

August 30, 2012

Chancellor Hamid Shirvani
North Dakota University System

Dear Chancellor Shirvani:

As requested, I am including written inputs, comments, and suggestions regarding the NDUS 3-Tier Access Conceptual Plan. Our response has been prepared following, as you asked, "review and consideration by the university's academic community." Thank you for giving us this opportunity to review the draft and offer our comments and suggestions.

Our review entailed an examination of our respective current procedures, an analysis of financial, programmatic and enrollment impacts of the proposed changes, and consultation with and solicitation of our community's input. This process has allowed us to understand more fully the proposal and its large and far-reaching impact on our mission and campus.

We are in full agreement that our institution and those in the NDUS must continue to make students' educational goals our highest priority. Learning, quality, access, affordability, and accountability are principles we all follow and adhere to as educational professionals, and I am proud to say we do well in each regard. We operate with integrity and commitment to students.

We are aware of the various calls to make our system more efficient and our delivery methods more effective. But in due respect to those opinions, I can confidently say that our system and the institutions I oversee are highly efficient and our delivery methods progressive and successful. In my opinion, there is no apparent reason or exigency to make wholesale changes to the NDUS on account of sporadic concerns about efficiency and delivery methods.

What is more critical for higher education right now is to raise the bar on innovative and successful pedagogy, integrated learning, civic learning, high-impact practices, and meaningful student engagement in scholarship. Moreover, there is a critical need right now for resources to increase support for our academics and effective student services, advising, mentoring, internships, and career guidance. We need conceptual proposals to improve our student diversity, including direct support for our Native American partners and Native students whom we proudly serve. And right now we need to devote time and resources to helping our students understand how to be more informed and contributing citizens, how to be more effective writers, proficient readers capable of discerning spurious arguments and claims, and how to contribute meaningfully to our society. Those skills and students' career preparation are front and center for our mission and vision at Minot State University.

Our state's ample resources provide a great opportunity to do something meaningful for the NDUS. Now is not a time to pursue a major overhaul of our system based on a presumed and inaccurate issue with efficiencies and delivery methods, no less with an inaccurate presumption that things are broken. At the very least right now, we need time for consultation, deliberation with the campuses, study, and dialogue. Providing a campus response to a proposal like this within a couple of weeks doesn't allow us time to consult with our campuses and one another.

Moreover, our campus has been severely impacted by the Souris Basin Flood. Housing, enrollment challenges, financial issues, and others severely impact us. My presentations to the SBHE, to the Budget Section, and to legislators have made these challenges clear. What we need from the NDUS right now is support for these issues and support for our students and their learning.

Our purpose in this response is to offer our analysis and campus input about the 3-Tier model. The analysis we have conducted and the feedback we have received (comments from faculty and staff are available should you wish to see them) shows that the 3-Tier model severely impacts our enrollments and finances, our vision and mission, and our strategic initiatives.

I understand very well that you are soliciting input with the intention of considering revisions to this proposal before it goes any further, and for that we are grateful for the opportunity to share this information and our clear recommendations.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

David Fuller
President
Minot State University

Minot State University: Mission and Character

Minot State University was founded in 1913 as a Normal School, one devoted to teacher education and the economic development and growth of the community. The university has grown from its original role as a teacher education school, to a four-year institution, and now to a comprehensive Master's I university authorized to offer a full array of undergraduate programs and graduate programs. Minot State University is the only comprehensive Master's I university in our system, unlike the other four year institutions that are classified as baccalaureate institutions. This institutional mission and character is designated by the State Board of Higher Education and the Higher Learning Commission.

Our university serves the community of Minot that now boasts a population of more than 60,000 residents and a major United States Air Force Base with approximately 17,000 service personnel and family. Our role as a comprehensive university with graduate authority supports this large and diverse population through on-campus, online, outreach, and alternative deliveries. Our university houses and boasts outstanding academic programs and centers, well qualified faculty and staff, with many possessing Ph.Ds. from the most prestigious universities in the nation. MSU is home to the nationally recognized North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities, the Rural Crime and Justice Center, the Great Plains Center for Community Research and Service, the state-wide Tobacco Consortium, an innovative nursing partnership with Trinity Health, and the Severson Entrepreneurial Academy. We are also the home of the Minot Symphony Orchestra and the Western Plains Opera, and proud of our reputation as a campus and community devoted to culture and the arts. We have fully-staffed educational centers at the Minot Air Force Base, Bismarck State College, and at NDSU in Fargo. We were one of the first universities to embark on a quality online program reaching across the state and country. We have added responsive programs, such as the Energy Economics and Finance Major, partnerships in Turkey, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, China, and South Korea, and we are currently exploring a program to be offered in Vietnam. Our partnerships with our Native American sister institutions of Turtle Mountain Community College, United Community Technical College, and Ft. Berthold Community College, and our cultural center and annual Pow Wow on our campus demonstrate our commitment to our Native American partners and students. We offer distinctive and nationally reputable academic programs, such as our communication disorders undergraduate and graduate program, an undergraduate and graduate program in criminal justice, including a Ph.D. cooperation with UND, athletic training, distinct art, music, and theater programs, and many others that attract students from within our state and across the nation.

The 3-Tier Concept and Impact on our Distinctive Character and Mission

A faculty member offers a very good assessment of the 3-tier concept as it relates to Minot State University:

The proposal states, "The choice of the right institution for students is critical to their success." This is of course true. But the proposal imagines that the only match/fit for a student to a school is via admission standards. There is no sense of "fit" of individual programs at specific universities. We have lost a sense of individual identity. We should be nurturing a sense of unique persons. Each school in the NDUS has its own strengths. Students should be able to decide which one they want to attend based on the quality of individual programs and professors. The NDUS is a system of universities; not one large university with many branches. I'm proud of MiSU's unique mission, history, core values, facilities and faculty. There are philosophical differences among professors, programs, and departments, but we embrace this. We extend the same courteous recognition to

other schools. Individual identity is vital to creative learning and discovery. I am frustrated with having to assimilate into an imagined "one size fits all" approach. This is severely limiting. A Chancellor's opinions of schools should not limit the opportunities of students to choose and receive the best individualized education for themselves.

Unfortunately, the 3-Tier Proposed Model would relegate Minot State University to a second-class institution, one misaligned in a second tier with much smaller baccalaureate institutions, serving different communities and fulfilling different missions. Outstanding students will be directed to the acknowledged first-tier institutions in the state because of a presumed higher quality of programming and teaching. The implication that lesser qualified students than those who attend the research universities should be diverted to institutions in the second and even third tier is misguided. The logic behind that system is suspect to assume that our system should micromanage student choices to this extent based on an arbitrary judgment about quality and class.

In all due respect to research universities, they are not, by virtue of their research mission, necessarily more effective as teaching and learning institutions than four-year or comprehensive master's institutions. Our research universities are just that, research universities, charged with hiring faculty and developing programs to support research. While research is certainly important, this does not by itself imply that the institution is better at teaching and learning. Although the tier concept might not imply qualitative differences in teaching and learning, the fact that students with higher academic records will be directed to these institutions misrepresents the essential missions and purposes of institutions of higher learning and the character and success of our own institution. It also mischaracterizes the act of teaching and learning. Our distinctiveness and traditions serving our city, state, and the Great Plains region defy any system that would attempt to relegate our role to a second class position based on an arbitrary system. Minot State University is not a second-class institution, and any conceptual tier model that suggests it is to students and to others does our institution and our reputation a great disservice.

Direct Impact of Specific Features of Proposal on Minot State University

Admission Standards

1. Two years ago, our campus underwent a concerted review of our admission standards. That review led to an approved set of admission criteria in line with our peer comprehensive universities and our sister institutions in the state. The analysis of our admission standards examined a variety of student characteristics and performances, and the standards were developed with the students' special needs and capacity for success. Those standards were also approved to supplement a variety of services and programs designed to address student success and progression toward the degree. That plan also included a new Passport Program offered in conjunction with Dakota College at Bottineau, which served students who were deemed at-risk and provided them with focused and consultative remedial support as a first-step prior to continuing their programs at Minot State University. We are well versed in student success methodologies, collaboration with our K-12 partners through quality dual-credit programs, and fully aware of the strategic needs to remain competitive and vital. This model indiscriminately shifts those responsibilities to another tier.

The 3-tier model will fully displace the standards we have instituted after deliberate study and campus reviews. The Passport Program will be lost in favor of a disjointed remediation plan. The proposed criterion for admission sets arbitrary standards to define differences in the tiers and insensitivity and little support of individual students, which is essential to effective learning.

2. The specific impact on our institution would be dramatic, with an estimated loss of 78 first-year students and a potential loss of another 112 students based on the suggested criteria. Early calculations show that the financial impact will be equally severe, with a loss of an estimated \$171,470 to \$246,057. Programmatic changes will occur, including the need for additional admissions staff for transcript and core evaluations; the loss of MSU/DCB's distinctive and successful Passport Program; loss of exemptions; and the confusion and unreliability of a standard of high school ranking criteria which is problematic and misleading due to many small high school classes.

Tuition Changes

1. Four years ago, understanding that the predicted number of North Dakota high school graduates was to drop by 30% in 2017, we embarked on a deliberate study of tuition models. Although a recent Chronicle report indicated that the number of high school graduates in North Dakota is predicted to decline by 13% within the next three years, the fact remains that our demographic student challenges are still a concern to many of us. In the recognition of the severe decline in population in our region and this northwest section of North Dakota, we carefully studied our competition in our 11-state region and concluded that we would be able to increase our ability to recruit out-of-state students and international students to Minot State University by entering into what we called the "Grow North Dakota" plan, a flat-rate tuition model for in-state and out-of-state students, approved by the campus and the State Board of Higher Education. This model has proven very successful in our efforts to recruit additional students, diversify our campus, and, as the title suggests, to Grow North Dakota. A documented percentage remain in North Dakota the first year after graduation and many become permanent residents. Our research showed that out-of-state students and international students bring with them considerable financial resources, they contribute to the workforce in the local economy, and they heighten opportunities to highlight cultural differences and global understanding. The financial benefit to the community and region far outweighs any perceived loss of dollars in a lower tuition rate. Additionally and equally compelling is the fact that our regional competition in Minnesota, South Dakota and in other states across the nation offer flat-rate models. Bemidji State, for instance, offers a flat-rate tuition model and a hybrid tuition model similar to our own.

Under this component of the plan, the flat-rate tuition model would be eliminated, the specific impact on our athletic program will be severe (see analysis below on athletics), our international initiatives will be curtailed dramatically, our regional competitiveness will be compromised, our strategic goal to increase diversity on our campus and our ability to "Grow North Dakota," as the original plan was titled, will be severely impacted.

2. The proposed change to a per-credit tuition model for all delivery methods will lead to increased tuition collections for institutions. However, those additional dollars come from increased costs to

students. When affordability and access are couched as critical values for these changes, one must wonder why we are discarding a program that actually provides students a much better value for their college expenditures than the one proposed. Going to a per-credit charge results in a considerable increase in expenditures if students enroll for 13-17 credits. Our hybrid model essentially charges full-time students (i.e., those who enroll in 12 credits) no additional dollars to enroll in 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 credits. This linear model, which is used in some adjoining states and by our competitors in Minnesota, offers students the abilities to complete additional hours without additional charges. The per-credit model essentially charges all students and registrations a pro-rated amount for each credit taken, from one and beyond. These additional charges will add considerable costs over what most of our students are now assessed. A student taking 17 credits and paying only the full-time rate of 12 credits under the current system would experience more than a 40% increase in his/her tuition costs. Granted, the additional revenues would provide the institution additional dollars to reduce some of the projected losses we are taking as a result of the changes in admission standards, dual-credit mandates, and waiver reductions, but it is a contradictory move in light of the proposal's interest in improving access and affordability. Student debt will increase as well, and that deserves our most careful considerations.

In addition to significant cost increases to students, this change has the potential for limiting enrollments as full-time students, increasing part-time enrollments, delaying graduation and providing the incentive for students to transfer to states, such as Minnesota, who preserve the hybrid tuition model. Granted, a per-credit model is more simple and transparent to students and parents. However, Minnesota schools will become much more attractive to North Dakota students and there will be the potential loss of international students to competitive states.

If students and parents notice the change and compare it with other institutions, it could cause students and parents to look elsewhere, especially in a state where the medium income is low and families end up footing the bills for their children, and the admission standards dictate they attend schools they are not interested in. For instance, Northern State in South Dakota charges in-state rates for North Dakota students. Minnesota institutions, such as Bemidji State, charge our current hybrid tuition model, and not per-credit to in-state and out-of-state students.

3. The proposal to charge all in-country non-residents the 1.5 resident rate represents a significant increase in the charges our current non-residents are charged. As we are following the approved flat-rate model, non-resident students are not required to pay 50% more under this proposal. This change, coupled with the proposed reduction in the waiver budget and aggressive Canadian recruiting policies, could result in an enrollment drop of up to 35.5% of this population; 16.5% of out-of-state residents and 19% Canadian students. It will also curtail our national recruiting for our new athletic program. The financial loss resulting from this change could be as high as \$475,000 or more.
4. The proposal to charge all international students 1.75 resident rate will have a notable impact on our international recruitment. Our current practice is to charge the flat-rate tuition fee to international students, similar to other schools. Prior to the introduction of the "Grow North Dakota" plan, we had approximately 25 international, non-Canadian students; currently we enroll 135 international, non-Canadian students. It is plausible that the enrollment in international students could decline by 17%,

if not more, and with it a loss of the cultural and global diversity we have gained, as well as a financial impact of \$229,000 in loss of tuition alone.

Reductions in Tuition Waivers

Currently MSU sets the amount of waivers at a professional benchmark standard of 10% of gross tuition collected. This methodology is sound, and recognized as an industry best practice. The proposal to limit waivers to 5% significantly reduces our waiver budgets and incentives for new students and support for essential programs. Our current waiver budget is \$1.55 million (10% of the tuition collected in 2011-2012). Those dollars cover all waivers, from those mandated by state statute, board policy, given at the institution's discretion (such as graduate assistantships), cultural diversity awards, and institutional waivers (e.g., academic excellence, athletic, marching band, Great Plains Scholar awards, employee-spouse awards, and WICHE). The financial impact of the reduction to 5% would decrease our award budget by \$775,000. Our athletic waiver budget would be reduced by \$250,000. These reductions will have a large effect on recruitment in all categories. The impact on graduate waivers is unclear based on the proposal's explanation. This translates to increased tuition for all students including the 70% from ND.

The waiver reductions from 10% to 5% will limit our abilities to recruit academically strong students, athletes, and others in designated programs.

Programmatic Mandates

1. Remedial/developmental coursework to the community colleges

Currently 97 incoming students in need of developmental English are served through some existing courses and by DCB; 223 students are served in math by on-campus courses and math clinics. In addition to the loss of headcount and revenue generated for the remedial courses our university offers, problems continue to exist when enrolling students as collaborative students through DCB. DCB does not have enough mathematics instructors to handle these needs, and the demand will become much greater if DCB or another two-year school assumes all of the courses we now offer. At times DCB hires MSU professors to teach these courses, and occasionally contracts between MSU and DCB faculty are split. Base salaries for two institutions are not the same, and it is unclear what institution picks up the benefits costs. In this proposed change students would not be able to take advantage of math clinics and other tutoring services offered by MSU, such as our Student Support Services project (called Power) and our Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL).

2. Dual Credit Reassignments

Currently MSU admits students in partnerships with local districts, including the Minot Public Schools. The loss of dual credits would force high school students to take courses with a non-local institution, perhaps not of their choosing. This change would negatively impact first-year student enrollments, in view of the fact that 50% of our dual credit students enroll as first-year students at MSU because of this program. MSU's educators are well trained and require educational background and standards for delivery. We are not assured that faculty from the two-year colleges have comparable training and support to offer appropriate oversight. MSU currently works with

several homeschooled and private high school students who typically take classes right on the MSU campus. This would no longer be an option for these students. The 3-tier system removes the option of an academically gifted high school student to experience the rigors of the regional university through this dual credit partnership in existence.

The financial and enrollment impact would be significant. Currently MSU charges dual credit students \$99.22 which last year generated \$144,633. Enrollments in dual credit courses totaled 252 last fall. Obviously the loss of those enrollments, the corresponding tuition, and the potential for them to enroll MSU, and the collaboration with the local districts would be lost under this proposal. MSU's program is strong and rigorous and offers well supervised experiences; this change would relegate this program to the status commensurate with remediation.

Impact on Strategic Initiatives

1. Athletics

Minot State University has been working for the past six years to investigate the strategic advantage of moving from the NAIA to the NCAA Division II. These investigations involved many consultations with faculty and staff, students, athletic staff, boosters, and community members. The research and planning included visitations by athletic consultants and members of the NCAA. Minot State University collected considerable information, considered the advantages and disadvantages of the change, and made a strategic decision that a move to Division II and into a new conference aligned well with our Vision 2013 goal to raise the bar for the institution and align ourselves with other institutions of similar missions and programs. Our study of aspiration peers in the Great Plains revealed that all those institutions were members of the NCAA Division II. Our study of the finances, facility needs, recruitment demands, and our competition led us to a sound plan for the transition. Last year we completed our final year of the provisional status, and two years ago we sought and gained membership in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference, regarded by many as the premier Division II conference in the nation.

Our approved flat-rate tuition model has offered us the ability to recruit athletes nationally and our 10% waiver budget allowed a portion to be devoted to support athletic recruitment. Currently 68% of our student athletes come from out of state. The potential loss of the flat-rate nonresident rate, one that other schools in the Northern Sun offer, will be lost under this proposal. That loss will be crippling to our athletic recruitment and result in a loss of approximately \$204,150. Although this cannot be calculated specifically with the formula provided, it is estimated that the impact on athletics will result in a potential reduction in the number of athletes coming to MSU to be close to a 26% decrease. Research conducted by NACDA shows that each student athlete brings with him or her on the average 1.9 additional students. Our experience recently confirms that athletes do indeed attract other non-athletes to a campus. The reduction in waivers extended to students will lead to a serious drop in enrollment and will greatly compromise our ability to participate in Division II.

2. Canadian and international partnerships

Our most recent partnerships, such as with Briercrest College, were negotiated with an understanding, not a guarantee, that the current rates would be honored. If we lose the Grow North Dakota rate, it is conceivable that the enrollments in the programs covered in the partnership, would suffer. The same could be predicted to happen with other international partners.

3. Impact on specific programs, such as Communication Disorders

Many of our niche programs attract students from across the nation and internationally. Communications disorders, for instance, recruits many students from other states, most notably Canada. Faculty in that program have expressed grave concern about the potential increase in those tuition rates.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations and suggestions:

1. Deliberation and consultation

We suggest that the SBHE and NDUS engage in deliberate study and dialogue about this proposal. This process should involve the consultation with the campuses. At present the campuses have only had about two weeks to review and submit responses on this monumental proposal. We have not discussed this plan in the Chancellor's Cabinet with other presidents, only during the respective tier meeting to describe the changes. This proposal deserves honest and detailed study by our campuses and other educational professionals if it is to succeed and accomplish the specified goals. As it stands right now, there are serious flaws and issues that will impact deleteriously our campuses and students.

2. Study regional impact

The proposal focuses almost exclusively on the delivery within the state of North Dakota. As all of us work with the greater region and nation, and must recruit and collaborate with others in the region and nation, the opportunity to study tuition models and practices elsewhere that would offer us a sense of the larger impact of these proposals. Iowa was mentioned as an example of the admission rubrics, and Indiana and Kentucky have been cited as examples of other practices. These models and others are important to review and discuss as best practices. It is critical that educational professionals guide the discussion.

3. Allow institutional differences

One-size does not fit all, as the adage suggests. And that holds very true for institutions of higher education. All of our institutions serve different regions, support different students and demands, and operate with the context of some very different economic and social demands. We pursue initiatives for the good of our students and the good of our institutions and regions. These varying service needs require us to have different tuition models, admission standards, waiver models, and others. In that

light, we strongly recommend that we are given the authority to maintain our Grow North Dakota tuition plan, that we hold to the 10% waiver limit, that we are allowed to continue to offer dual-credit courses, and that we do not constrict our operations and our student choices by a forced participation in an arbitrary and misaligned tier system.

4. Explore and support innovation and current practice to make our campuses the envy of the nation

The 3-Tier proposal does not include references to innovative practice, new dimensions of learning, professional development, technology enhancements, civic engagement, writing, and other directions that are key to making institutions strong and effective as learning organizations. A most notable absence is any reference to learning assessment. Our campuses must receive the support to make assessment and information drive our curricular improvements for the good of our students and programs. In all due respect, those directions are much more essential than irrelevant discussions about efficiencies and tiers. And given the resources within the state of North Dakota, this is the time to advocate for that support, not overhaul the system.

5. Support for flood and energy demands

Finally, we ask that the SBHE and the legislature assist us in our effort to address the serious losses we have incurred in enrollment and revenues as a result of the Souris Valley Flood and the influx of the energy industry into our community.

Conclusions

Although our institutional response does not endorse the 3-Tier Proposal, there are a number of features of it that are commendable. The College Success Report, while it is unclear as to the amount of time and effort it will take to gather and compile these data, would provide useful information to high schools so that they may adjust or revise their curricula and practices to improve students' preparation for college. This would lead to heightened awareness of the cause for success or failures. Expanded state and campus financial aid to include more need based aid is a good idea as well, unless it will further reduce our limited waiver and scholarship budgets. This initiative could lead to an increase in the enrollment of part-time students. Creating a mechanism for credit for life and military experience, which Minot State University is already exploring through its Veterans Center, is a good step forward. The impact would be minimal unless the portfolio system requires additional monitoring and costs to the students. The recommendations on supporting accelerated learning opportunities for adult learners and eliminating hurdles are good ones. We participate in a number of accelerated programs for adult students, but could do more. According to an adult survey we conducted two years ago, most adults prefer the online option. If such a direction is pursued, it is obvious we'll need to explore adding evening and weekend services, such as child care. Another good initiative in this proposal is the suggestion to seek out students who have credits and no degrees. We continue to communicate with students who do not complete their programs. Contacting these students and creating a program for them is challenging but worthwhile.

The three-tier model has been advanced within a short period of time with the purposes of differentiating three types of institutions by mission. The rationale includes an assurance that this system is not intended to diminish what the campuses have accomplished. Nonetheless, the tiers by their very nature designate levels

of quality and accomplishments that do lead to the diminution of what our campus has accomplished. Whether this was the intention or not, the reality is that the differentials in admission standards create in the minds of prospective and current students, parents, K-12 institutions, and higher education institutions an unfortunate perception of levels of quality and ability and more specifically suggestions about limitations in quality and ability. And as we have demonstrated in our analysis, the results will be very damaging to our programs and students.

It is not clear what such a tier system and the resulting implications of levels of quality do to “make the campuses stronger and of high quality in every way,” as the document explains. How does such a tier distinction strengthen an institution whose mission is to serve a diverse set of students in a particular region of the state, fulfill a successful tradition, and celebrate the successes of our many graduates who contribute to our region, state, and country? Any explicit or implicit benefits of this system do not appear to warrant the monumental disruptions that will occur in our North Dakota University System. It is not clear how such a radical change in policy and practice could justify the ends, which are defined as making our campuses stronger.

This proposal will not make our campus stronger. Instead, it will weaken it considerably and force us to move far back from what we have accomplished over the past few years. This effort to establish tiers and mandate and impose generic standards and practices on our institutions will not strengthen our institutions or our abilities to serve the students more effectively. We maintain that the imposition of such a model will lead to a loss of our own sense of uniqueness and commitment to serve individual students well. Tracking and restricting student choice within our system and forcing them into institutions that are not their choice might work well in a state or region where there is an excess of students, and an inability to serve them well, severe financial problems. That is not the case in North Dakota. Our small population and our qualities of place are different and do not call for such a profound change to our system that is not a good fit for our state and subsequently not a good fit for our campuses.

In our strong view, higher education in North Dakota is not broken. We are in one of the most effective, efficient, and dynamic systems in the country, in contrast to those states that are failing to accommodate their students. There is no reason to fix something that is not broken, and this model implies that dramatic changes should be imposed to improve what we do. We can always improve what we do, but it doesn't take such a radical proposal imposed within a short time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide you with our input and responses.

David Fuller

Minot State University