

## CHAPTER 10

### Looking To The Future

The members of the faculty, staff, student body, and administration at Southeastern Oklahoma State University find themselves on a metaphorical bridge: examining and learning from our past and applying these lessons as we prepare for the future. With this as a background the tasks of conducting the study and constructing the report have forced the University to look far beyond the boundaries of its own academic disciplines and administrative units. While we learn from our history, it is *we*--and not history--that must chart our course, choose our path and initiate our actions. The ability to predict, adapt, and make the right call is an essential element in any organization's survival and success.

At the same time, even the best-laid plans are subject to unanticipated problems, obstacles and challenges. Occasions that are not, and cannot be foreseen, are bound to arise. Recognizing this, Southeastern is committed to facing its future on the basis of an honest appraisal of its past, and a rigorous assessment of the present from which it is developing the plans and strategies that it believes balances purposive direction with the flexibility to grow, develop, and meet future challenges in our continuing quest to achieve the University's mission.

#### Successes

##### **In Strategic Planning**

Southeastern's revised Mission Statement and Scope and Function Purposes and Objectives, and its Vision 2005 provide the guidelines and direction that will serve SOSU well in its future endeavors. The strength of these documents lies in the contents expressed, and the fact that they are a result of the processes of collective input. As Chapter 2 of this self-study concludes: "The university community has responded to the opportunity to change. Positive steps have been taken to improve the quality of programs and to include and to unify the efforts of faculty and administration in operating the University" (p. 11). Our commitment to build continually upon these collective efforts at planning and decision-making will be an essential component to the success in adapting to contingencies and meeting the challenges that the future holds.

##### **In Shared Governance**

These collective efforts are exemplified in the practice of shared governance. SOSU has taken to heart the recommendations of the 1993 Evaluation Team, and has instituted several measures to improve shared governance. These measures include the restructuring of faculty committees, expanding the advisory capacities of the Faculty Senate, and reducing the teaching load for those faculty involved in select activities related to shared governance and administrative duties. The benefits derived from shared governance are at least two-fold. First, allowing and encouraging faculty input and participation in decision-making fosters feelings of ownership, involvement and responsibility that serve to enhance faculty morale. Second, the opportunity for faculty to air their views and contribute their insights provides a pool of multiple

perspectives from which to draw. The availability of these multiple perspectives increases the likelihood that the University will have access to “just what is needed” to solve problems, overcome obstacles and address pressing concerns. An illustrative example--pertaining to the near future--concerns the challenge of sustaining shared governance reforms in the face of state revenue short falls. Ironically, it is the processes of shared governance that is perhaps the best thing to generate the creative and innovative ideas that will succeed in meeting this challenge.

### **In Assessment**

The institutional changes that are detailed in this report give evidence that a culture of assessment is developing at Southeastern. In no small part, the exercise of self-study has contributed to the emergence of this emphasis on assessment. This is not an end in itself, but is recognized as a tool—and an important tool—in enabling us to fulfill our broader mission. The process of assessment, while deservedly receiving much attention of late, has long been a concern of thoughtful and reflective individuals and organizations: The challenge for the future, then, is to build on these developments, continue to evaluate the effects of our assessment procedures, and to apply effectively the findings of assessment to our goals of promoting student learning, increasing educational opportunities, and enriching the quality of life for students and for broader communities.

### **In Human, Physical and Financial Resources**

Southeastern will continue to maintain a faculty and staff that are sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement in both the instructional programs offered and the student support activities provided. The deployment of faculty resources will continue to reflect the university’s mission and programs. Students in all programs, majors, areas of emphasis, and locations will have the opportunity to receive quality instruction from appropriately qualified faculty.

The Campus Master Plan, which has been under development since 1998, is the essential resource document for facility and campus planning. Part of this Plan included the formation of the Renovation Goal Team (comprised of faculty, staff and administrators), which was charged with suggesting a hierarchy of priorities for the use of funds for the expansion, renovation and maintenance of the campus’ physical resources. The Campus Master Plan provides a comprehensive framework to direct the allocation of available resources in a way that maximizes the quality of life for all of the campus community.

As noted throughout this study, the State of Oklahoma is experiencing a revenue short fall. Southeastern continues however, to show dramatic progress in areas of external funding, particularly in the Southeastern Foundation and Grants & Contracts. A sustained pursuit of external funding, in conjunction with a persistent focus on strategic planning and the state’s Academic Planning and Resource Allocation policy will ensure that financial resources are effectively utilized in order to meet the needs of students, faculty, and external constituencies.

## **In Instruction**

Patterns of evidence, in this report, demonstrates Southeastern is succeeding in its efforts to educate students with the knowledge and tools to be lifelong learners, to equip them with the skills to pursue their professional aspirations and to cultivate the values and dispositions that will help them to be more effective citizens of their communities and their world. The steps we are taking in the areas of technology and the General Education program are of particular note as SOSU continues to achieve these instructional goals in the future.

- **Technology**—The University has made great strides in providing access to and training in the use of computer technology for both faculty and students. The Center for Instructional Development and Technology has proven to be a rich resource for equipping faculty with the skills and knowledge needed to integrate technology into their instruction. Efforts to utilize technology are driven from the desire to exploit the means necessary to facilitate student learning. SOSU will continue to build on these developments, as well as increasing its offerings of distance degree programs through telecommunications, the Internet, and other media. The Henry G. Bennett Memorial library will continue to sustain its growth and utilization of technology in order to provide quality service and offer the most advanced information access capabilities for Southeastern’s faculty and students.
- **General Education**—Since the Evaluation Team Report of 1993, Southeastern has implemented several measures intended to improve the General Education program. These measures include the implementation of a new program, the formation of a General Education Committee, and the appointment of a full-time faculty member as the Director of General Education. It is believed that these improvements will ensure that this cornerstone of the undergraduate experience will function to provide students with a broadened cognitive perspective, and with the intellectual and analytical tools needed to make their way in a changing world.

## **In Diversity, Community and Institutional Integrity**

As it is stated in Chapter 8, the University community is reminded “that diversity is that rich mixture of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, varying physical abilities, gender, ethnic and geographic backgrounds essential to the quality of campus life” (p. 237). Specific steps that have been taken to provide the University community with diverse educational opportunities and experiences include: focused efforts to recruit faculty and students from underrepresented populations; increased emphasis of diversity in instruction and curricular materials; and the creation of two positions (Director, Office of Diversity and the Multicultural Coordinator). These efforts demonstrate Southeastern’s commitment to the values of democracy and social justice, and also express the recognition that variety is indeed the spice of life. Moreover, attempts to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of a diversity of cultures serve to enrich and enhance the quality of life for all: The more things students learn to like and enjoy, the greater is their chance of happiness and understanding others.

Southeastern values its relationship with its employees, students and other groups in the community. It is dedicated to implementing collaborative processes with both internal and external constituencies. As these relations are broadened and strengthened, Southeastern is committed to continued institutional integrity and to maintaining the highest levels of legal and ethical propriety.

### **In Services and Opportunities for Students**

The Vision 2005 document states, “By 2005, Southeastern will be the leading regional university for quality higher education in Oklahoma and northern Texas.” Clearly, there is a marketing dimension to this statement. If student enrollment is an indication of the high quality educational opportunities provided at Southeastern—it is believed it is—then the eleven consecutive semesters of increased enrollment is surely evidence that SOSU is well on its way to attaining its Vision. Southeastern is committed to and capable of continuing the tradition of providing quality services and educational opportunities for the students. It might be said that a quality education causes students to enroll.

### **Future Areas of Sustained Focus**

This Self-Study Report has been written with the concept of a mature institution in mind. A mature institution is one that recognizes both its strengths and its weaknesses through the self-study process. The mature institution realizes that any self-study process is a “snapshot” of the institution at a particular point in time, which includes both successes and areas that require sustained focus and effort. These are the areas for future sustained focus:

- Effectively adapt to the changing political and economic context for higher education.
- Changing student demographics, demands for greater accountability, new technologies, the increasing cost of higher education, and the continuation to deliver planning to recover from the budget reductions.
- Continue the tradition of devoting personal attention to students and working to improve effectiveness at promoting students’ lifelong learning, responsible citizenship and global awareness.
- Work to strengthen and streamline the University’s committee structure.
- Continue to strengthen the Office of Freshman Programs in order to enable it to help students make a successful transition to college.
- Develop effective strategies to meet the challenges associated with the continuing growth of the student body. These challenges include providing adequate resources of time, money, technology, manpower and space needed to fulfill the mission.

- Continue to provide the training and technology that will make available the information needed by students, faculty and alumni in a timely, and cost-effective manner.
- Develop creative and effective ways to continue the growth of high demand programs in light of funding and staffing challenges.
- Continue to build upon and expand our successful cooperative agreements and partnerships with other institutions and organizations in the region.
- Develop effective ways to provide funding for faculty research and travel in spite of budgetary cutbacks.
- To make a coordinated effort in light of budgetary constraints to fill vacant faculty positions.
- Continue to improve efforts at implementing a comprehensive plan of assessment for the University. These efforts include a consistent implementation of assessment throughout the University, inclusion of all faculty as part of the assessment process, and providing students an explanation of the reasons for and the importance of assessment.
- Take the appropriate steps to improve the General Education Program and the School of Graduate studies, making these more coherent, coordinated and effective programs.
- Continue to improve the conditions of physical facilities, including the construction of the new Student Union, in order to create an environment more conducive to learning.
- Continue to build on and improve the efforts at creating a campus atmosphere that ensures sensitivity toward underrepresented populations on campus.
- Improve efforts at obtaining private funding for promoting University excellence.
- Continue to improve and enhance strategies for offering students opportunities for active learning and internship experiences that cultivate the total development of students.

### **Preliminary Plan of Action to Address the Self Study Challenges**

Southeastern plans to combine the areas of sustained focus identified in this Self-Study Report with the issues raised by the HLC Team to form our roadmap for the future relative to our HLC accreditation. After some reflection on the self-study, there has been an emerging consensus that one of the things that would assist Southeastern in sustaining our efforts on the key HLC initiatives is to institute an annual review process. More specifically, as a result of this

self-study the faculty, staff and administration of Southeastern plan to initiate an annual summit/conference on major HLC initiatives identified by the Self-Study Report and the HLC Team. The focus of this conference would be to review the institutional progress on meeting each of the HLC challenges, identify additional challenges which need to be addressed, devise new strategies for meeting these challenges, monitoring and modifying existing strategies including timelines and individuals responsible for enacting these strategies, and identifying and developing appropriate outcomes measures for each of these challenges.

The first annual HLC conference will be held during the fall 2004 semester. The Office of the President in conjunction with the Office of Academic Affairs will jointly host the conference. The Faculty Senate will also be invited to become a sponsor of this conference. Each conference will begin with a review of existing outcome measures and data sources in an effort to assess our progress on each initiative. An emphasis of each annual conference will be the identification and development of new outcomes measures when necessary. Some examples of data sources which will be utilized for the first annual conference will include the goal team reports from the strategic planning goal teams, assessment reports, program review documents, documented work of various committees such as the Institutional Assessment Committee, the preliminary enrollment reports developed for the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and various other documents such as the Annual Budget Highlights Report, et cetera.

#### **A Final Note**

While Southeastern has many constituencies pursuing a variety of ends, Southeastern is united by a vision of this institution that is deeply grounded in its historical mission and unified by a shared set of aspirations for the future. The self-study helps us understand that the past helps shape the future and permits us to set ambitious goals for ourselves and to prepare a solid groundwork for successors.

With this look to the future, Southeastern Oklahoma State University presents the Higher Learning Commission with this Self-Study Report for your consideration.