



**Interim Report from Academic Profile Task Force
Prepared for: March 12-13, 2015 Board of Governors Retreat**

Background and Focus

The overarching charge given to this task force is to envision the alignment of the University's array of academic programs, strategic partnerships, and research emphasis to help ensure that the next generation of student/learners succeed. The Task Force met as a group three times between December and February, and will meet once more before the March BOG Retreat. The first two meetings focused on developing and refining a detailed list of areas of interest, and topics within those areas, that the group thought should be addressed in the vision statement that will be developed. Five broad areas emerged: (a) balancing quality with 21st century technology and employer demand; (b) defining and focusing on student success; (c) identifying student body size, mix, and profile; (d) expanding partnerships that benefit the academic profile, and (e) addressing the University's distinctive characteristics. For each of these areas, committee subgroups were formed in order to analyze the national conversation, gain a local campus perspective, and formulate talking points for discussion on how the national trends and pressures will interact with the MSU culture and expectations to envision the next ten-year academic profile.

The Task Force has reviewed enrollment data, the higher education financial data, career projections, a webinar on on-demand educations, and numerous position papers.

Environment: Key Trends and Expectations

Several predictable trends have emerged, starting with the expectation that the rate of change in higher education will be accelerated. Higher education will have an increasing demand for personalized educational experiences with the challenge of making direct connections to employer demands. Although it will stress both administration and shared governance, an agile approach will be critical in order to capitalize on rapid developments in technology, changing student expectations, and the challenge to prepare students for careers which are not yet clearly defined. The "new career" reality will place additional pressure on curriculum development to address specialty areas and niche markets.

In addition to more traditional approaches, a variety of modern delivery methods will continue to evolve as established, commonplace expectations --- online, hybrid/blended, incorporation of social media, short-term courses, self-paced, etc. Facilitating learning from multiple higher education institutions, corporate learning, credit-by-assessment, shortening time to degrees, and

other approaches to demonstrate learning will be valued. Similarly, collaborative learning, research experiences, internships, study away, and other environments focused on enhancing problem-solving and development of analytical capacity will be priority expectations. Competencies are emerging as a currency of higher education, and this consideration will be competing with and valued, as we do credits.

There is an expectation that “student success” will be embodied as central to all of these trends, with that measure going beyond the convenient measure of retention and graduation. MSU will be challenged to prepare students to be educated persons who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to navigate all aspects of life including employment, community, and home. More and more, the University will not be judged by graduation rates or “student satisfaction,” but rather by the success of its students once they graduate. In this environment the public affairs mission will continue to be valued as part of the unique characterization of a Missouri State education.

Emerging Vision Considerations

The size and make-up of the student population will be central to the MSU vision because it should, and must, drive curriculum development, resource expectations and allocation, and staffing patterns. Some of this will be driven by the reality of increased reliance on students starting their higher education experience in community colleges. But the decisions made at MSU will also make a significant difference in pathways to the future. Likewise, the nature of the student population envisioned will forecast Missouri State’s position in terms of type and expectations in research productivity and the extent of student-faculty research collaboration.

Although the Task Force has not reached any conclusions, there is a tone in discussion that the pathway MSU has been on for the past two decades is likely to be the road to continue. That pathway has been highlighted by increasing the University profile at the graduate level and it has given the institution a new level of distinction in research and creative work. Clearly, there are graduate-level areas of critical demand by employers...even beyond what MSU has established. And the research efforts established in several special centers of excellence at MSU, such as the JVIC Centers and Viticulture/Enology work at Mountain Grove, have connections to national and local demand in today’s society.

The recent MSU pathway also has been marked by active efforts to build collaborations and partnerships with industry, health care, and other institutions of higher education. Continuing these efforts would appear to fit into the growing expectation that higher education meets employer demands as well as it is a resource-frugal approach. There also is a growing consideration in the Task Force that the academic structure in terms of “location” of academic programs should be such that it gives those graduates advantages in career opportunities.

Discussion Questions

Throughout recent history, our strategy has been to achieve modest enrollment growth year over year. Should that strategy continue? If so, how should we evaluate potential additional programs?