic Affairs. An interim dean for arts and sciences had also been appointed. As a result of the administrative changes, the University was beginning an adjustment from a highly centralized decision-making process.

### **C. Unique Aspects of Visit**

MSSU participates in the Foundations of Excellence Program (FoE) with the Policy Center on the First Year of College. After consultation with the Higher Learning Commission and the Policy Center, MSSU sought approval and was granted permission

to pursue a special-emphasis approach for the self-study. It combined the self-study for the FoE program and the five criteria for continued accreditation into an institutional report submitted to the HLC. The special emphasis is the First Year Experience.

MSSU is a participant in the HLC Assessment Academy. At the time of the visit, it was in the first year of the program.

#### **D. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited**

Prior to the visit, the team chair conducted a site confirmation visit to H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC) in the British Virgin Islands regarding the completion program for the Bachelor of Business Administration degree. MSSU has an agreement with HLSCC in Tortola, British Virgin Islands to offer the Bachelor of Business Administration degree for students who have completed an associate's degree.

#### **E. Distance Education Reviewed**

The team viewed a dental hygiene instructional television class offered simultaneously to students in Rolla, Sikeston, and Joplin, Missouri. It interviewed some faculty of the program. In addition, the pre-visit provided an opportunity to review the Bachelor of Business Administration offered via distance education as noted above in Section D.

#### **F. Interactions with Constituencies**

1. Board of Governors (three members including Chair and Treasurer)
2. President
3. Vice President for Academic Affairs
4. Vice President for Business Affairs
5. HLC Steering Committee
6. Community Representatives (19)
7. Student Success Committee
8. Select Department Heads
9. Faculty Open Forum (46)
10. First Year Experience Planning and Oversight Committee
11. Assistant Vice President for Assessment and Institutional Research
12. Assessment Committee
13. Director of Learning Center
14. Math Faculty
15. Assistant Vice President for Student Services
16. Residence Life Director
17. Faculty Senate Executive Committee
18. Open Staff meeting
19. Graduate Program Advisory Committee
20. Deans of Schools of Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Technology
21. Director of the Institute for International Studies and members of the planning committee for the International Focus Semester.
22. Student Open Forum (50 or more)
23. International Education Themed Semester Planning Committee

**G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed**

1. Special-Emphasis Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Self-Study Report
2. MSSU Catalog 2006-2008
3. MSSU Student Handbook 2007-2008
4. MSSU Faculty Handbook
5. Employee handbook for professional and classified support staff
6. Audited Financial Statements (FY03-07)
7. Career Services Annual Reports
8. Committee Descriptions for various committees
9. Statement of Ethical Conduct
10. Campus Security Act Policies and Procedures
11. Data descriptions: Faculty cohorts hired, tenured and still employed
12. Team Reports for all Nine FOE Dimensions
13. *Southern View* – Volume 9 Number 1
14. First-Year Experience Center (Foundations of Excellence) Dimension Research Team Reports
15. First-Year Experience Center Action Projects
16. FYE Action Project: Philosophy, Goals, and Assessment of the FYE
17. FYE Action Project 4: Academic Advising Materials
18. First-Year Experience Center Oversight Committee Structure
19. MSSU Fresh-Start Orientation Family/Guest Handbook
20. Fresh-Start Orientation 1<sup>st</sup> year Course Placement Guides
21. Academic Department Program Review Reports for Biology and Environmental Health, Respiratory Therapy, Biology and Accounting
22. Program Review Assessment Academy Project Description
23. Collaborative Graduate Programs Policies and Procedures Handbook
24. FY03-07 Budget Summaries
25. Facility Master Plan
26. Faculty Senate Committee Descriptions
27. Academic Program Accreditation Documentation
28. Class utilization report
29. Class size array
30. Faculty tenure report
31. Faculty Promotion and Tenure recommendations
32. Job descriptions and advertising
33. Annual Reports for Computer Information Science, Criminal Justice Administration, Dental Hygiene, IET/CADD/CAMT, Nursing, Radiologic Technology, and Respiratory Therapy
34. Assessment Plan Evaluation Rubric for Academic Majors
35. ETS MFAT and ACAT Comparison data
36. Learning Assessment Plans
37. Learning-Assessment Reports Executive Summary
38. Program-Review Assessment Academic Project
39. Teacher Education Department CHEA Award Application
40. First Year Experience (FYE) Assessment materials
41. Assessment Academy Project: Philosophy and Assessment of the FYE
42. Assessment Plan of the FYE
43. FYE Planning and Oversight Committee, description, agendas, and membership
44. FYE Assessment Goals and Objectives
45. Academic Affairs, Students Services and Auxiliary Enterprises

46. Academic Support and Student Services Departments and Offices
47. Transfer Articulation Agreements
48. International Education Assessment
49. International Education course materials
50. International Education Themed Semesters materials for 2006 (France), 2007 (China) and 2008 (Germany)
51. Student Organizations information
52. Student Research Grants for 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07
53. Campus Landscape Master Plan
54. Classroom, Laboratory, and Technology Inventory
55. Facility Master Plan
56. Physical Facilities Report
57. Division of Student Involvement Annual Report 2006-07
58. Exhibits displayed outside of work area in library (e.g., but not limited to, Music Department, Kinesiology Department, Intercultural Communications, Core Curriculum Assessment, Psychology program and student publications in Art)
59. Honors Program Brochures
60. Advisory Committee Meetings materials for academic departments
61. Course Syllabi
62. Record of Student Complaints held by Vice President for Academic Affairs
63. Faculty Credentials (selected)
64. Graduate Program Advisory Committee description, agendas, and membership
65. Foundations of Excellence (FoE) Faculty/Staff Survey Results
66. FoE Student Survey Results
67. AAUP Reports (2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08)
68. Student Demography Headcounts
69. Missions, Goals, and Objectives statements for schools, academic departments and other units and programs
70. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) reports for academic departments
71. Library Handbook
72. Library Consultant's Report
73. Library Annual Report
74. Library Collection Development Policy
75. Library Academic Department Budget Allocation
76. Memoranda of Understanding for Rolla Technical Center and Sikeston Higher Education Center

## **II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW**

### **A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process**

Missouri Southern State University conducted a comprehensive self-study focusing on the criteria for continued accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission and the Foundations of Excellence program of the Policy Center on the First Year of College. MSSU created a steering committee, HLC Task Force, Foundations of Excellence Task Force, and eight research teams to conduct the self-study for the comprehensive visit. The research teams included 85 administrators, faculty, professional staff, and students. In addition, materials were made available on a regular basis via a website to the campus community as a whole. This assured broad campus representation and much involvement in the process.

**B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report**

The team found that the report accurately reflected the activities of the University and helped document the case that the criteria for continued accreditation were met. The two requests for institutional change, one for approval to offer a Master of Arts in History in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Saint Louis and the other to offer the Master of Business Administration in cooperation with Northwest Missouri State University, helped establish the readiness of the University to pursue these initiatives and expand its graduate program offerings.

**C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges**

The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be adequate.

**D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment**

Requirements were fulfilled.

**III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS**

The team reviewed required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information.

**IV. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA**

**CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- The University Mission Statement is well publicized in documents that are used by both students and faculty including the undergraduate catalog, employee and student handbooks, the University's website, and a variety of other publications. The mission is also prominently displayed throughout the campus. In meetings with the team, the faculty, staff, and students shared common understandings of the mission.
- Since announcing the international mission in 1995, the campus has developed numerous activities to support this special focus and to differentiate itself from other universities in Missouri. Financial resources have been dedicated to accomplishing this mission, and faculty members have traveled extensively to international sites with students. The collaborative agreement with the British Virgin Islands supports the international mission.

- There is a consistent understanding by students, faculty, and staff of the international mission of the institution. The international mission is embraced by the campus and is reflected in the University's core curriculum, extracurricular activities, travel, themed semesters, faculty development programs, and other activities. International education appears to be deeply ingrained into University activities.
- The Board of Governors is composed of individuals from across Missouri. Several are alumni of MSSU, and some have degrees from other institutions. The Board members thus offer diverse perspectives and experiences. Review of the minutes of the Board of Governors meetings as well as conversations with three Board members indicates the Board is highly supportive of the mission of MSSU and has the interests and needs of the campus as its top priority.
- Promotional documents accurately reflect the role and mission of the University. These documents clearly and accurately portray what the institution is and what it offers. Students choosing MSSU are provided a detailed picture of the expectations and opportunities at the University. Students report consistency between the expectations established in the marketing materials and their experiences at MSSU.
- The University has in place a structure for shared governance. Though the institution is at a cusp with a recent past of autocratic decision-making in which the Faculty Senate and associated committees were not fully-recognized participants in the decision making process, the future is defined by the recent change in the presidency. Statements made by the new administration indicate that MSSU will support and promote shared governance and effective leadership, which in turn will support collaborative processes that will enable the organization to fulfill its stated mission.
- Students, faculty and staff demonstrated a consistent understanding of the importance of a liberal arts education as evidenced by interviews and a 51-credit core, as well as graduation requirements for computer literacy and writing intensive courses. This supports the institutional goal of balancing liberal arts and professional education. The Core Curriculum Committee has initiated a robust plan for assessing and improving the core.
- Missouri Southern State University's Mission Statement clearly identifies a commitment to helping its students gain "understanding of other cultures of the world" and promotion of "better understanding of our own valuable cultural diversity." This component of the mission statement is well understood by faculty, staff, and students as evidenced by multiple conversations throughout the site visit. Sensitivity to the diversity of learners is a natural consequence of the international and cultural diversity emphasis.
- Though relatively new to the mission, graduate education is seen by internal and external constituents as an important role for MSSU and a natural progression in its growth and development as a higher education institution. The opportunity to partner with other Missouri universities to provide graduate programs to the region is viewed as a vital service to the region.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- The previous president had a 25-year tenure which exceeds the institutional memory of most faculty, staff and Board members. As the new president and the campus constituencies strive to develop a culture of shared governance and open communication, it is likely that some members will struggle with change. It will be important for the Board to support change without becoming intrusive.
- Under the previous administration, shared governance was not a part of the culture of the institution. Conversations with faculty and staff, including a focused meeting with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, provided evidence that faculty had not helped determine the priorities for the institution, and so were less invested in a number of initiatives such as the First Year Experience Project than would be expected. This was verified in a number of site visit meetings including one-on-one conversations with several of the academic deans.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.****4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)****Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- Several units on campus have developed planning documents in preparation for the future. The physical plant department develops a deferred maintenance plan each year and earmarks funds to address the highest priorities. The athletics program has developed a comprehensive plan that follows the NCAA guidelines. Such plans and the expertise of these offices provide evidence of a campus sense of direction and purpose that serves as an internal compass for day-to-day functions and decision-making in spite of the absence of a comprehensive strategic plan for the University. These might serve as a guide in developing the institutional plan.
- The Board of Governors, President, faculty, and staff clearly recognize the necessity of planning and articulate an urgency to begin a comprehensive campus planning initiative. Although the new president has been on campus for

only two months, he has initiated preliminary planning activities and has clearly established the expectation that a strategic plan will be the top agenda item for the new administration. Discussion with individuals across campus indicated unanimous consent that a strategic plan is necessary.

- The faculty and physical resources are utilized in a fashion consistent with the institutional mission. There are no on-campus courses taught by teaching assistants, and no classes with more than 50 students. (The only classes offered by MSSU that number more than 50 are distance education courses.) The small class sizes provide room to increase enrollments in the future while maintaining fairly stable budget with little need for increases in faculty FTE.
- MSSU has physical capacity to support growth in enrollment. Classroom utilization suggests that the physical plant is less than 20% occupied from before 9am and after 3pm. Should significant growth occur in the on-campus population, the University also has extensive acreage on which to build.
- The campus has invested in the Banner integrated administrative software system that will provide consistent data in a usable format for decision-making purposes. The campus has begun to use financial data to allocate resources to fulfill its mission. The Business Office has assumed a leadership role in developing a transparent budgeting process that can build on the functionalities of Banner.
- The University has received an influx of funds from the state for FY09 and anticipates additional funds for each of the next two fiscal years. Such funding will positively impact the University's ability to address needs identified in the strategic plan.
- The state of Missouri has indicated its intent to develop a funding formula model for higher education. This effort can provide opportunities for MSSU to receive recognition of its funding needs, though it will be important that base inequities reportedly existing for MSSU are addressed as part of this effort.
- MSSU makes effective use of community advisory groups and involvement in local organizations and events to provide feedback on ways in which the University can meet the needs of the community. Community representatives come from various sectors and are well-positioned to understand the needs of their employers and the region.
- The Institutional Research (IR) office has augmented its staff with faculty readers from business, psychology, and the social sciences. This is an admirable use of resources in a way that gains support from academic programs regarding data analyses.
- MSSU has capitalized on the state's opportunity for institutions to provide collaborative master's programs where they are not otherwise available. It has considered the needs of the region, existing relationships with sister institutions in the state and enrollment opportunities in selecting its initial programs. These

programs currently place minimal demand on institutional resources while relying heavily on the existing programs at other universities.

- The MSSU Foundation completed a \$10 million campaign in 2007 that successfully raised funds for specific construction projects such as the Mansion, the Recreation Center and bond payments for the athletics facility. The campaign also provided funds for scholarships and departmental operations.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- Despite this successful effort of the MSSU Foundation in 2007, the Foundation is not viewed as a resource to assist in meeting the university's needs. The annual giving levels of alumni and campus employees are 12% and 20% respectively. Limited staffing in the foundation coupled with the lack of a comprehensive data base of alumni and donors will hamper efforts to increase revenues.
- Planning that has been conducted by specific units on campus can be used to inform the work which will begin for the entire campus. However, it will be important that these documents are brought under the broader umbrella of the institution's needs and priorities.
- While MSSU has carefully selected graduate programs collaboratively with other Missouri universities, formal planning for the implementation of these programs appears minimal. Some issues will be resolved over time as the programs mature, and MSSU has begun to address issues such as the impact of the program on the selection of faculty to teach graduate courses offered in the program, and evaluation of faculty through the collaborating institution. MSSU appears to be adopting the role of a host site rather than that of a full partner in the collaborative effort. Discussions with faculty and administrators suggest little understanding of the potential implications of collaborative graduate programs regarding graduate faculty status, faculty load, and expectations for promotion and tenure for all programs. In addition, MSSU would benefit from an exploration of its roles and responsibilities versus those of the home program in areas such as curriculum development and assessment of student learning outcomes.

## **3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- As noted in Criterion 1, the University has not utilized its system of shared governance, although provisions are made within the governance structure for this to occur. The governance style has fostered a campus climate in which strategic planning has been done in a highly centralized manner except for a few programs that have developed their own plans. The following items on strategic planning and budgeting highlight the need for MSSU to carry out an articulated system of governance.
- The campus has no comprehensive strategic plan and no process in place to develop a plan. The planning culture on campus is restricted to specific offices or programs that have developed a plan in isolation of the rest of the

campus. Data to support institutional planning is limited and is often generated by individual offices without a uniform definition of variables. Additionally, discussion with faculty and administrators indicate that data analysis is conducted in isolation and that a number of offices do not rely on data to guide decision making. Without a strategic plan and a culture of data driven decisions, the campus is unable to systematically respond to the evolving environment in higher education.

- The budgeting process is completed in the absence of a strategic plan and in isolation. Unit budgets are determined without consideration of re-allocation opportunities or unique budgeting needs. Given the historically limited budget levels, enrollment declines and the funding reduction in 2001, the absence of a plan to establish funding priorities seriously jeopardizes the ability of the University to shape its future. It was noted that net assets of the University have declined each of the past two years. This decline is particularly troubling in the absence of a strategic plan.
- In an effort to maintain enrollment and to compete with area higher education institutions, the University has implemented a scholarship program that uses \$5 million of the University E & G (education and general) funds equating to nearly 25% tuition discounting. This practice has led to additional deterioration of funds available to support the operational needs of the University.
- Throughout the visit, nearly every meeting identified enrollment as a high priority. In fact, enrollment often appeared to be seen as the answer to all problems. However, the campus has not developed an enrollment management plan that identifies whether it has the capacity to increase enrollment, the disciplines which are at capacity vs. those that have low enrollment, the mix between face-to-face vs. on-line classes, etc. The decision to establish joint graduate programs appears to have been made with little apparent consideration for whether the campus has fiscal or human resources to deliver the programs.

**Recommendation:** Focus visit in 2010-2011 to address strategic planning and governance.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- MSSU takes pride in its focus on teaching. The criteria for rank, tenure, and promotion include faculty members' instruction, service, and involvement in either student support or research. Student support includes advising, and working on either the First-Year Experience or International Education initiatives. MSSU provides professional development for faculty teaching the first-year seminar.
- Faculty who teach in the International Education initiative have clearly stated learning outcomes in their course syllabi. Faculty members work collaboratively across campus to present courses once the upcoming year's theme country has been established. Departments also offer courses, such as Education 280: Foundation for Global Education, which can focus on the theme country. Students seeking to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree must complete four semesters of a foreign language, and MSSU offers majors in French, German and Spanish; minors in Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish; as well as 12 credits of Arabic. Many student mentors who have been trained to assist faculty in the new First-Year Seminar have traveled or studied abroad which will be an asset to the new first-year students.
- Every educational program has clearly stated learning goals. The vast majority of educational programs have linked their learning goals to specific courses or activities within those programs. Roughly two-thirds of the programs have clearly identified the data elements that they will use to judge whether the education programs are meeting their learning goals. Roughly one-third of the programs have collected data. Six educational programs have analyzed that data and used the information to "close the loop."
- MSSU has learning outcomes determined for undergraduates in their respective baccalaureate programs. Assessment in some areas is ongoing where for other majors it is just beginning. Assistance is provided to units to develop assessment plans. Faculty seem to understand course and program assessment. Programs with outside accreditation requirements seem further ahead than areas which do not have this model. MSSU shares information about passage rates on licensing exams and information about graduates and their acceptance into professional or graduate schools or into professions.
- MSSU faculty determine course offerings and the means by which they instruct their classes. MSSU offers in class, on-line, and distance learning formats for their courses. Professional development is offered through the Center for Teaching and Learning and through conference participation. Faculty may take foreign language courses and have their books paid for in support of the International Education mission of the campus; this is particularly helpful for faculty who would like to know more about the language and culture before taking a group of students to the target country.

- MSSU recognizes faculty for their teaching in departmental and campus-wide awards. Faculty who have an active research agenda are supported to attend conferences and give presentations. The University also hosts video conferences and webinars so that faculty and administrators can benefit from the research on teaching and learning; this allows more individuals on campus to learn about emerging strategies to increase student success. Faculty not only actively participate in professional organizations within their disciplines, they encourage students to become involved in their research. MSSU has also set aside funds to support students' undergraduate research and to defray costs associated with students attending a conference to present their research.
- The University embraces technologies that can assist their students; wireless connectivity is available throughout the campus; and distance learning is used so that citizens in the four-state region can take courses at MSSU. The campus is wireless which is a plus for students seeking to study anywhere on campus. Many students were using desktop or laptop computers as they studied. Students and faculty spoke about using the language lab to improve their understanding and speaking ability in the target languages they were studying. Members of the community also discussed how MSSU labs were helpful for students to gain the necessary skills in fields for which they were preparing.
- The University is to be commended for participating in the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. Through their initial participation in the Academy, the University has assured that each program has developed clearly defined program learning outcomes. The assessment rubric that has grown out of the Assessment Advisory Committee is an effective mechanism to ensure that all academic programs are adequately assessed. A number of programs have gathered student assessment data and are beginning to determine changes that need to be made as a result of their assessment efforts. The use of Freshman Assessment Day and Senior Assessment Day allows for systematic assessment data-gathering to support effective diagnostic and evaluative measurements of students.
- The redesign of the program review process provides an opportunity for a more meaningful review of each academic department. The four units that participated in the review process this past fall conducted thorough self-studies resulting in comprehensive reports. Each Program Review Panel included at least one member from another university.
- The Faculty Development Committee administers \$20,000 in funds available for faculty travel to conferences. There are separate funds available for International Travel. Development programs associated with the new Freshman Course were provided to faculty who volunteered to teach the course. Additional development programs are coordinated by the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Division of Lifelong Learning.
- Eleven academic degree programs hold accreditation from specialized accrediting agencies. A review of university records shows that all programs with such accreditations are held in good standing by the appropriate agencies.

- In group sessions and during one-on-one conversations, students indicated that they feel faculty care about them and want them to succeed. This is evidenced by data from NSSE Surveys, Alumni Surveys, and Program Review Reports.
- Spiva Library provides a tremendous resource to students and faculty. A significant renovation and expansion to the building occurred in 2001 and has greatly enhanced the services provided. Spiva Library appears to be an appealing place for students to congregate and is an excellent resource for students, faculty, and the residents of southwest Missouri. It was vibrant and well-used during the time the peer evaluators spent on campus.
- MSSU makes clear to students that the graduate programs are collaborative programs, and the university celebrates this collaboration. About half of the courses are offered by MSSU faculty, program materials including the diploma bear the stamp or seal of both institutions, and customized graduation regalia bear the identification of both universities.

2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**
4. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

#### **Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

#### **CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE.**

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

##### **1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- MSSU provides funds to support students' research projects, whether to support the research itself or to support students traveling to regional, state and national conferences to present the results of their research. These funds are administered by the Student Research Grants Committee.
- MSSU has committed itself to enhancing undergraduate education through participation in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) program. Thus far, the University has conducted a self-analysis of each of the foundational dimensions. The FoE process has motivated the creation of a clearly stated Philosophy for

the First Year and Learning Goals for the First College Year. It has driven the replacement of a one-credit-hour College Orientation course with a more substantive three-credit-hour course. The budget for the course is now in place, and a stipend is available for those teaching the class.

- The response to the high DFWI courses identified in the FoE report (indicating the number of students receiving grades of D or F, withdrawing from the course, or receiving a grade of incomplete at the end of the semester) has been nothing short of dramatic. The Economics faculty redesigned the ECON 180 course to more closely align itself with the Core Curriculum intent for the course. This should have an impact on success rates in that course. In addition, the faculty in the department of Mathematics, while having three courses in the top ten DFWI list, took ownership of both the problem and the solution. They currently take turns staffing a math lab whereby faculty sit in the math lab and assist students with their homework and questions. The adoption of the Pearson MyMathLab software has allowed for a cross-section alignment of expectations, assignments, and assistance. The consistency and level of math assistance that this makes available is remarkable.
- MSSU provides professional development opportunities through a number of venues. The Faculty Development Committee awards funds (approximately \$20,000 per year for each of the last four years) for research, participation in professional conferences, travel, and instructional assistance. The Center for Teaching and Learning funds video conferences and webinars (web seminars) in order to provide staff with access to cutting-edge educational programs. Sabbatical leaves are awarded to faculty who undertake professional development that will benefit the University.
- Although the primary mission of the University is teaching and learning, the mission statement indicates that this should be complimented by scholarly and creative expression. MSSU has established a number of departmental or school awards that recognize the involvement of the faculty in scholarly pursuits. Research, publications, grants, and creative activities are also included in faculty evaluations and the rank, tenure, and promotion process. Faculty curriculum vitae and department displays in the resource rooms included documentation of faculty scholarly activity. Promotion and tenure standards may soon include “student support” as an option, a change which will better align promotion and tenure guidelines with the University mission.
- During the HLC team’s open meeting, faculty expressed pride in their Core Curriculum which includes 51 credits. Students are exposed to knowledge covering seven areas of study and develop intellectual skills in communication, higher-order thinking, valuing, and managing information.
- Computer literacy is critical to students’ success at the college level. MSSU has addressed this need to prepare students for a level of proficiency with regards to computer applications that will ensure they can compete in any job they seek. Each department has established the level of competency students need in various computer applications in their discipline, and they ensure the competency of their majors.

- MSSU is intent on its focus to develop the writing ability of its students. Students complete at least five writing-intensive classes by the time they earn their baccalaureate degree; transfer students must complete at least three upper-division writing classes. All students complete at least one writing-intensive course in their major discipline.
  - Departments benchmark the effectiveness of their programs by asking alumni and employers to respond to surveys. They also receive reports from discipline-specific accrediting agencies.
  - New students learn about what is expected of them when they participate in MSSU's orientation program, Southern Welcome. The Student Handbook is an excellent guide to assist students with policies and procedures as well as to help them find resources.
  - The creation of a campus-wide policy for the protection of human research subjects in 2006 was an important step for the institution to ensure that faculty, staff, and students acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly. The formation of an Institutional Review Board that year also ensures that Missouri Southern complies with Federal regulations. This is a significant step in support of the institution's decisions to begin offering collaborative graduate programs. Some departments also have their own review panels.
  - Missouri Southern's emphasis on International Education is demonstrated and supported throughout its curriculum. The Institute of International Studies promotes international education by developing cooperative relationships with foreign universities, the international theme semester, and encouraging travel abroad. The curriculum for the new course, The University Experience: Transitions within an International Context, is being developed in conjunction with the Foundations of Excellence program and will assist first-year students to prepare themselves as citizens of a twenty-first century global community.
  - Through its participation in the Higher Learning Commission's Academy of Learning Assessment, the University has demonstrated its commitment to assessing academic degree programs and core curricula.
- 2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
  - 3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**
  - 4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

## Recommendation of the Team

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

### 1. Evidence that Core Components are met

- MSSU has a long list of advisory boards which work closely with the faculty and administrators in each school to help them align their curricula with industry standards. The individuals with whom the HLC team met from the courts, schools, industry, and partner institutions were very supportive of the University and the improvements that were being made. Many of the programs are accredited by discipline-specific accrediting agencies and the community leaders sit on those boards as well.
- With the influx of individuals from Mexico and Central America in MSSU's service area, the University has led the way in programs for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and in preparing teachers for the changing demographics in their class rooms. MSSU works closely with school districts and community colleges within its service area to encourage their students to continue their educational careers.
- MSSU has also partnered with organizations and businesses in the area to provide short courses, workshops, and seminars on specific topics of interest. Courses are offered on campus as well as on-site and through on-line technologies. Hybrid delivery methods are used to make courses available throughout MSSU's service area to those who need them for advancement.
- MSSU serves as the cultural and educational center for this part of Missouri and the four-state area. Faculty members see their work within the community as an integral part of their job, and the University provides a myriad of opportunities for residents to benefit from their expertise. The fact that the University has both a television and radio station allows MSSU a unique opportunity that many higher education institutions do not have. The biennial International Piano Competition and the annual Langston Hughes Celebration are other means by which MSSU reaches out to the community at large. The Institute for International Studies has engaged the community in its offerings each year, bringing speakers and other aspects of the culture of the nation for that year's theme. Community members and faculty expressed how this has helped them to build relationships that have had an impact. The International Language Resource Center provides services to develop intercultural sensitivity and understanding of other cultures.
- The work of faculty in providing expertise and advice to governmental agencies is commendable. The location of MSSU allows faculty to work with business leaders and government agencies in four different states. Spiva Library's collection, including the state and federal government documents, is a resource to the entire area. Various academic departments provide direct service to the community such

- MSSU has shown that it can respond to community needs. The development of the Bioinformatics option for Biology and CIS majors and the Dental Hygiene programs are exemplars of how MSSU works with its constituencies. The Fire Academy was developed to meet the needs of the four-state area. The University prides itself in its response to needs of the public—particularly in the development of graduate programs to further the needs of the state and region. Since it was granted university status by the governor in 2003, MSSU has the ability to work in cooperation with other state universities to offer graduate programs.
  - Missouri Southern State University’s International Piano Competition is a significant regional cultural event for Southwest Missouri. The competition draws pianists from across the globe, clearly exposing Joplin and the surrounding communities to the international aspect of the University.
  - The institution operates both a radio (KXMS) and television (KGC) station. The radio station continuously broadcasts classical music thereby providing a cultural service to the community. The television station provides programming which focuses on issues of local interest, community service organizations, and university courses.
  - Service to the community is demonstrated by providing University-sponsored activities and events for K-12 students. Highlights include Missouri AHEC Science and Health Day Camp (MASH Camp), Young Authors Day, Spanish Village Immersion Camp, Children’s Theater, and sports camps. The opportunities for local K-12 students are enhanced by the presence of MSSU. The institution’s international emphasis is illustrated by the Spanish Immersion Camp and the Modern Foreign Language Field Day.
  - Missouri Southern State University engages with the local business community through a variety of community service programs. The Business and Economic Executive Lecture Series hosts speakers of interest to both students and the business community. Members of the business community who wish to consider globalizing their business can contact the International Trade & Quality Center (ITQC) for assistance, clearly in line with the institution’s international education emphasis. MSSU’s Small Business Development Center publishes the *Southern Business and Economics Review*, a publication focusing on issues of importance to the local economy.
2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
  3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- 4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**V. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS**

**A. Affiliation Status**

No change.

**B. Nature of Organization**

**1. Legal status**

No change.

**2. Degrees awarded**

No change.

**C. Conditions of Affiliation**

**1. Stipulation on affiliation status**

Add: "and the Master of Arts in History to be offered jointly with University of Missouri-St. Louis; and the Master of Business Administration to be offered jointly with Northwest Missouri State University."

**Rationale:**

The University has already implemented six joint graduate programs. It has gained additional experience in graduate education and has shown a commitment to expanding services to meet the needs of the region. It has selected programs based on strong undergraduate programs and existing ties with collaborating institutions. It has addressed some of the issues encountered with offering graduate programs.

**2. Approval of degree sites**

No change.

**3. Approval of distance education degree**

No change.

#### 4. Reports required

##### Progress Report

**Topic(s) and Due Date (month-date-year)**

**Rationale and Expectations**

##### Monitoring Report

**Topic(s) and Due Date (month-date-year)**

**Rationale and Expectations**

**Condition Statement (if . . . then)**

##### Contingency Report

**Topic**

**Rationale and Expectations**

#### 5. Other visits scheduled

**Type of Visit:** Focus Visit

**Topic(s) and Timing:** (academic year - 2010-2011) Strategic Planning and Governance

##### Rationale and Expectations

The University, until shortly before the team visit, utilized a highly centralized governance process in spite of an articulated system of shared governance. A comprehensive strategic planning process did not exist, nor was the budget process linked to planning. In the academic year of the visit, the University experienced a change of presidents for the first time in 25 years. This has created a focus on strategic planning with an expressed commitment to shared governance.

#### 6. Organization change request

The team recommends approval of the institutional change requests to offer the joint graduate programs including the Master of Business Administration with Northwest Missouri State University and the Master of Arts in History with the University of Missouri-Saint Louis.

##### Rationale:

MSSU has already implemented six jointly-offered graduate programs. Its experience in this area has resulted in progress in addressing issues regarding infrastructure to support graduate education and selection and approval of graduate faculty to teach in the program. MSSU has selected programs considered viable for the area and build on strong undergraduate programs.

#### E. Summary of Commission Review

**Timing for next comprehensive visit:** academic year - 2017-2018

Regarding the request for approval to offer the Master of Arts in History jointly with the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the team recommends approval.

Regarding the request for approval to offer the Master of Business Administration jointly with Northwest Missouri State University, the team recommends approval.

**Rationale for recommendation:**

Based on a review of the self-study materials, including the First Year Experience special emphasis Foundations of Excellence materials and extensive review and discussions during the site visit, the team confirmed that Missouri Southern State University meets all five of the criteria for continued accreditation. The mission is understood by internal and external constituents, supported and executed. The University has organized its physical, human, and financial resources to continue to serve the higher education needs of the region in the future.

MSSU made a commitment to assessing student learning by its participation in the Higher Learning Commission's Assessment Academy. It demonstrates that it values learning and responsible acquisition of knowledge through various activities and resources available to students and faculty. MSSU is highly engaged with the constituents it serves and is seen as an important contributor to the region.

Regarding the area of the assessment, the team notes MSSU's membership in the HLC Assessment Academy. The work in the Academy will be vital in addressing many issues that have persisted. The team recommends that, should MSSU be unable to fulfill its commitment in the Academy, the focus visit in 2010-2011 would then be expanded to include the assessment of student learning outcomes.