

Chapter 7

Morningside College: Continuing to become one of the best private residential Colleges in the Midwest.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the last ten years at Morningside College have brought much change and the next ten years are likely to be no less challenging. The issues that confronted Morningside College in 1999, prior to the adoption of the *Five Year Plan*, included mounting budget deficits, too many staff and faculty positions for the number of students at the college, decreasing enrollments, an athletic program that was both costly and inconsistent with the culture of a small private residential college, and some very tired facilities. At the beginning of 2004, Morningside College has clear mission and vision statements, a new outcomes based curriculum, a focused admissions strategy, an athletic program that is consistent with the culture of the college, a reorganized and re-energized Board, and a number of improved facilities resulting in an institution with focus, direction, and confidence.

The *Five-Year Financial Forecast* projects a balanced budget by 2005-06, although enrollments that have exceeded goals for the past two years indicate that this may occur sooner than projected. While this is cause for optimism, there are many issues that still concern the institution. These include: the number of high school graduates in Iowa is decreasing; Morningside's year 1 to year 2 retention rate and six year graduation rate are still too low; health care costs continue to be difficult to predict and control; the uncertainty of the economy directly impacts the market value of the endowment; faculty and staff salaries are still lower than desired; a number of facilities on campus are still in need of upgrading; and our competitor institutions are also working to get better.

Through the efforts of all members of the Morningside College community, the institution is continuing to improve. While aware of the issues that continue to be of concern, the Board has challenged the community to achieve even more by adopting the following statement: “The goal of Morningside College is to be one of the best private residential colleges in the Midwest. By best, we mean providing a superior educational experience for students measured by criteria widely accepted within higher education.” The specific criteria are spelled out in the *Five-Year Plan Update* that has been shared with the college community in draft form.

The *Five-Year Plan Update* lists four initiatives which must occur in order to achieve the goal adopted by the Board:

1. Enrollments must increase and the academic profile and graduation rates must improve.
2. The capital needs of the campus must be addressed.
3. Quality faculty and staff must be recruited and retained.
4. More money for annual and capital needs must be raised and the endowment must increase.

During the summer of 2003 Admissions developed a plan to enroll 300 new first-year students with a better academic profile and 80 new transfer students by 2006. The *Five-Year Plan Update* describes the benchmarks for the Admissions plan. A retention consultant visited Morningside in December 2003 and will make suggestions to improve retention and graduation rates. The college has earmarked \$100,000 for retention efforts in the 2004-2005 budget. Other specific ideas to achieve the first initiative are also included in the *Five-Year Plan Update*.

Significant improvements to the Morningside physical plant, such as the new apartment style residence units, have occurred over the past four years but much remains to be done. The older residence halls need to be renovated; progress on the campus master plan and landscaping needs to continue; and the Allee Gym renovations need to be completed. The *Five-Year Plan Update* identifies other necessary physical plant improvements including renovation of the first floor of the Olsen Student Center, locating the President's home on campus, and acquiring Robert's Stadium and surrounding land. Negotiations with the Sioux City Schools on the acquisition of Robert's Stadium are ongoing and may be concluded by February 2004.

Recruiting and retaining strong faculty and staff will require increased development funds for both groups and an improved compensation plan. Morningside must commit to funding regular on-going development opportunities for faculty and staff. A successful compensation plan must: 1) be realistic, 2) be goal oriented, 3) be sustainable in the long-term, 4) be regularly evaluated, and 5) advance the institution. The *Five-Year Plan Update* calls for increasing compensation and requests input from Faculty Senate and from Administrative/Staff Council on criteria for a merit component to the compensation plan. The *Five-Year Plan Update* also indicates that as the number of students increase, the number of faculty will also need to increase. As with the merit component of the compensation plan, the Faculty Senate has been asked to recommend criteria against which requests for new faculty positions will be evaluated. Criteria for the addition of staff/administrative positions are detailed in the *Five-Year Plan Update*. The college plans to add both a Director of Assessment and Institutional Research and a Grant Writer beginning in June 2004.

The fourth initiative to allow Morningside College to become one of the best private residential colleges in the Midwest is to increase fund raising at the college. The needs of the college include the annual fund, capital projects, and the endowment. An institutional campaign has begun with an initial goal of \$20 million and it has been more successful than anticipated. The goal for this campaign needs to be both ambitious and realistic. A feasibility study is underway to determine if an institutional campaign with a goal increased to \$35 million within a time frame of 2002-2008 is possible; early indications are quite positive. Morningside must also work to cultivate the next generation of donors who can be leaders in future institutional campaigns.

The implementation of the *Five Year Plan* has allowed Morningside College to reverse a number of trends that could have led to its demise. With some difficult belt tightening, slightly higher enrollments than planned, successful fund raising and fortuitous bequests the college has met or exceeded its benchmarks under this plan. The college is now on track to achieve fiscal stability and is able to focus on improving the quality of the educational experience for students. The *Five-Year Plan Update* provides the path to this improvement. The commitment of the Board, the President, the senior staff, the faculty, and the administration and staff of Morningside College coupled with the quality of its student body will ensure its success well into the future.