



Section 7.1

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Chapter Seven Conclusion

Each chapter of this Self-Study Report has examined and evaluated designated aspects of the institution, aligned with the HLC/NCA General Institutional Requirements and Criteria. This chapter brings together the conclusions from each of the other chapters and describes the impact that the self-study process has had on the SVSU university community.

7.1 Summary of Chapter Conclusions

SVSU: Overview and History

Culminating this decade of change and transformation, the institution now is in the process of internalizing and institutionalizing changes in policies and practices that are more reflective of a maturing institution.

Accreditation History

Building on the strengths noted in the 1994 site visit report, the university has systematically addressed all issues of concern. Because of the transformative change of the university over the past decade, the work to develop General Education, program assessment, and diversity has demanded a larger scope of planning and a broader range of strategies than would have been predicted in 1994 and 1995. Many issues from the previous report reflected a campus with a very different culture. For a time, the university's growth challenged its ability to develop appropriate new structures and processes consistent with a mature institution.

Although work remains in the area of assessment, and the institution has not yet accomplished all it intends to achieve in the area of diversity, the university has made demonstrable progress in General Education and all other areas of concern. The *Next Steps 2000-2005* planning process has helped the institution maintain a consistent focus on the issues discussed above and made it possible to address these issues in an institution-wide context. As SVSU begins its next planning cycle and commits to continuous improvement in its planning processes, the university's ability to further address these vital issues will be reinforced.

Mission, Planning, and Governance

The past decade's growth and transformation have been accomplished within the administrative structure described in this Report. The periodic revision of the Mission Statement, as a consistent part of the overall university planning process, ensures continued validity and relevance. *Next Steps 2000-2005*, the

university strategic plan, established measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes to achieve that Mission and Vision and identified university units responsible for key actions.

Due to careful planning and conservative fiscal management in the current budget climate, SVSU has been able to maintain services without layoffs or major cuts in programs, in spite of a significant expansion of the student population and of the physical plant.

Next Steps 2000-2005 is used, in varying degree, by all major divisions of the University to shape their planning. However, not all units or university faculty and staff feel equally engaged in planning processes or achievement of defined goals. It is generally acknowledged that the planning process is top-down; some feel this is an effective approach, but others contend that individual units are too removed from the process, becoming involved only as it directly affects their own work.

Department self-studies and surveys indicate *Next Steps 2000-2005* is not fully integrated into curriculum planning, and it is not clear whether department and college curriculum planning figures into *Next Steps 2000-2005* revisions. Department chairs, who lack control over resources, have expressed the most distance from the university planning process; by contract, chairs are not vested with planning responsibilities and receive only limited release time for their work. Faculty participate in curriculum development through the process delineated in the faculty contract. Both administrative appointees and elected faculty serve on curriculum committees and participate in deliberations on proposals submitted to them. The faculty votes on committee recommendations at two ratification meetings each year. The allocation of resources for implementing curriculum decisions rests with the administration. This collaborative process requires that administration and faculty continue to communicate effectively.

While information from departments, task forces, and committees may be used in the planning activities of the university administration, the university community often does not see how such input from advisory committees and task forces informs planning and implementation, even when individuals have been directly involved. Many in the campus community feel inadequately informed of specific initiatives and do not recognize how progress toward goals and objectives is measured.

The university is governed through a traditional hierarchical structure in the context of two collective bargaining units. The effectiveness of governance structures is perceived quite differently by different units and by individuals

within these units. The impact of recent institutional reorganizations to accomplish both university goals and division objectives needs to be assessed. Many units noted the importance of student and alumni feedback in their on-going planning process and regularly carry out student satisfaction surveys. However, outcome-based assessment efforts are uneven. Many units are only beginning to establish assessment procedures to measure their effectiveness and do not yet consistently use assessment information to plan for improvement.

Although the university operates efficiently to accomplish its purposes, those purposes have been tied primarily to institutional growth. In an era with diminished resources, tensions may develop in the dual commitment to build qualitatively distinctive programs while remaining an institution of opportunity. Thus strategic alignment and broad engagement in the planning process will become more critical.

Resources

SVSU is financially administered on a sound and prudent basis. As the financial data indicate, the institution has operated in a cost-effective manner, has maintained sufficient reserves, and has had the ability to survive economic downturns. Annual audits have consistently been positive and have substantiated reported financial information.

The university has initiated improvements to hiring processes, with a focus on diversity, and has implemented a new performance management process for all administrative and support staff. The impact of these changes remains to be evaluated. Hiring processes need to be more closely aligned with university mission, and all faculty/staff development activities need to derive from institutional goals.

The campus provides a safe working and living environment. A majority of campus facilities are new or renovated, and a deferred maintenance plan is in place. However, the current budget climate places more pressure on the institution to identify and implement operating efficiencies.

The university has made a qualitative step forward in employing technology, and has greatly expanded training opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. A major transformation has occurred within the past four years. Currently, however, there is inadequate budget for necessary future IT upgrades, replacement costs, and staff positions. Institutionalized support for technology integration originally supported by grants will need to be addressed in future funding.

The university library has undergone major renovation and expansion. Its online resources have likewise expanded greatly. Adequate resources will continue to be necessary to support rising costs of subscriptions, materials, and services.

SVSU needs to prepare for the impact of an optimal size environment (around 10,000 students, 1700 living on campus) and plan for future tuition rate decisions, any further physical plant expansion, and resource reallocation strategies. The university must continue aggressive pursuit of operational efficiencies through process improvement programs. All of these concerns should be addressed in the next phase of planning.

The allocation of resources is not completely understood across campus, as budget development is a centralized process. However, a linkage between resource allocation and the planning process is evident in the regular review of *Next Steps 2000-2005*, which provides clear demonstration that resources have been allocated in support of SVSU's mission and goals.

Academic Programs

As noted throughout this Self-Study, SVSU has experienced a decade of unprecedented expansion and maturation. This transformative change is evident in all aspects of its academic programs as well. Founded as an "institution of educational opportunity" for the region, SVSU has maintained that commitment even as the growth of the past decade has allowed the university to develop programs of qualitative distinctiveness and expand the diversity of its curriculum, at both the graduate and undergraduate level. SVSU has attracted an increasing number of better prepared students to the university, even as it continues to provide academic support programs for those who enter the university less well prepared.

Saginaw Valley State University offers a wide range of traditional liberal arts and sciences programs as well as a number of professional undergraduate programs appropriate for its mission. SVSU has thoroughly revised its General Education program to align with recommendations from the 1994 NCA evaluation team report. The program is in its third year of operation and assessment measures have been undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Diversity in the curriculum has been an issue of concern. Although some have preferred a required course on diversity, others have felt that it is more effective to integrate diversity issues into all aspects of the curriculum. That is the approach taken by the General Education program, and a survey on Diversity in the Curriculum showed that issues of multiculturalism, international relations, and race/gender analyses inform both curricular and extracurricular programs at all levels. The effectiveness of this approach needs to be assessed.

SVSU has also expanded its graduate curriculum from three major programs to eight, with a subset of specializations within College of Education Masters of

Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) and Education Leadership (EdL) programs bringing the number of concentrations to 20. Consequently, SVSU is now considered a Masters I institution in the Carnegie Classification. Graduate programs at SVSU are part-time professional programs serving non-traditional students who tend to be employed full-time in their respective fields and seek to enhance their credentials to move into leadership positions. These professional programs meet the same community needs as the undergraduate professionally accredited programs; their creation is often prompted by local business and community leaders. Graduate programs reside in the respective five colleges and are managed by Program Coordinators appointed by the dean. Graduate enrollments have proved variable and because part-time graduate students may not maintain consistent registration in the programs, it is difficult to monitor their progress. Task forces have been appointed for each program to examine enrollment trends and review issues facing each of these programs.

Academic programs are supported by an extensively renovated library and a significant expansion of the technological infrastructure and services through the university. Student learning at SVSU is also facilitated by a variety of academic support programs and centers. While many of these services are provided through the Academic Affairs division, student advising is administered by Student Services & Enrollment Management, a somewhat unusual arrangement that makes effective communication between units essential.

Academic program planning and assessment primarily takes place at the department or college level (outside a university-wide planning context). Many faculty members have expressed lack of familiarity with *Next Steps 2000-2005* and do not see its relevance to the work of their departments. Academic program assessment is most consistently carried out in professionally accredited programs and in the General Education program. Most other programs and departments utilize some assessment measures, at least at the course level, and some use the outcomes to revise courses and programs. However, assessment is uneven across academic programs and has not been institutionalized into processes for program development and resource allocation.

Curriculum revision processes are defined in the faculty contract. Program and course ratification is carried out by university-wide committees with elected faculty members and administrative appointees. The faculty as a whole votes on committee recommendations, which then go to administration for implementation. Some have argued that as the University has grown, these processes have become less effective and that input from faculty outside their area of expertise carries undue and inadequately informed influence and that curricular processes

should lie within the respective Colleges. Others strongly support the continuation of the current system and see it as a way of maintaining academic standards and faculty engagement.

The course schedule at SVSU has traditionally been cost effective, with every effort made to maximize the number of seats occupied in each section. Enrollment has consistently increased over SVSU's 40-year history, and credit hour counts have increased even more significantly, reflecting the increasing number of residential students. The average course size is 24, although some departments have consistently higher enrollments than others, depending on the subject matter. Although some lecture courses admit as many as 55 students, few courses have higher enrollments. In the current economic climate, the ratio of full-time to part-time faculty will continue to demand attention.

The number of full-time faculty has increased significantly since 1993. Faculty are recruited from nationally recognized graduate programs and typically hold terminal degrees in their fields. Full-time faculty teach a 12 hour per semester schedule, and many faculty teach Spring/Summer sessions, as well. Teaching is the primary consideration in tenure and promotion decisions, as is consistent with the mission of the university. A week-long Faculty Summer Institute, focusing on best teaching practices, helps orient new faculty to the University. Faculty also engage in significant amounts of research supported by the university; increasingly, grant-funding efforts, aided by the Sponsored Programs Office, have become a measure of faculty scholarship. Faculty also provide extensive service to the university, which is also a factor in tenure and promotion decisions. Evaluation processes are contractually defined and have a long history. With the growth of the faculty, some have come to view these processes as inefficient, and the work of the Professional Practices Committee and evaluation teams as overwhelming. However, others feel strongly that these processes are democratic, effective, and should be maintained.

Campus Culture

The growth and maturation of the university are reflected in significant changes in campus environment and culture. Students report high levels of satisfaction with the academic programs and support services provided by SVSU. A continuing challenge for the institution, especially in the current economic climate, is to meet the needs of all SVSU students with a variety of programs, course offerings, support services, and facilities. New residence halls and a new Student Center have been built to meet student needs. New programs have been developed to serve new constituencies, even as long-standing programs have been enhanced. Indications are that these new programs and facilities, along with leadership from a core of residential students, have drawn even commuter

students more fully into campus life; however the impact of these services will need to be assessed.

Although SVSU has become increasingly diverse and a large number of activities, offices, and programs have been developed to foster and support that diversity, the numbers of minority faculty, staff, and students need to increase for SVSU to fully reflect the community it serves. Campus task forces, college and division committees, as well as community advisory groups, have worked to address diversity issues. Diversity officers reporting directly to the President have assumed special responsibilities in this area; the current Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Programs is working with units across campus to develop benchmarks to measure progress in this area and incorporate the multiple campus diversity initiatives into a comprehensive strategic plan that will be well-known by the campus and the community and inform university planning.

SVSU has developed strong links with the community, both formal and informal. Over the past decade, SVSU has become a more significant presence in the area and more people come to campus to use the facilities and participate in cultural activities, community education programs, and athletic events. Community interest has increased community support, as demonstrated through successful fundraising campaigns. Campus outreach has also increased through student internships and fieldwork, volunteer activities, and service on community boards. SVSU has developed essential links with the communities it serves, enabling the University to respond appropriately to community needs.

Information about the university and its programs is communicated through a variety of publications. The production of these is facilitated by the University Communications Office. Technology has transformed communication internally and externally through the university website and through new means for registration, advisement, and course delivery. These processes have meant new issues of resource allocation and increased need for oversight, as well as a faculty and staff development and training to ensure the integrity and effective use of these systems.

7.2 Impact of SVSU Self-Study Process

The decade of growth and transformation described in this Self-Study Report have laid the foundation for an exciting future for Saginaw Valley State University. The value of this self-study has gone far beyond its necessary role to fulfill HLC/NCA requirements. The process and final Report have helped develop common understandings of the transformation of this university over the past decade.

The self-study has also crystallized the institution's understanding of the challenges it faces to take all the high energy, new opportunities, expanded programs, and strengthened community links to further improve the institution in all aspects. The self-study has prepared the university to pay special attention to the need to develop a continuous improvement model which mirrors the logo of the *Self-Study Updates* written for the university community. As the institution works to Plan/Act/Assess/Revise, it will become ever more successful at accomplishing its mission. This will be especially critical in a time of diminished financial resources. As the university builds on its unique history and seizes new opportunities as they arise, it will also become ever more successful at serving the many stakeholders who are committed to the Mission and Vision of this institution.

Section 7.2

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