

Design Concepts – University of Minnesota Crookston
Report by Public Strategies Group
Executive Summary

The University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC) is developing a new vision for its campus as part of an institutional strategic positioning process designed to make the University of Minnesota one of the top three public research universities in the world. Declining enrollment, demographic challenges, and financial constraints require that UMC chart a future course that is academically and financially viable, is consistent with the University's overall mission, and can demonstrate measurable progress within two years.

As University President Bruininks said, "Although there are no predetermined outcomes, one thing is clear: The need for change and improvement is urgent [for UMC]."

The University asked The Public Strategies Group, Inc. (PSG) to develop a series of design alternatives to serve as starting points for developing UMC's strategic position. The purpose of these designs is to provoke reflection, discussion, and action.

The designs presented here are not specific proposals or recommendations. They are broad concepts intended to stimulate fresh thinking about UMC's role in northwestern Minnesota and how to re-position UMC to meet the needs of its customers more effectively, now and in the future. The University will study the designs as part of the deliberation leading to a new strategic plan for UMC.

In developing the three designs presented in this report, PSG used a broad range of resources, including:

- Analyses of trends affecting UMC and the region,
- Interviews with administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and local residents,
- Ideas developed in a *design lab* made up of professionals from throughout the United States with a range of expertise on higher education and the region, and
- Responses by stakeholders to a set of Preliminary Design Concepts presented by PSG in Crookston in May 2005.

Sustainable Rural Vitality: A New Core Purpose

In the first design, UMC would become a senior-level *institute* -- a center for instruction, research, and development of applied skills and technology for sustaining and renewing the economic, ecological, and political vitality of rural and small-town cultures.

The campus would serve as a focal point for discussion and debate and a repository for the best research and ideas on issues central to the long-term well-being of the region. It would be a magnet for students, scholars, lifelong learners, and practitioners of rural sustainability work. Rural vitality topics might range from health care delivery to early childhood education, from the changing nature of production agriculture to the definition of community in sparsely populated areas.

The Achievement Connection: A New Approach

In the second design alternative, UMC would become the primary broker of higher education resources — both its own and those of other providers — for students in the region. It would also reach out to international students who see the unique characteristics of the Red River Valley, with its diverse mix of educational resources, as fitting their needs.

The Achievement Connection would help students design a multi-program, inter-institutional plan to meet their educational goals. It would seek a combination of the best service, education, and price for its students, and offer coaching and guidance to help them succeed. This design concept would also leverage the complementary roles of UMC and the University of Minnesota-Morris by creating an operational, marketing and recruiting superstructure — the “University of Minnesota Northern Plains Institute.” This entity would serve both institutions and offer the region a potentially powerful new higher education service model.

Institute for Public Resource Managers: A New Customer

In the third alternative, UMC would become the principal educator of entry-level professionals for government agencies focused on agriculture, natural resources, and environmental protection. Selected government agencies would be the core customers of UMC, and students would receive training for employment in public sector agriculture, natural resource management, and environmental protection. This alternative vision would attract students seeking the specialized training and experience needed to gain entry into these professional fields.

UMC would work closely with public agencies to allow students to complete academic projects, internships, and cooperative learning experiences that prepare them to “hit the ground running” when they become full-time professionals.

UMC would also become a business-to-business provider, offering workshops, seminars, and conferences designed exclusively for the professional development of agency staff, further serving the needs of public employers.

In order to evaluate the efficacy of these or other possible designs, the following criteria should be considered:

- To what degree will the design yield outcomes that contribute to the overall success of the University of Minnesota, as called for in the strategic positioning plan?
- To what degree can the design evolve to accommodate the myriad forces that will shape the evolution of higher education?
- To what degree will the design result allow UMC to assume greater responsibility for more of its costs, as well as a balanced budget?

- To what extent will the design build on existing educational, rural and economic development, and related resources in the region?
- To what extent can the University of Minnesota provide the resources necessary to successfully implement the design?

Another important part of this process will be to create a clear set of outcomes, and then develop an accountability system to track performance.

UMC has reason to celebrate what it has accomplished in its first hundred years. The new direction required is driven by changing conditions, and UMC can embrace its future with enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence about the potential value it will add to the region, the state of Minnesota and, most important, its students.

This summary of the PSG report was prepared by University Relations