



Short Subjects

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A Descriptive Overview

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COMMITMENT TO FOCUS

The University of Minnesota's "Commitment to Focus" (CTF) plan has two interrelated general purposes:

- 1) To more clearly differentiate the University's role from the roles of the state's other higher education institutions; and
- 2) To achieve excellence in the three traditional missions of the University: instruction, research, and service.

Both purposes are expressed in the University's announced intention to shift its focus from quantity to quality--from "being all things to all people" to "doing better those things which we do best." CTF is based on the premise that the University should do less, but do what it does do better. Under the plan, the University will focus on what makes it distinctive; i.e., on the activities that cannot be done, or cannot be done as well, by other public post-secondary schools in Minnesota. These efforts are also intended to raise the University's standing among other public institutions in the country.

Four specific objectives of the plan are described below. The discussion includes examples of measures the University is taking, or proposes to take, to implement CTF. A comprehensive presentation of CTF, including funding implications, is beyond the scope of this paper, as the plan envisions significant changes in virtually all aspects of the University's policies and programs. To be fully realized, CTF requires support not only from the state government, but also from the private sector, the other systems of higher education, and the general public.

The four objectives of CTF described below are as follows:

- 1) Increasing the quality of instruction;
- 2) Insuring adequate preparation of undergraduate students, while maintaining access;
- 3) Eliminating unnecessary duplication; and
- 4) Providing more state financial support for high-cost instructional programs.

1. Increase Instructional Quality

An explicit objective of Commitment to Focus is to raise the University's ranking in academic quality from one of the top ten public institutions in the country to one of the top five. There are no official rankings of academic quality, and the most widely accepted ones that exist are based more on perception than on objective criteria. CTF is based on the premise, however, that the University's perceived academic ranking will improve if more funds are invested in instruction. The University has stated that while more funding won't guarantee that its ranking will improve, its ranking cannot improve without more funding. Increased funding will benefit students, according to the University, because it will represent a greater investment of resources in their education, and at that same time will enable the University to recruit more prestigious faculty.

CTF specifically seeks to increase the University's ranking in per-student funding from seventh among the nine public institutions in the Big Ten to third or fourth. The intent is to make the University of Minnesota be on par with such institutions as the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois.

There are two ways of increasing per-student funding: to increase the amount of funding or to decrease the number of students. CTF would do some of each. The University is requesting about one-half of the increase it says it would need to increase its ranking to third or fourth if it retained the same number of students. The plan calls for reducing the number of students so that the increase in funding, combined with the reduction in students, will result in per-student funding that will raise the University's rank to third or fourth.

The plan calls for a reduction of about 8,000 students by 1992. The University projects that it will lose about 6,000 whether CTF is implemented or not, due to decreases in the number of high school graduates. Thus CTF is aimed at reducing the number of students by 2,000 more than is expected to occur naturally.

The entire reduction would be among undergraduate students--the number in graduate and professional programs would remain the same. Most of the reduction would occur among students in their first or second years of college. The University assumes that most of these students could be picked up by community colleges; state universities would handle the remainder.

One result of decreasing the number of undergraduates would be to reduce the ratio of undergraduates-to-graduates from four-to-one to three-to-one, which the University says is closer to the ratio in the universities with which it wishes to be compared. A smaller number of undergraduates, according to the University, will benefit them by reducing class size and at the same time relieve graduate students and professors from some of their teaching load so that they can concentrate more on research.

2. Require Adequate Preparation

An element of the University's emphasis on quality under CTF is to impose minimum requirements that every student must fulfill in order to do junior- and senior-level work. These requirements are different than admission requirements. Admission requirements--those that must be met by a student applying for entrance into the University for the first time--will continue to be set by each individual college within the University, and may consist of such measures as grade point averages, class standings, and test scores.

The new preparation requirements differ from the existing admissions standards in two ways:

- * The preparation requirements apply only to students at the time they wish to enter into a baccalaureate degree-granting program, following the completion of two years of general education.
- * The requirements consist of coursework that the student must have completed, rather than grades or test scores.

The requirements are intended to insure that the student has completed the preparatory work necessary for performing satisfactorily in a baccalaureate degree-granting program.

The requirements are that students have completed four years of English, two years of social studies, three years of math, three years of science, and two years of foreign language. The Board of Regents has already approved the new requirements; they will take effect beginning in the 1991-92 academic year.

Students may satisfy all of the requirements while still in high school. If they have not done so, they have three ways in which they can make them up and still obtain a baccalaureate degree from the University:

- * If the deficiency is in only one or two courses and they meet the applicable admission requirements, they can enroll in a University college and make up the courses during their first two years.
- * If they are missing more than a few courses, they can enroll in another institution, such as a community college, for their first two years and after satisfactorily completing the requirements, transfer to the University.
- * Alternatively, they can complete their first two years at the University, in the General College (Twin Cities) or in the Supportive Services Program (UMD), and then transfer into a baccalaureate program.

3. Eliminate Unnecessary Duplication

CTF is based on the premise that the University has spread itself too thin, and that it needs to narrow its focus. This means that some of its activities must be eliminated or curtailed. CTF proposes to drop or cut activities that duplicate opportunities available to students through other institutions, and concentrate the University's resources on the activities that are unique to it.

One way in which the University proposes to narrow its focus is to drop degree programs that are not central to its primary missions. The University has already ceased offering any two-year degree programs at its Twin Cities or Duluth campuses, on the grounds that these are more appropriately provided by the state's community colleges. The two-year degree has been maintained at the University's technical schools at Crookston and Waseca, as these are two-year programs that have no counterpart elsewhere in the state.

The Board of Regents has also approved dropping, effective for the 1991-92 academic year, the General College B.A. degree. The General College will instead be devoted exclusively to its original purpose of assisting unprepared students. As was noted above, the General College at the Twin Cities campus, as well as the Supportive Services Program at UMD, will provide unprepared students with the opportunity to make up the required coursework and subsequently transfer into a baccalaureate degree-granting program.

Under CTF, some instructional programs will also be dropped, reduced, or merged. For example, the University has targeted a number of undergraduate professional programs for cutbacks, including the School of Management, the College of Education, and the School of Nursing. These three programs have been proposed because similar opportunities are broadly available in other state institutions, such as in the State University System. The University of Minnesota's efforts in these and other programs would focus on offerings not available elsewhere--for example, ones linked to the University's graduate programs, research activities, and outreach efforts.

Another aspect of eliminating unnecessary duplication is phasing out programs at the University's coordinate campuses at Crookston, Waseca, Duluth, and Morris that are not consistent with CTF. Generally, CTF calls for each of these campuses to focus on the activities that are distinctive at each, and to eliminate those that duplicate ones that are available elsewhere.

More specifically, CTF envisions that the Crookston and Waseca campuses will focus on agricultural offerings, and eliminate those that are not tied to the agricultural program. Morris is to concentrate on the liberal arts, and develop a more fully integrated liberal arts curriculum that provides a more distinct alternative to the diversified curriculum available at the Twin Cities campus.

Under CTF, The Duluth campus is to narrow its focus in a manner very similar to what is suggested for the Twin Cities: to eliminate its two-year degree programs, to establish uniform preparation requirements for baccalaureate degree-granting programs, and to eliminate or reduce courses that duplicate what is available elsewhere.

CTF envisions the Duluth campus as in some ways mirroring the Twin Cities campus, but concentrating on the northeast region of the state. One implication of CTF for Duluth is that it reduce the number of students in its Supportive Services Program. CTF implies a reduction because many students now in the Supportive Services Program come from the Twin Cities. The proposed reduction stems from the belief that UMD ought to be serving primarily students in the northeast region, and that other institutions should serve metropolitan-area students. Other than in the Supportive Services Program, CTF does not foresee the need for any reductions in students at Duluth beyond the natural attrition expected to occur.

4. Support High-Cost Programs

The state's current "average cost funding" policy bases the amount of funding an institution will receive for instructional costs on the number of students enrolled in the institution. Under the policy, it is assumed that University of Minnesota student tuition fees will pay for 33 percent of those costs, with the balance provided by state appropriations.

The policy does not require the University to set tuition rates in such a manner that every student pays 33 percent of the instructional costs of the program in which he is enrolled. The only requirement is that total tuition payments, by all students enrolled at the University, amount to 33 percent of the costs. The school is free to set different tuition rates for different programs or levels of instruction as it sees fit, so long as they average 33 percent.

The University has in the past charged its undergraduate students more than 33 percent, in order to lower the costs below 33 percent for students in its professional programs. The rationale for this policy is that the cost of professional programs is so great that most students would not be able to enter into those programs if they had to pay 33 percent of their costs. The estimated total instructional costs of professional programs range as high as over \$30,000 per student annually, as compared to around \$4,000 per student in undergraduate programs.

Since CTF calls for a reduction in the number of undergraduate students, it will reduce the undergraduate tuition revenue the University will receive. If the University keeps the number of professional students constant, as it proposes under CTF, it must either increase tuition for undergraduate students so that they are providing an even larger subsidization, or it must ask for larger payments from professional students.

The University is proposing instead that the average cost funding policy be altered to provide appropriations for 75 percent of the instructional cost of six professional programs, with tuition paying for 25 rather than 33 percent. The six programs are: dentistry, medicine-Duluth, medicine-Twin Cities, pharmacy, public health, and veterinary medicine.