STRATEGIC PLAN
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Mission

Midwestern State University is a leading public liberal arts university committed to providing students with rigorous undergraduate and graduate education in the liberal arts and the professions. Through an emphasis upon teaching, augmented by the opportunity for students to engage in research and creative activities alongside faculty and to participate in co-curricular and service programs, Midwestern State prepares its graduates to embark upon their careers or pursue advanced study. The university’s undergraduate education is based upon a comprehensive arts and sciences core curriculum. The understanding that students gain of themselves, others, and the social and natural world prepares them to contribute constructively to society through their work and through their private lives.
Values

- Excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and artistic production
- Intellectual curiosity and integrity
- Critical thinking
- Emotional and physical well-being
- Mutual respect, civility, and cooperation
- Social justice
- Civic service
- Stewardship of the environment, and of financial and human resources
- A safe, attractive, and well-designed campus
Background

Midwestern State University (MSU), like universities throughout the United States, faces numerous challenges in the future. Just a few of these include reductions in financial support from the state, rapidly changing technology affecting operations and instruction, and increasing demands for accountability. MSU developed the following strategic plan to provide a framework to address these challenges with an eye to the long-term prosperity of the university.

An important element of the planning process was input from MSU community groups ranging from employees and students to alumni. Various groups and individuals were asked to present their ideas of the goals for MSU in the future. This input was sought so that it would be possible to identify themes that serve to unify all members of the MSU community.

It is important to note that this document serves as only one part of the strategic planning process and implementation. The result is a document that identifies broad goals and objectives. By design, priority was given to engaging and involving various university groups to identify future directions. The next phase of the planning process will be to develop an implementation plan that will include specific tactics, identify resources, deadlines, and responsible oversight parties.

About MSU

MSU is a Texas state university. It is one of only four independent universities in Texas not part of a university system, and is overseen by its own Board of Regents appointed by the Governor. The university is a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) and is designated in the Texas Education Code as a Texas’s only public liberal arts university. Enrollment is more than 6,100 students, including 700 graduate students. The university offers 45 undergraduate and 28 graduate programs. Just over 49 percent of MSU's students come from Wichita County and nine surrounding counties, 17 percent are from the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and 13 percent are from out of state or international. Nearly 20 percent of the students live on campus.
Operating Environment

MSU’s internal strengths support its capacity and capability to accomplish its mission and achieve its vision. The opportunities and threats are a reflection of the external conditions that may affect MSU in the future.

The assessment that follows reflects MSU as a whole, and individual programs and support operations may have lesser or greater capability and capacity, and be affected differently by factors in the external environment.

INTERNAL STRENGTHS

The following are areas of strength that MSU can use to advance itself toward its goals.

- **Positive reputation**
  MSU has a positive reputation, especially in the local area. In addition, it has a loyal base of alumni. These strengths enhance the ability to recruit students and to seek external gifts. MSU has benefited substantially from gifts from members of the local community.

- **Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) membership**
  MSU is a member of COPLAC, which complements the university’s standing as a public liberal arts institution. The university was the first in the state to offer a core curriculum and is committed to a strong liberal arts experience for students in all majors. COPLAC values interdisciplinary opportunities, close faculty and student interactions, and opportunities for faculty-supervised research, which taken together, provide a distinctive experience for MSU students and faculty.

- **Good quality human resource base**
  MSU has a strong faculty base that is well prepared to provide instruction for the cross-section of programs provided. In addition, MSU has a loyal and experienced staff that is able to provide the operational and support services necessary to the university.

- **Attractive campus**
  MSU has a very attractive campus with the capacity to provide instruction effectively and accommodate a vital campus life. MSU’s campus is the stereotypic image of the small, elite, liberal arts college.

- **Student-focused**
  MSU has a long history as a student-oriented university. The core value reflected on the campus is a focus on student development. The result of being student oriented is not the lowering of standards, but providing means by which students can develop in order to meet standards.

- **Educational value**
  An educational value is defined as the educational outcomes achieved per dollar spent. MSU, given its student orientation and highly qualified faculty, is able to provide excellent educational outcomes at a moderate price.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

A number of patterns in the operating environment will affect MSU in the future. MSU has a significant number of its student base affected by local trends, but also draws substantial numbers of students from throughout Texas, the United States, and other countries. Still, the primary base for students is Texas. Since local trends may be different than state trends, selected trends from both are considered.

DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS

- The local area’s population growth is expected to remain flat over the next 10 years. Wichita County and the surrounding counties have remained at about the same population since 2000.

- The proportion of the local population that will be college age in the next decade is declining. Census data from 2000 and 2010 indicate that the number of 10- to 14-year-olds dropped from just over 9,000 to just over 8,000, and the number of 15- to 19-year-olds declined from about 12,000 to about 10,500.

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STATE DEMOGRAPHICS

- Texas State population will continue to grow into the next decade. The rate of growth may be slightly lower than in the past, but it will remain robust.

- Much of the population growth will occur in Texas’ metropolitan areas including Dallas/Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston.

- In-migration is a significant component of Texas’ growth. Although attention is frequently paid to undocumented immigrants, Texas experiences substantial in-migration from other U.S. states because of the general strength of its economy. In addition, demands for science, technology, and health professionals attract immigrants from throughout the world.

- The median age of the population in Texas was 33.6 according to the 2010 census. Only Utah has a lower median age, indicating Texas has the second youngest population among the 50 states. Twenty-seven percent of Texas’ population was younger than 18 in 2010. The demand for higher education statewide will be significant into the next decade.

EDUCATION

- A sizable proportion of students seeking admission to MSU will continue to have weak preparation for college-level work.

- Students admitted to MSU will continue to be from groups for which retention is difficult, including first-generation college students, students from low-wage families, and students with full-time jobs.

- Students seeking admission will have weak preparation in math and science, thereby limiting their career choices to majors where job growth is weakest.

- Texas ranks in the middle of states on measures of math and reading proficiency for fourth- and eighth-graders.

- Mean SAT scores for Texas are critical reading-479, mathematics-502, and writing-465. The total group mean scores are reading-497, mathematics-514, and writing-489. This indicates that Texas is underperforming compared to the United States.

- Educational weaknesses are especially prominent among minority and low-income students.

TECHNOLOGY

- Technological change will continue to be very rapid, requiring frequent updates and additions to keep pace with technological applications outside of the university.

- Entering students will expect use of technology such as social networking, computer-based interactive educational programs, webinars, and learning modules that can be downloaded to smartphones. Required investments in technology will not only be for discipline specific purposes, but also for all areas of instruction.

- Traditional educational boundaries are changing. In the past, most state universities were structured to serve state populations. Online education has changed the boundaries of education and given access to educational content to students anywhere in the world. David Brooks, in a May 3, 2012, commentary in the New York Times, noted that Harvard and MIT have devoted $60 million to provide students with free online education.
REGULATORY
• The demand for assessments of student learning and performance has increased markedly in the past two decades. In addition to university accreditation, the number of program accreditations has increased. Further, the scope of what must be measured and reported within a given accreditation or assessment also has increased. The result has been that more time and resources must be devoted to those activities. For all intents and purposes, these are unfunded mandates.

CULTURAL
• Current and future students have had computers, social networks, smart phones, and other technology for most of their lives. Their sense of reality includes these technologies. As such, they expect these technologies to be part of their education. The use of technology does not mean that students have knowledge of or comfort with the underlying knowledge required for technology development.
• Search engines, instant messaging, social media, and other technological innovations have shaped how students think, including a sense that memorizing facts is not necessary. This, combined with an increased reliance on standardized multiple choice tests, has resulted in students who are not prepared to synthesize complex information at the time they enter college.
• Most future students will be comfortable with cultural diversity. At the same time, they face a world in which careers will not be a matter of moving to another city, but sometimes to another country. Universities will need to prepare students to effectively work within the global economy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MSU
MISSION, VISION, AND STRUCTURE
• It is axiomatic that in a complex and dynamic operating environment any organization must have the capacity to be flexible and adapt. At the same time, external systems such as accrediting bodies and state requirements are imposing requirements that constrain required adaptation. Clarity of mission and vision are essential to ensure that MSU sustains its purpose while being buffeted by countervailing forces. MSU will need to strengthen its clarity of vision and the extent to which it is a vision-driven organization.
• The current structure of MSU tends to lead to limited collaboration across different units of the organization. The rapid changes facing MSU including technology, student attributes, and economic uncertainty require structures that enable rapid response to change, as well as collaboration across units to create innovation and develop excellence.

ENROLLMENT
• Enrollment growth will require increases in recruitment of students from outside the local area. Local demographic patterns indicate a declining base of students locally. State demographic patterns, however, indicate increased demand for education from outside of the area. MSU is not especially well-known outside of the local area. It will be necessary to strengthen its efforts to market regionally and to establish MSU as a desirable alternative to other universities.
• Weak academic preparation among Texas students will increase the need for remedial education to ensure standards do not decline. This will require a planned effort that involves collaboration among groups within and outside of MSU.
• A stable enrollment necessitates improved student retention rates and will be the responsibility of several units on campus. Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Information Technology, and Business Affairs must share in the development and implementation of a comprehensive student retention plan.

• Most of the areas of job growth in the future will require students to have solid grounding in math, science, and technology. Even students seeking careers outside of the traditional science and technical fields will need this background. The aspiring writer must be able to set up a blog, incorporate animation, and e-publish. While many students use technology, they often lack the rudimentary skills needed to work with or develop necessary applications.

• The high-tech educational environment provides an opportunity for MSU to take advantage of its niche to provide a “high touch” educational setting. Even as technology advances, the setting of MSU is ideal for strengthening the social, critical thinking, and synthesis abilities of students.

FINANCIAL

• There is little doubt that financial pressure will continue. Even as state resources for higher education are at the lowest in Texas history, the need for resources is increasing. Capital investment to keep pace with technology will be needed. Students, especially local students, will require more financial support to afford their education. While this may be a challenge for local students, MSU is positioned to use its relatively low cost to recruit students from outside of the area who may have personal resources.

• MSU’s continued financial strength will require increasing outside sources of funding. Like the typical business, MSU will need to diversify its sources of revenue. It currently has substantial fundraising strength to address financial needs. A significant change that must be addressed, however, is the need to increase resources for operations. Additional resources through grants also are a source, but MSU will need to build its capacity to obtain grants.

• Although technology may require up-front investment, effective technology investment can reduce costs. The J.S. Bridwell Regional Simulation Center, for example, has enabled the nursing program to grow, but at a lower cost per student. Technology could be used within the campus to enable students to attend the same lecture while being in different rooms, reducing the need to build additional classrooms. This, combined with small group discussions, is little different from approaches used from the Sorbonne to the University of Texas. Finally, technology can enable substantial savings through process improvement. This is especially important given the increasing demand from various accrediting bodies.

INSTRUCTION

• Professors at both the graduate and undergraduate levels will continue to face students who lack certain basic skills and cannot perform work at the necessary level. Although only 14 percent of entering freshmen are required to take remedial work based on placement exams, these exams inadequately predict student preparation. Remediation is difficult within the standard credit-bearing course, since the additional time required for the student needing remedial assistance diverts time away from the substantive focus of a course. Technology offers one possibility. There are varieties of online and computer-based programs that can be used to teach basic skills. Even with technological options, more resources will be needed to focus on remedial preparation.

2 In 1982, John Naisbit published the book, Megatrends. He suggested that as the culture becomes more high tech, there will be a corresponding desire for “high touch” that involves bringing in interpersonal and experiential factors.
There are many forces that will require a reshaping of instruction. While the traditional didactic format has its place, the need to incorporate hands-on, experiential, and interactive educational approaches has been suggested since Socrates used the Socratic method. The divide between distance education and classroom education is disappearing. Indeed, the availability of free content through the Web may reshape the role of the professor. MSU’s success into the future will require defining a niche in which it provides the most positive student experience, not just in terms of educational outcome, but also in terms of campus life.

Changes in technology and instructional processes, as well as changes in student expectations, will increase the need for faculty development and support.

CAMPUS AND FACILITIES

One of MSU’s strengths is its campus. It has the appearance of a traditional university, and its size can foster a sense of community. The need to increase enrollments from outside the local area may require MSU to create a more robust campus life. At present, the campus needs more facilities that are designed to foster social interaction among campus community members.

MSU has been very successful in its efforts to add and update facilities. The challenge that faces MSU in the future is significant. The challenge is not only financial. It also will require designing facilities that effectively accommodate the changes in technology and instructional processes that are likely to occur in the future.

The need to recruit more students from outside the area will affect the demand for housing.

CAMPUS CULTURE

MSU has limited engagement among faculty, students, and staff. Engagement in education typically is described in terms of a student who is not just active, but intrinsically motivated, curious, and reflective. Employee engagement is much the same, but engagement is in the work and the aims of the organization. The dynamic and complex future that MSU faces will require fostering a culture of engagement for both students and employees.
CRITICAL ISSUES

The implications described above have a number of common elements that can be considered as critical to strengthening MSU into the future. Critical issues were identified through the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats conducted after reviewing input received from the campus community. These include:

- **Clarifying mission and vision.** This is not simply developing mission and vision statements. It is defining MSU as, in the vernacular of marketing, a brand. It involves defining the unique and positive attributes that make MSU a great place to be a student or to work.

- **Increasing and diversifying financial resources.** The need to diversify and increase the current resource base is compelling. Reductions in state funding, the need for additional technology, additional facilities, and funding for student scholarships are among the factors making expansion and diversification of the resource base essential.

- **Capital improvement planning.** MSU has a master plan for the campus. Rapid changes in technology, however, require that a more comprehensive capital improvement planning process be put in place.

- **Marketing.** Along with the branding already noted, MSU will need to aggressively market to potential students outside the local area.

- **Quality improvement and innovation.** MSU’s ability to thrive is tied to ongoing quality improvement. The scope of quality improvement is extensive, including everything from recruiting students to effective job placement upon graduation. This will require not only incremental improvements in existing processes, but innovation in processes. It also will require attention to evidenced-based decisions; that is, implementing initiatives that either have demonstrated efficacy or include an evaluative component.

- **Adaptive culture.** Academic institutions, and MSU is no exception, are bound by many traditions and norms. The traditions are an important part of what defines the culture. At the same time, it is critical that MSU have the capacity to adapt and change to address the many forces shaping higher education. Fostering a culture of engagement for both students and staff is one part of that.

- **Human resource focus.** The success of MSU is dependent on qualified and motivated faculty and staff. Rapid changes in technology, the need to effectively engage students, and the need to diversify resources require strategies that will enable faculty and staff to perform effectively.
Goals

One important part of the planning process was to gather information about what faculty and staff considered central goals for MSU. The results of the process to identify those goals are presented in this section.

The process involved several steps. First, information was gathered from individuals and units on what they considered goals and actions for MSU. This information was reviewed and themes were identified. The themes were then written as goal statements. The goal statements were sent back to the units, faculty, and individuals to rank.

The top six goals were determined using two ranking methods. The first method was to rank the goals using their average rank score, a score computed by assigning points based on the rank position. The second approach was to count the number of votes that a goal received for first, second, or third position. The six goals presented here were the top five that resulted from both approaches (See Appendix A for a list of all the goals that were identified).

The top six goals are very similar to the critical issues that were identified in the previous section. The convergence of both frameworks suggests the primacy of the goals and issues that have been identified.

GOAL 1

Strengthen the extent to which MSU’s mission and vision are effectively conveyed both within and outside of the organization, and serve as the basis for decisions

- Revise the mission and vision statements to communicate the direction the university will take in the future.
- Communicate the meaning and value of the liberal arts to internal and external constituents; explain the mutual benefit of the liberal arts and sciences and professional programs.
- Participate in COPLAC conferences (students and faculty) to develop COPLAC culture on campus.
- Develop a marketing and promotion plan to brand the university and convey its mission and vision.
- Develop an evaluation matrix for activities that asks the question, How does this activity support academic functions?

GOAL 2

Establish and implement processes for effective faculty recruitment and retention to ensure the highest quality faculty

- Develop and implement a systematic plan to address salary compression.
- Restructure faculty classification to distinguish faculty with various teaching and research responsibilities.
- Develop and implement system of rewards and incentives that aligns with the mission and vision of MSU.
- Provide professional development opportunities.
- Provide faculty with sufficient resources to be effective teachers and researchers.
- Increase faculty sense of well-being and shared purpose.

GOAL 3

Increase the quality of education provided to students to ensure they have essential competencies to contribute to society, embark on or advance in chosen careers, and engage in lifelong learning

- Add more interdisciplinary teaching and research opportunities.
- Weave critical thinking and writing components into every program and the core curriculum.
- Continue to seek program accreditation and maintain existing accreditations.
- Increase undergraduate involvement in research activities.
GOAL 4
Acquire and incorporate technology (equipment, software, processes, etc.) that enhances educational quality and operational effectiveness

- Enhance instructional technology (classroom and online).
- Enhance technology to support research.
- Upgrade technology in the library.
- Develop applications and Web-based programs to increase operating efficiency and support marketing.

GOAL 5
Increase the number and quality of students admitted to and retained in graduate and undergraduate programs

- Improve retention of first-year and second-year students.
- Increase opportunities for students to present papers at conferences and to publish articles.
- Offer academic programs that have a distinctive focus to interest students.
- Develop and implement an enrollment management plan.

GOAL 6
Expand and Diversify University Resources

- Increase external funding through grants and contracts.
- Increase donor funding (number of donors and amount generated).
- Increase alumni participation.
- Develop programs and other activities that generate surplus revenues.

Next Steps
The information as well as the goals and objectives presented in this document are a starting point for an ongoing planning process. The next phase will be to develop an implementation plan that will include the following steps:

- Commit to tactics to move the university toward achieving agreed-upon goals.
- Allocate resources for priority initiatives.
- Set deadlines.
- Identify responsible oversight parties for tactics and goals.
- Schedule ongoing reviews and updates of progress toward achieving goals and objectives, and revise the plan as required.

Appendix A. Additional Goals
The MSU community proposed a number of additional goals that are important and will support the realization of the six priority goals.

- Ensure the retention of qualified MSU staff.
- Increase research productivity.
- Incorporate a focus on innovation and lean management to improve process efficiencies, streamline operations, and reduce costs.
- Expand and upgrade facilities to enable effective research, instruction, and a sense of community among faculty and students.
- Strengthen student engagement and foster a culture at MSU as a community of learners.
- Strengthen the marketing of MSU’s graduate and undergraduate education.
- Foster and support a global orientation and an emphasis and serving diverse populations.
- Ensure the governance structure of MSU effectively supports the mission.