

## Executive Summary

**Chapter 1:** Several changes in the top administration and the academic governance structure occurred just prior to and soon after the March 1994 evaluation of Morningside College by the North Central Association (NCA), followed by the proposal and rejection of one new curriculum, the approval of another without a strong consensual vision and practical plan for implementation, faculty growth without concomitant enrollment growth, annual operating budget deficits, a growing operating debt level currently at \$7.7 million, more senior administrative changes, and the proposal and subsequent rescinding of a controversial benefits reduction plan.

In 1999, President John Reynders brought a welcome stability and a focusing of effort on the problems of budget deficit, tuition discounting, endowment-spending formula, mushrooming staff, NCAA Division II cost, and stalled fund-raising. He issued a *Call to Action for Morningside College*, leading to “*For Such a Time as This*”: A Five-Year Plan for Morningside College, aiming for 1) fiscal stability with a balanced budget in five years, 2) a rich curriculum and co-curriculum, and 3) a rewarding work environment. Approved in October 2000, the *Five-Year Plan* directs actions in six specific areas: mission and vision, athletics, curriculum, tuition, cost-cutting, and student life—with recommendations for new mission and vision statements, a redefinition of athletics, new niche opportunities, a new fund-raising campaign linked to the *Five-Year Plan*, a reduction of faculty and staff (full- and part-time), modification of the benefits plan, new initiatives for improved value to students, new personnel policies, and a planning process.

The most controversial decisions were the transition of athletics from the NCAA Division II North Central Conference to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Great Plains Athletic Conference as of Fall 2003; the elimination of programs in Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Economics, Environmental Science, French, Health/Physical Education/Recreation, Indian Studies, and Sociology begun in Fall 2000; the reduction of staff from 144.5 to 125; and the reduction of faculty size from 79 to 64 by Fall 2003 with cuts in Biology, Chemistry, English, Mathematics/Computer Science, and Nursing. A new and thoroughgoing curriculum revision process that focused on quality, mission fit, and affordability resulted in the approval of a new curriculum in January 2003, to begin in Fall 2004. Curriculum work continues with the development of new courses and a strong emphasis on methods of assessment. The successful 1996-2000 "Investing for the Future" fund-raising campaign has been succeeded by a new campaign resulting in physical plant improvements and new administrative positions, scholarships, and programs, including one equipping every Morningside student with a notebook computer, beginning in 2002-03.

There have been specific responses to recommendations stemming from the 1994 NCA visit and to other concerns expressed by the NCA team. Better board training has been implemented. Compensation increases have been difficult to accomplish, but progress is being made. Two general education curriculum revisions have occurred. Major changes have been made in athletics. Budget concerns continue, as the five-year plan has projected a balanced budget by 2005-6, but in the midst of a national economic downturn. The administrative structure and faculty governance organization is improving, as are personnel policy issues, the evaluation of faculty, gender and cost

issues in athletics, the alignment of curriculum and mission, and physical facilities. Low faculty salaries are still a problem.

As the college addresses its future, two major issues are ongoing: its financial health, a central theme of the five-year plan, and the development of a culture of assessment. While the college is on-track for a balanced budget by 2005-6, the recent market declines in the endowment portfolio and rising health-care costs have created added budget concerns. The assessment effort has begun with the definition of eight specific outcomes for every graduate, the requirement that every course approved for the new curriculum addresses assessment, and recommendations for an assessment director, an assessment committee, and oversight of assessment by the Curriculum Policies Committee.

**Chapter 2:** Criterion 1 of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) requires that an institution's purposes be consistent with its mission, appropriate to higher education, and clearly stated. Morningside College's purposes, which fit the expectations of higher education, are taken directly from its mission statement, applied to all decisions, and understood by the broad college community.

There are five stated purposes: to provide higher education for traditional-aged college students in the Midwest; to foster eight outcomes in graduates (critical thinking skills, communication skills, ethical behavior, an appreciation of different cultures, a foundation of liberal learning, a commitment to life-long learning, leadership skills, and spiritual values); to combine liberal education with pre-professional training; to provide co-curricular opportunities in an attractive residential setting; and to promote service in the context of affiliation with the United Methodist Church. Especially challenging

among these purposes and their accomplishment are balancing liberal education with pre-professional training, assessing progress towards achieving each purpose, and responding to diversity in the student body. These challenges and others raised by the high standards of such purposes are being met with an ethos of inclusion and participation at Morningside.

**Chapter 3:** The HLC Criterion 2 questions an institution's marshalling of human, financial, and physical resources. With a re-structured Board (in October 2002); an experienced, respected, and committed senior management; and the consciously developed communication to and participation of faculty and staff in a dynamic system of shared governance, in which the Finance and Facilities Committee is a key player—Morningside College has created a solid organization in recent years.

Human resources are talented and loyal, despite heavy workloads and compensation not yet up to competitive standards. Financial resources are fragile, as the college continues to operate with a cash deficit. Strong measures to achieve a balanced budget by 2005-6 have been communicated to all constituencies of the college. The support of community financial institutions and an investment consultant is helping. The college has been successful in achieving the financial goals of the *Five-Year Plan*, and plans to continue to surpass them by controlling costs, meeting enrollment goals, conducting a successful capital campaign, and continuing to deserve the support of the college community and local banks.

Physical resources are in good condition, adequate in size, well equipped, and well maintained. The college is addressing the problem of deferred maintenance.

Academic resources are experiencing a particular growth in the area of educational technology. Student resources stress student safety and security.

**Chapter 4:** Accomplishing educational and other purposes is the focus of the HLC Criterion 3. There have been two curriculum revisions in ten years. The first, in general education, resulted in the CORE curriculum, implemented in Fall 1998. The second, more comprehensive and mission-driven, was approved by the faculty in January 2003 for Fall 2004 implementation.

Creating a culture of assessment has become the route to the accomplishment of the goals of these educational programs, through continuous evaluation and adjustment. The three-part CORE Assessment Plan has led to valuable changes in the general education program, as has the assessment of the Interdisciplinary Honors Program completed in Fall 2002. Departmental programs have in place or are moving toward systematic assessment plans that are focused on mission-driven objectives. The graduate program in teacher education is using an assessment system based on a design keyed to professional and state expectations.

Oversight of the conduct of educational programs is handled by the Curriculum Policies Committee with ultimate approval by the entire faculty. Evaluation of teaching is systematically accomplished by student survey and by a peer process overseen by the Promotion, Tenure, and Development Committee. Professional faculty development funding is a priority of the five-year plan. Two faculty excellence awards programs promote faculty achievement. The Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Award, established in 2003, carries significant monetary incentive and empowerment.

**Chapter 5:** The continued accomplishment of educational purposes and effectiveness is addressed in Criterion 4 of the HLC. Finances are a major concern in this regard. A mid-year budget adjustment in 2002-3 to stay with the financial targets of the five-year plan cannot be repeated without jeopardizing the plan's educational goals. The process of belt-tightening, however, has been open and equitable. Early success in the current capital campaign may lead to raising the bar on fund-raising goals. Similarly, the college has been exceeding recent enrollment goals. Physical resources are being maintained and enhanced precisely to attract students. Enhanced technology resources also play a part in this strategy. The painful down-sizing of human resources is finished. Now the focus is on monitoring personnel needs in terms of student growth. The pursuit of partnerships with other institutions is another strategy for efficient deployment of personnel.

The effective planning and decision-making of the past three years, mission-driven and agile, is working. The early review of the five-year plan in Summer 2003 is a recent example. The college takes a multi-factored approach to its future: enrolling more students and retaining them, controlling the tuition discount rate, and campus-wide assessment. Morningside College is an institution in transition—headed in the right direction. An inclusive planning process, assessment, and the five-year plan are central to its successful perseverance. The college is moving to Tier I regional status, following a May 2003 Board recommendation. Its success rests on its clear mission, developing vision, and ability to provide adequate financing for its evolving goals.

**Chapter 6:** The final HLC requirement, Criterion 5, deals with the integrity of an institution. Morningside's mission statement sets the standard. Its faculty, staff, and administration know that they serve as models. There are published policies and

procedures for the rights and responsibilities of all college constituencies: faculty, staff, and students. Diversity is a particular commitment and challenge. The Public Relations Office endeavors to provide information that is fair, accurate, and consistent. The college is a reliable and cooperative partner with other organizations and institutions.