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***and* DEVELOPMENT**



Capitalizing on the
Potential of Minnesota's
Rural Campuses

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Seeking solutions for Greater Minnesota's future

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Executive Summary

Rural regions across the nation are threatened by declining populations, slowing economies, and legislative power transfers to urban and suburban regions. The very survival of colleges located in these rural regions is at stake. The potential for these rural campuses to survive and thrive via more far-reaching collaboration with their communities and better-focused missions, strategies, and operations must be examined thoroughly, efficiently, and promptly. This research project addresses the role of rural colleges and universities associated with the higher education systems in Minnesota in terms of economic development. Specifically, the research intends to answer the question: *What potential does the presence of regional campuses hold for rural communities in facilitating economic development activities?*

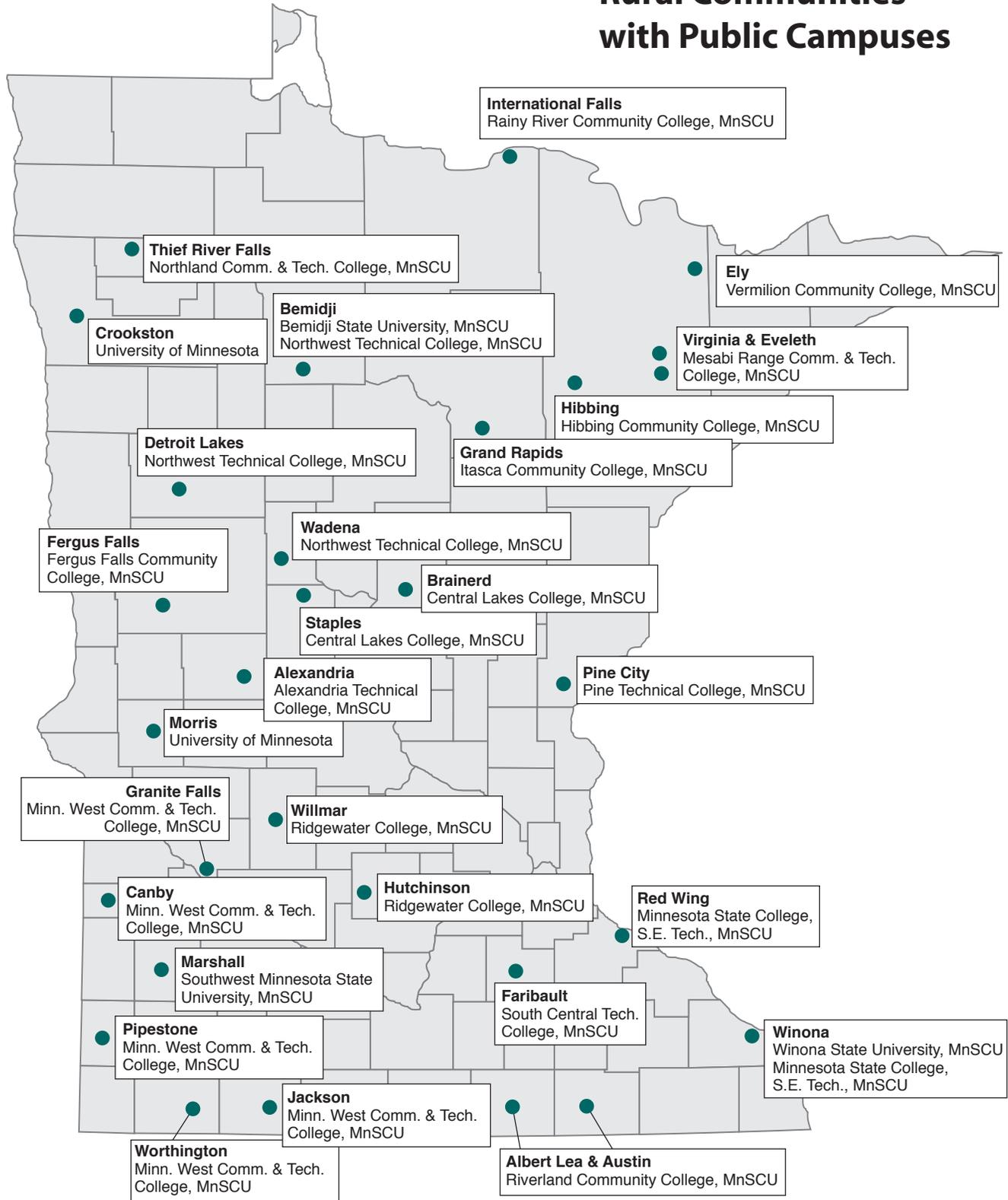
Salient research questions are:

1. How important are campuses to a region's vitality? What are the appropriate measures to gauge their current and future value?
2. What proven and emerging models for facilitating economic development hold potential for Minnesota's rural regions with higher education campuses?
3. Given these measures and models, what legislative or system policy initiatives (relating to higher education, workforce development, enterprise zones, etc.) are most likely to encourage the adoption of practices to better facilitate or accelerate economic development in Minnesota's rural communities? What are appropriate roles of higher education systems, versus regional campuses, versus local institutions and other state, regional, and local partners?

The research methodology drew on data and information from local and national resources to define and apply theoretical constructs and a framework. Successful and emerging models and best practices are described with findings analyzed and adapted for relevance and possible application to Minnesota's rural regions. Metrics are suggested for rural campuses to use to assess the impact of their economic development activities.

"Rural campuses" in Minnesota are clearly defined. Seven recommendations are made for capitalizing on the potential of these rural campuses, ranging from implementing targeted strategies to proposing innovative institutional models. Roles for policy makers and leaders from the state level to the campus and community level are addressed. In particular, local communities are encouraged to articulate their expectations to their local colleges and to work with academic leaders to ensure that the region receives the full contribution an institution of higher education can make to fostering more productive economies.

Rural Communities with Public Campuses



Chapter 1

Introduction

This project emerges out of a growing concern about the continued viability of Minnesota's rural colleges. A year ago, a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* headline referred to the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), "Higher ed system: too many campuses, too few dollars." (August 19, 2002). More recently, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* sought to make an issue of what they described as near-empty classrooms at the Canby campus of Minnesota West Technical College (June 8, 2003).

The questions about rural colleges reflect not only concerns about the campuses themselves but also about rural Minnesota in general. The state's population increasingly is concentrated in the Twin Cities metro area, and many rural areas are losing population in both real and relative terms. More and more Minnesotans have migrated to the urban areas of the state. Comparing county-level data of both urban and rural communities with colleges:

- The average household income of persons in the rural college counties studied in this project is 75% of the state average and dropping.
- The population of persons ages 20-30 in these counties is expected to decline more than 13 percent from 2005 - 2025, while the same group in 12 urban college counties will grow by 14 percent. [State Demographic Center, 2000]

This project's findings affirm a confluence of interest between the rural colleges and their local communities. The health of one set is intimately tied to the health of the other. The key question that this research project addresses is: *What potential does the presence of regional campuses hold for rural communities in facilitating economic development activities?*

The focus here is on illustrating ways to improve the role of higher educational institutions in facilitating economic development in their rural regions. This report recommends a set of initiatives to help the colleges and their communities seize their strengths and economic opportunities in an era of enormous change. It highlights proven practices and emerging ideas. It presents a set of actionable recommendations to help the stakeholders at both the state and local levels facilitate economic development. Guidance on measuring the value of these initiatives is included. Selected resources that show successful approaches involving higher educational institutions in rural regions are identified.

The Challenge for Rural Colleges

The state of the rural economy demands that rural community leaders, faculty and administrators on rural campuses, state systems administrators and state policy makers explore and adopt new and more effective approaches to rural economic development.

Leaders of many of these colleges and their community's institutions have come to recognize that traditional approaches no longer work for them. College leaders working with current academic models are often stymied in their efforts to create more viable institutions. Community leaders now struggle to find ways to keep their residents employed and engaged in the community.

One would think a county with a public college should have a competitive edge in both education and economic development. Indeed, by one measure rural college counties are doing better than rural counties without a college. Persons in rural counties having rural colleges have personal incomes equaling 75 percent of the personal incomes of non-rural Minnesotans. But the personal incomes for persons living in rural Minnesota generally are only 70 percent of that of non-rural Minnesotans. Thus, there is a slight positive variance for rural college counties on the personal income scale.

Is this differential as large as it might be? The research indicates that too often civic and academic leaders in rural college communities lack a shared vision about what it would take to create sustainable institutions and

communities. And for many college leaders and faculty, there is still a deep conviction that their core academic mission will sustain them, no matter what.

Committed leaders who do have a broader vision of their college and community find themselves overextended, with little time available to discover and assess, let alone implement, new ideas. To put it another way, almost everyone knows that “something must be done,” but strategic direction and consensus are not immediately at hand.

This report suggests ways by which rural college communities and their leaders can maximize the potential advantages presented by a college to obtain the strongest possible economic futures for their communities.

Minnesota’s Rural Campuses

This analysis primarily includes 32 campuses in rural regions across Minnesota. “Rural Minnesota” is defined by exclusion — not included in the definition are campuses located:

Table 1: Minnesota’s rural colleges and universities

Community	Institution
Albert Lea	Riverland Community College, MnSCU
Alexandria	Alexandria Technical College, MnSCU
Austin	Riverland Community College, MnSCU
Bemidji	Bemidji State University, MnSCU
Bemidji	Northwest Technical College, MnSCU
Brainerd	Central Lakes College, MnSCU
Canby	Minn. West Comm. & Tech. College, MnSCU
Crookston	University of Minnesota, Crookston
Detroit Lakes	Northwest Technical College, MnSCU
Ely	Vermilion Community College, MnSCU
Eveleth	Mesabi Range Comm. & Tech. Coll., MnSCU
Faribault	South Central Tech College, MnSCU
Fergus Falls	Fergus Falls Comm College, MnSCU
Grand Rapids	Itasca Comm College, MnSCU
Granite Falls	Minn. West Comm & Tech Coll, MnSCU
Hibbing	Hibbing Comm College, MnSCU
Hutchinson	Ridgewater College, MnSCU
International Falls	Rainy River Comm College, MnSCU
Jackson	Minn. West Comm and Tech Coll, MnSCU
Marshall	Southwest State University, MnSCU
Morris	University of Minnesota, Morris
Pine City	Pine Technical College, MnSCU
Pipestone	Minn. West Comm & Tech Coll., MnSCU
Staples	Central Lakes College, MnSCU
Red Wing	Minn. State College, S.E. Tech., MnSCU
Thief River Falls	Northland Comm & Tech College, MnSCU
Virginia	Mesabi Range Comm & Tech Coll, MnSCU
Wadena	Northwest Technical College, MnSCU
Willmar	Ridgewater College, MnSCU
Winona	Minn. State College, S.E. Tech., MnSCU
Winona	Winona State University, MnSCU
Worthington	Minn. West Comm. & Tech. Coll., MnSCU

- In eight counties in the greater Twin Cities area (Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington)
- In regional center cities outside of the Twin Cities area having more than 30,000 residents (Duluth, Mankato, Moorhead, Rochester, and St. Cloud)
- Within 30 miles of one of the regional center cities

The focus of this report is *public* colleges and universities because of the special relationship these institutions have with the regions within which they are located. The missions of both the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities stress that their member institutions should serve the residents of the state and their regions. Inherent in these missions is the idea that these colleges and universities have a duty to help promote the economic health of their locales. For purposes of brevity, the term “public college” includes both community and/or technical colleges and public universities.

Finally, these public colleges are referenced mostly in respect to their physical campuses — the communities in which they are located. MnSCU has organized many of its community and technical colleges into multi-campus regional institutions. There is valid organizational and curricular rationale for these structures. However, the community approach of this report is important for three reasons:

- The premise of this project is that colleges should work more closely with their local communities.
- The community focus best emanates from each campus and not via a central administrative office.
- MnSCU occasionally realigns their individual campuses with different regional structures, and the report’s recommendations should not be tied to these changing entities.

The Colleges and Communities: The preceding definitions and limitations have defined for us the 32 public colleges in 30 communities that are the focus of this study. Table 1 identifies each college by its home community and also notes its institutional affiliation.

The two University of Minnesota campuses in the study — Crookston and Morris — play a somewhat different role in their regions from that of the MnSCU community and technical colleges. The former are more generally seen as statewide in significance; Morris, in fact, is rated as one of the nation’s best public liberal arts institutions. Crookston has developed a national reputation for its technology-oriented curriculum.

Similarly, MnSCU’s three universities included in this study (Bemidji, Southwest State, and Winona) attract a student body broader than their immediate regions. Their scope of influence is therefore broader than that of the typical MnSCU community or technical campus. Nonetheless, the study includes all six of these institutions because of the unique role they play in the rural economy of the state.

Rural Diversity: Thus far “rural Minnesota” has been defined primarily in terms of population and geography. These definitional parameters have led us to designate the above institutions as the focus of this research. Being aggregated as part of “rural Minnesota” under these parameters does not suggest homogeneity across regional or community lines. Far from it.

Minnesota has an extraordinary range of economic, cultural and resource characteristics in its rural areas. From the mining, tourism, and timber areas of the northeast to the row-crop and livestock agricultural bases of the south, from the river bluff country of the southeast to the fertile prairies of the northwest, the contrasts are enormous.

The rural communities are equally diverse. From the smallest “college town” on the list, Canby, to the largest, Winona, the 30 communities offer tremendous differences in economies, lifestyles and politics. For each community, the local college is a very important economic resource. But the smaller the community, the more likely the college will be the major economic factor for the town.

These differences across regions and communities prohibit us from adopting a standard-form “solution” for all the colleges and communities. There is no single set of recommendations that will apply to all these situations. A major lesson of this project is the need to tailor approaches and solutions to the unique situations of each college and community.

Chapter 2

Practical Conditions and Theoretical Environment of Rural Economic Development in Minnesota

This chapter examines trends in higher education, sets forth the assumptions and theory underpinning economic development in rural college communities, and briefly notes the status of rural economic development efforts.

The Publicly Engaged Institution

Since land-grant institutions were created in the middle of the 19th Century, and on through the rapid development and expansion of community colleges in the mid-20th Century, the understanding of how colleges and universities connect to their communities has continuously evolved. For most of this time, the connection was mainly understood as being at the curricular and research level. Programs were designed to provide full-time-enrolled, recent high school graduates the opportunity to prepare for careers. Applied research to address identified problems was encouraged and funded, primarily at land-grant institutions, but also at some regional universities. Outreach to disseminate the results of this research was provided through extension offices.

Over the last twenty years, the connection grew to include customized education and training for local employers. Professional and technical programs as well as work-readiness and workforce development initiatives have become prevalent. Community and technical colleges took the lead in this employer-focused programming; however universities have also been increasingly involved. Beginning with the isolation of the ivory tower and their work to bridge the “town-gown” tensions, their connection has evolved from outreach to public engagement to active partnerships in economic development for mutual benefit. Recently, institutions of higher education began to convene regional gatherings to initiate action to foster economic growth.

Today, the impetus for such connection originates more frequently from the community than the college. As research and popular writing highlights the value of a college to a region’s economic condition, legislators, community leaders, and employers become more demanding that institutions engage with their community.

While community and technical colleges by their nature have long professed deep community connections, baccalaureate and graduate institutions are also taking up the challenge to explore and define new ways of being engaged. *Stewards of Place*, published in 2002 by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, observed that public engagement is an essential part of the heritage of its member institutions. AASCU cautioned, however, that the challenge exists to convert rhetoric to reality and for institutions “to function as learners as well as teachers in tackling the myriad opportunities and issues facing their communities and regions.”

Private colleges have long seemed exempt from this expectation of public engagement, but *Educating for Citizenship*, published in 2003 by the AASCU, notes that “many campuses have begun literally and figuratively to remove wrought iron fences demarcating sharp geographic, social, and intellectual boundaries between the academy and their communities.”

Each of these publications, along with many others, provides new frameworks and proposes new roles in how colleges connect with their communities.

Campus Compact is a national association of more than 900 public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities, located in 46 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories, plus one international member. The Campus Compact network includes 30 state-based member organizations. Its mission is to promote community service that develops students’ citizenship skills and values, encourages partnerships between campuses and communities, and assists faculty who seek to integrate public and community engagement into their teaching and research. During its first seventeen years, Campus Compact has implemented initiatives designed to make public and community service a fundamental component of American higher education.

Range of College-Community Connections

Table 2 presents a way to begin thinking about the range of possible connections between college and community. Particular colleges and communities should not try to fit themselves within any particular cell on the table. Each community's situation will be different and reflective of local culture and needs. Each college and community should analyze the chart and identify where they fit *and where they would like to fit* within the outlined scheme.

Table 2: Range of college-community connections

Responsive to Community	Engaged with Community	Integrated into Community
College as responder to community requests	College as ongoing participant in economic development organizations	Community system automatically draws on college resources
College as independent actor/cooperator	College as partner	College as collaborator – working for mutual benefit
College asks community leaders how it can be of help	Community leaders rely on services college makes regularly available (e.g., two-way interpreter role)	Community projects integrate resources from college and other community resources
College boundaries are maintained; exceptions are made to support partnerships	College develops ongoing venues to bridge boundaries and to partner with community	College and community boundaries are blurred so two systems act as one
Community brings ideas to campus	Community economic development activities begin with college leaders participating	College assumes new roles to address unmet community economic needs (loan funds, temp services agency, retail)

Economic Theory Applied to Rural College Communities

Among the fundamental building blocks of rural vitality are a healthy economy and a healthy community. While the two are intrinsically linked, the ability to build a healthy community including civic infrastructure and social capital comes primarily from the resources and well-being generated by a healthy economy. Therefore this project focuses on the ability of colleges and universities to contribute to the facilitation of local economic rather than community development.

Theoretically, economic benefits are derived from a “production function” in which activities use labor and technology to convert raw materials into goods and services that are then traded for money or other value. The area or geographical sphere of this trading activity usually defines the economy.

To change an economy requires altering the pattern of inputs and outputs including prices and profits gained from the production and trading of goods and services. All localities or regions are limited in the extent to which they can affect prices or markets outside their local region or sphere, e.g. the price of world traded commodities such as corn, wheat, oil, or computer chips. A local community can, however, identify ways to organize its assets — raw materials, skills, talents, physical plant and equipment — in ways that increase its existing advantage over other areas. Analysts generally partition local economies into two sectors: 1) one that produces goods and services primarily for trade outside the area — thereby bringing in money from outside the region and 2) those businesses which trade locally (usually for local consumption that is limited by the size of the local population).

The central ways to grow an economy under this model include:

- Selling more goods and services outside the region (bringing in more outside capital),
- Selling more goods and services within the region (usually by increasing population growth and/or

- consumption or identifying profitable supply linkages to existing businesses)
- Increasing productivity by using human skills and technology to produce more efficiently and add more value to the good or service produced.

Relying on attracting a growing number of residents or businesses is not generally the most realistic approach, especially for smaller, more remote rural regions. The only significant population growth seen by most rural college communities is from retirees relocating to high-amenity areas. Research on “winning” rural communities by economists of the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank found they “generally have lower labor and other business costs, better transportation, a higher level of agglomeration, more doctors, more colleges, a better educated work force, and more retirement activity” (Changing Economy of the Rural Heartland, p. 8).

Today’s most fruitful rural economic development strategies for these regions are therefore primarily centered on:

- Starting businesses in new industries by supporting entrepreneurial activities through education, business planning and financial assistance.
- Developing new skills sets and technological capacities among workers and business owners through education and technology – e.g. modernizing manufacturing equipment and processes, using new technologies to produce goods and services better, cheaper and faster.
- Attracting new and supporting existing businesses in healthy growing industries to maintain and grow their market shares in regional, national or world markets.

Rural Development Policy and Practices in Minnesota

Minnesota’s rural colleges and universities have a vital role to play in implementing these strategies. However, this role is not well defined or recognized within the context of state development policy. At the 2003 Minnesota Rural Summit, Gov. Tim Pawlenty suggested that entrepreneurship and innovation are badly needed because the industries that have provided jobs for generations in rural parts of the state – agriculture, timber, tourism and mining – won’t sustain outstate Minnesota’s residents and communities in the future. He said new products and new industries are the answer, “not more government programs that hand out grants to poor areas” (“Minnesota officials say state’s rural economy must diversify to thrive,” Larry Werner, *Star Tribune* August 6, 2003).

Minnesota lacks an overall strategy for rural economic development. Statewide agencies have failed in their attempts to adopt and implement a coordinated strategy despite the obvious need for one. Nevertheless, there are a number of other concerted efforts aimed at supporting rural economic development.

Statewide Efforts: In recent years the regional Initiative Foundations have provided charitable grants and investments for local projects and served as the vehicle for state-supported business loans and counseling for rural businesses. In 2003, the Blandin Foundation refocused its mission and programs and along with the McKnight Foundation has convened a Regional Economic Development group to help each region to envision and plan for its future. The group sees the potential for state government to support, though not lead, these development efforts. In 2003, the Minnesota Legislature passed a governor’s initiative — the JOBZ program — to encourage the establishment of up to ten tax-free industrial zones in rural areas.

Since 1983, the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Board has catalyzed partnerships between employers and colleges and universities to serve a three-fold purpose: ensuring that businesses have the skilled workforce needed in a changing high-tech environment; providing workers with access to retraining and advanced training opportunities; and building the capacity of the state’s colleges and universities to provide the learning opportunities needed by their students. Partnership grants are awarded to the academic institutions. State funding must be matched on a one-to-one basis by the participating business(es).

For the past twelve years, Minnesota Technology Inc. has been funded by the legislature to advance the competitiveness of rural companies. As a quasi-public corporation, MTI has worked with companies to expand and update their use of technology and to secure focused training for their employees. Since 1991, Minnesota Technology has served more than 5,600 manufacturing and technology companies around Minnesota, helping

the state's economy realize gains of more than \$700 million in the process, particularly in Greater Minnesota. Its future impact on rural economic development is less clear as it is currently undergoing a transition to a private, non-profit corporation more dependent on user fees and grants than public funding.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board has recognized the importance of supporting a coherent local strategy. One of four "Strategic Directions" in the MnSCU Strategic Plan for 2002-2005 is "Strengthen community development and economic vitality." Three of the relevant goals in MnSCU's Strategic Directions document are as follows:

- the colleges "will work with local communities to help them develop, maintain and enhance their vitality."
- MnSCU institutions will "seek new ways to serve as a key partner to coordinate local, regional and statewide economic development initiatives." [While it may not be appropriate for MnSCU or its colleges to actually "coordinate" these activities, there clearly is a major participative role for them.]
- MnSCU will "develop frameworks for state and regional planning and collaboration that help more of its institutions to work in partnership with community and business groups."

Aside from its rural campuses, the University of Minnesota continues to have a wide and encompassing role in rural development initiatives. One of its contributions to local efforts includes Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships to foster research, outreach, and education projects in order to promote healthy rural economies. This initiative supplements other University outreach programs such as the downsized but still active Extension program. Extension has over the years been an effective contributor to regional development efforts.

Locally Initiated Efforts: A number of organizations provide economic development planning and visioning on a regional basis, such as the Regional Development Commissions (RDCs). The RDCs receive federal funds on a regional matching basis to fulfill this role. Some rural communities employ economic development officers. Many forward-thinking communities are working to plan more strategically. Alexandria is a good example of a Minnesota community that has developed a strategic plan to grow the local economy in cooperation with the local college. Elsewhere, the Initiative Foundations, created with McKnight Foundation support, have worked with many communities to determine the factors that support firm retention and expansion in their regions, the impediments to economic growth, and their regions' emerging areas for investment.

Chapter 3

Models and Best Practices From Rural Colleges

This chapter looks at a number of national and local models that can help Minnesota colleges and their communities determine their best approach to achieving economic development goals.

Promising Practices From Other States

Research for this project yielded a number of national models that can provide useful insight for Minnesotans. The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), one of the most extensive and well-funded efforts, highlights rural college transformations from around the nation. This national seven-year demonstration project was recently reconfigured as a collaboration of land-grant universities and rural community colleges.

RCCI has thus far identified and publicized the results of twenty-four projects. The RCCI-funded projects are good information sources, although not necessarily good models for Minnesota today. The originally funded projects are located in regions that are among the most persistently poor economies in the nation. For a number of these colleges, there had been almost no extended work with employers or with communities prior to the stimulus of external funding. In contrast, most rural public colleges in Minnesota have engaged at least to some extent in economic development activities in their regions.

In its most recent round of activity, RCCI selected three Minnesota campuses for preliminary funding: Rochester Community and Technical College working with rural southeastern Minnesota communities and the Northeast Higher Education District. Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College was also selected as part of this second phase of funding. As this phase of RCCI work continues, specific recommendations coming from the participants in Minnesota-based activities should be attended to closely.

RCCI catalogues a number of ways in which rural community and tribal colleges acted as catalysts for economic development:

Building civic capacity – by helping develop a unified vision and leadership

Developing entrepreneurship and small businesses – counseling, technical assistance and skills training, as well as projects such as business incubators, financing mechanisms and training for self-employment.

Developing regional economic development approach – identifying common assets, pooling resources and working collaboratively on tourism development, planning and other initiatives, rather than competing among neighbors.

Coordinated regional workforce development – attuned to employer's changing needs.

Promoting technology transfer and competitiveness – focused on helping small and mid-sized business adopt new technologies such as manufacturing networks, brokering specialized technical assistance between firms and technology specialists, developing programs in key sectors.

Developing programs that target the poor – to reach poor people who need jobs and incomes; includes school-based enterprises, micro-enterprise training, youth programs and targeted job training to help the poor acquire new jobs.

Encouraging a strong education ethic – focused on encouraging formal education, high school completion and further education and skills development.

Table 3: Economic development approaches

Typical Past Approaches	Approaches for the Future
Heavy dependence on natural resource base – agriculture, extraction, and timber	Importance of intellectual, cultural, and civic resources for economic development
Recruitment of industry, marketing cheap land, labor and taxes	Enhancing productivity and competitiveness of existing business and workers; help for new business startups. Strengthening the foundation for development, especially civic infrastructure
Competition among adjacent towns and counties	Regional approach that involves business and civic leaders across town and county lines
Economic development priorities often set by one or two agencies in a process dominated by established interests	Priorities emerge from collaborative process involving multiple agencies and organizations, with broad-based community participation and support
Focus on increasing the number of jobs	Focus on raising the overall economic tide while also benefiting lower-income, lower-wealth residents

MDC Inc., 2001. Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas, p. 9.

In concluding the first phase of its work, RCCI provided a useful contrast between the kinds of economic development approaches of the past and those it sees as useful in the future (Table 3).

Regional Technology Strategies (RTS), an economic and workforce development policy organization located in Carrboro, N.C., initiated a competition in 1998 to identify innovative and exemplary (benchmark) practices related to rural development at community colleges. This project was conducted under the auspices of the Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance (TA3), a consortium of 28 leading technical colleges in the southern U.S., Europe, and South Africa that supports exchange and innovation in technical education and regional economic development through collaborative projects, conferences, and research.

Two Minnesota rural colleges have been recognized for innovation by RTS. Alexandria Technical College was cited for its success in building long-term, sustainable learning alliances with local employers. Hibbing Community College, a part of the Northeast Higher Education District, was recognized for its Community Information Technology Center, which provides both remedial and technological skills training to community members. (A rich source of other benchmark practices can be located through “Cultivating Successful Rural Economies” at www.rtsinc.org/benchmark/profiles).

The USDA’s National Centers of Excellence program focuses on economic opportunity, sustainable community development, community-based partnerships, and a strategic vision for change. Recent grant recipients include: University of Texas-Pan American, Texas; Somerset Community College, Kentucky; Heritage College, Washington; Cankdeska Cikana Community College, North Dakota; Crownpoint Institute of Technology, New Mexico; Fort Peck Community College, Montana; San Diego State University-Imperial Valley, California; and California State University-Fresno. Several examples of how the funding and partnership agreements will benefit rural areas include Kentucky, where Somerset Community College will use the funding to provide on-the-job training opportunities to new and existing business and industry within the Empowerment Zone, Enterprise Community, and other communities located in the district, and at University of Texas-Pan American, where the focus will be on improving training and educational opportunities through the use of telecommunication and information technologies.

In addition to efforts that focus on community and technical colleges, other institutions of higher education have also expanded their attention to the roles they can play in their regions. In the neighboring state of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, has greatly expanded its business and industry alliances, incorporating partnerships with local technical campuses to ensure that employers have access to ongoing education needs. Articulation agreements with these same campuses make it possible for workers to move

Table 4: National and Minnesota example models and programs

Approach	National	Minnesota
<p>Entrepreneur/business development (incubator, loan fund, business management and marketing training)</p>	<p>Southeastern CC – rural electric co-op partnership incubator and “think tank, ” loan program Rose-Holman – web-based incubator U of Central Florida – Incubator Haywood CC – Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative Hagerstown CC - business incubator and shared manufacturing center Hazard CC – Technical Assistance Center for starting/expanding businesses CC of Colorado – e-commerce training program Meridian CC – JumpStart Entrepreneurship (local support) McDowell Tec CC – Appalachian Microenterprise Loan Fund Central Oregon CC – Oregon Entrepreneur Dev Loan Fund</p>	<p>MN West Canby – incubator, space sharing NHED – True North: general services; Main Street Conversion IT enterprises in Range communities</p>
<p>Workforce Development (onsite classes, e-learning, customized training)</p>	<p>UW-Stevens Pt – Industry/Tech College Partnerships Hagerstown – Advanced Technology Center Lakeshore TC – Non-Traditional Occupations (women) Coahoma CC - “adopt-a-town” job access</p>	<p>Alexandria TC – integrated training planning with 3M, Tastefully Simple, and Rural Cellular Northland C&TC – on-site continuing training certificate programs with Digi-Key and MachineWell; traditional manufacturing curriculum integrated with Digi-Key seminars and work experience Hibbing CC – remedial and tech skills training for community MN West – Worthington – diversity training and multi-lingual classes</p>
<p>Technology Advancement (tech transfer and development, technology infrastructures)</p>	<p>Garret – telecom partnership for infrastructure; non-profit coop for internet access UW-Stout – Tech transfer and development with growing manufacturing and distribution centers</p>	<p>Alexandria TC – Center for Automation and Motion Control</p>
<p>Industry Sector Focus (focused industry approach)</p>	<p>Oklahoma State, Okmulgee – manufacturing firms Cawtaba Valley CC – Hosiery Technology Center Hagerstown – Advanced Technology Center (IT) State of Maine – cluster focus of CC& TC in partnership with state Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p>Northland C&TC – recreational vehicles Northland C&TC – aviation mechanics training and upgrading</p>
<p>Non-Institution Based (operated independent of college or university)</p>		<p>Tech Plus -- incorporating MSU Mankato and South Central TC customized training with other services supported by city</p>

smoothly from associate degree to baccalaureate degree programs while working full time. Of course, University of Wisconsin, Stout, has long been recognized as offering superb technology-focused programs. But even Stout, in recent years, has more aggressively advanced its partnerships with industry, not just in its local community, but also across the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Innovative Practices in Minnesota

Originally, workforce training was primarily done at the work-site. During the latter half of the 20th Century, technical and community colleges emerged as providers of career programs to prepare students for workforce entry. Today, the work world demands ongoing access to the just-in-time learning — formal as well as informal — that optimizes workforce quality and capability.

In some regions of Minnesota, rural colleges are taking the lead in just-in-time learning, deepening their relationships with employers in highly productive ways, often beginning with funding from the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership. The experiences of two institutions in particular, Alexandria Technical College (with 3M, Rural Cellular, and Tastefully Simple) and Northland Community and Technical College (with Digi-Key, Arctic Cat, and MachineWell) demonstrate how customized training has evolved into strong, on-going relationships with important employers in their region. Both rural colleges have become key partners as the companies develop their long term strategic plans and design human resource programming to support their goals. These institutions understand that rural as well as urban firms compete in a global environment where speed, flexibility, and innovation are key to competitiveness. In such environments, employers can no longer rely on employees “picking up” what they need over time. The continuous introduction of new processes, systems, and equipment requires ongoing training and education to ensure that the intellectual capability of workers is used to the maximum.

At Minnesota West Community and Technical College, campus leaders are expected to be engaged in community activities and economic development initiatives as part of their assignment. Other faculty and staff are encouraged and recognized, too, for their community involvement. This shared responsibility across the college means that information about opportunities to work with their communities on economic development is continually being incorporated into campus plans and strategies. In Worthington, this has led the college to develop an Animal Science Research Area with services for research, incubation, and business development.

In these innovative, industry-focused programs, rural colleges do not expect their local faculty to provide all of the expertise. They are increasingly accessing the best expertise online and customizing it to the needs of their local employers. And they don’t limit themselves by only locating Minnesota expertise — they go national and international as needed.

Table 4 provides an overview of the primary kinds of initiatives, models, and programs that demonstrate close connections with local and regional employers.

Emerging Model – Regional Learning Environments

The new wave of economic development among rural community colleges moves the connection between the rural campus and its region beyond engagement and partnership toward integration. The classical understanding of the role of colleges and universities in a region has been to think of them as “knowledge producers” (research focus) and “knowledge disseminators” (teaching focus). Collectively, these two roles might be called “knowledge

(Table 4) Many of these models are detailed in the following two studies: (a) Eller, Ron, et al . 1998 *Rural Community College Initiative II. Economic Development*, Project Brief AACC-PB-98-2. <http://www.aacc.nche.edu> (b) Rosenfeld, Stuart 2001 *Cultivating Successful Rural Economies: Benchmark Practices at Community and Technical Colleges* Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. and the Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance <http://www.rtsinc.org/benchmark/>

providers.” In the same classical understanding, the region’s residents, government agencies, businesses, etc., were seen as “knowledge consumers.”

John Seely Brown, Chief Scientist Emeritus at Xerox’s Palo Alto Research Center, challenges community and campus leaders to understand how the digital world is having a different kind of impact on the ways people learn and work. He sees a much richer interplay between those known as knowledge providers and those called knowledge users. As more faculty are engaged with business, industry, and other agency personnel and as students are working part time or full time in firms and agencies, faculty also become learners in the process. As firms provide adjunct faculty, guest lecturers, and internships, they, too, become providers of knowledge. A regional learning environment is created, facilitated locally by face-to-face and Web-interactions. Rural regions can capitalize and extend this environment through Web-based access to global knowledge resources.

Chapter 4

Metrics to Assess Rural Campuses' Engagement in Economic Development

Measures of campus engagement and the impact of their efforts to facilitate community economic development are discussed in this chapter. In an effort to be comprehensive and at the same time clarify and separate process outcomes from the impact of economic development initiatives in general, methods for evaluating economic development outcomes are also discussed. The challenges in developing metrics are described, some models are identified, and suggestions as to where measurement can begin are offered.

Communities alter their aspirations over time. At one time, Minnesota had an imperative to “have a post-secondary educational institution within 35 miles of every Minnesotan.” An expert who served on the LeVander Commission recalled that this was not a written goal, but it certainly drove the location and development of what is now Minnesota’s array of rural campuses. There was an overt expression of the premise that the presence of a college campus would contribute to the quality of life of Minnesotans and to the economy of each rural community. Such a discrete goal offers easy evaluation. Either the physical dispersion of campuses is achieved or not. Today, the targets for achievement – particularly in the arena of community and economic development – are not so discrete. Nor are they universal.

This research project proposed to set forth a set of metrics by which various stakeholders could value the presence of a rural campus. No one global set of measures is advocated. Instead a variety of measures of potential impact of a rural campus and of its role in facilitating economic development are identified. While recognizing the impact of rural campuses’ *presence* in rural regions, the focus here is the campus’ involvement in and facilitation of economic development. This role is defined as the contributions of an engaged campus with local employers and institutions as well as the leadership it provides in planning and implementing economic development strategies and initiatives.

All rural colleges have an economic impact by their mere presence. They employ individuals, they purchase commodities, they provide services and products to persons in the region. This sort of economic impact is important but is not what our study is all about. This study examines roles for a college that transcend their mere presence.

Some academics suggest that the best way to consider the impact of change is to consider what would have happened otherwise – i.e. to assess whether the outcomes would not have occurred “but for” the project. This

Table 5: Rural Campus Role and Impacts

Role	Potential impacts
Presence – day to day operations, payroll and purchases	Direct expenditures for wages and supplies Indirect purchases by employees and students within the region
Involvement -- activities which engage educators and learners in local businesses and organizations – especially service learning	Reduced expense or need for purchasing expertise from others within or from outside the region Increased efficiency of operations for research or service learning project Indirect impacts of building relationships and opportunities for students (measures might include retention of students within the region after graduation)
Facilitation – proactive and intentional activities designed to add value to the base of local economic activity (see models in Chapter 3)	Metrics established on a project by project basis by each institution in collaboration with local stakeholders might include cross-cutting metrics by which all campuses’ activities are compared – such as employment and income impacts (numbers of jobs, wages), productivity/business impacts (change in profits, sales volumes, financing invested, new businesses started) and community impacts (tax revenues and payroll)

research found cases of specific and intentional activities involving higher educational institutions without which rural economies and communities would be significantly different.

One example is Staples, Minn., where technical college training in machine tools and robotics along with concerted community action led to the location and spin-off of dozens of firms in the region now employing hundreds of Minnesotans. Without such a focus and support for developing this new set of skills, a new base of industry may not have developed. The value of this initiative or set of activities over the years can only be measured by presuming what might have happened without it. Most likely, the average wage and number of people living in central Minnesota would be less than it is today. Furthermore, the value of the engagement of the higher educational institution in building and fulfilling a vision for the future of its local economy would have been lost. These contributions may play out in the community's ability to attract and retain residents and employers and support local projects through added taxes.

Recommendations for measuring the value of a rural campus are as follows:

1. Establish a baseline of regional economic health (employment, wages, incomes per capita and per household, changes in population and tax base) and monitor change on a regular basis.
2. Examine and inventory the roles/activities of the higher educational institution and its impact on community and economic development:
 - Activities allied to teaching/research function (e.g. service learning, etc.).
 - Proactive projects or initiatives to facilitate community and economic development (specialized training and technical assistance).
3. Establish activity-based measurable outcomes or indicators in collaboration with stakeholders, monitor and share performance results with them.

Measuring Economic Development Impacts

Tracking changes in the baseline economy using fundamental measures of economic well-being should be a regular part of any institution's contribution to the economic health of a region. In order to accurately measure change or development, a baseline measurement of economic health is needed and changes tracked over a specific period of time.

Traditionally, economic development has been measured by the level of employment (number of new jobs, net new jobs or change in unemployment). But not all jobs are created equal in terms of their quality. It is important to consider their quality — wages, hours worked per week or month, benefits offered, and their likely continuation of the job into the future. Policymakers, educational administrators and community leaders need to define their own intended outcomes and fix them in a reasonable time frame (some economic changes require multiple business cycles of five to ten years or more to fully “pay off”). These should be defined and tracked by each community on a project-by-project basis.

There are a number of approaches to assessing the economic impact or the value of economic development projects. The most frequently used analytical approach in evaluating projects is input/output analysis to measure the change in employment and investment due to a specific impact. (See www.cardi.cornell.edu/cd-toolbox_2/tools/Econ_Multipliers.cfm.) These input-output (I/O) models estimate the employment, income and multiplier effects of a new project. (There are several providers of software now calibrated for smaller regions — e.g. IMPLAN, LOCI, REMI model and SAM – Social Accounting Matrix.) However, the smaller the economic region and the smaller the project, the less precise the estimate of impact.

Some analysts use a “Return on Investment” (ROI) approach that measures the return to the public (usually the state or city) in tax revenues associated with a specific project or set of projects. For instance, the state of Oklahoma offers a worksheet to estimate the local tax impact of economic development. The Utah Center for Rural Life offers an on-line worksheet to help users prepare a “quality of life” statement that can be used as a measuring stick for each economic development strategy. (<http://utahreach.usu/ucrl/less2.htm>)

Dr. Cornelia Butler Flora, Director of the North Central Center for Rural Development, has developed some

constructs for measuring community economic development in rural areas using the following sources of capital: social, human, financial, natural, built, political, and cultural. She suggests that any measurement or evaluation of change depends on one's theory of change and the nature of causality. She discusses some of the fatal flaws and pitfalls of measurement and the value of community-determined measures of success (see: <http://www.nrfc.org/In/documents/Monitoring%20outcomes.pdf>).

The state of California through its ED>Net program has a highly developed system of tracking economic development impacts from the various activities and projects of its community colleges. It defines program impact and efficiency as:

- Improving profit potential for companies and businesses,
- Improving earning potential for individual residents of the community,
- Improving revenue to government entities,
- Providing a sustainable, good standard of living for all residents.

Metrics for Community Engagement

The principal focus of this research project has been the role of rural colleges in promoting regional economic development. But in Chapter 2 we also noted the importance of “community engagement” as a benefit that should be provided by American colleges and universities. Community engagement touches on activities as diverse as institutional civic involvement and leadership, participation in community activities, university-community partnerships in programs and facilities, and integration of programs and services within the institutions’ community or region.

Australia has a major initiative in its Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources around “community engagement.” Canada’s federal Human Resources Development department has a Community Engagement division. Universities in the United States, including the University of Cincinnati and Tufts University, have centers devoted to community engagement. The Campus Compact, a national membership organization of more than 900 colleges and universities, with a very active Minnesota chapter, promotes and supports effort by higher educational institutions in dozens of states to demonstrate their community engagement.

Measuring “community engagement” is a new endeavor. Examples of measures of community engagement used by central administrators of higher educational institutions typically center around service-learning, community-university partnerships, collaborative research, and outreach. Too often the metrics around these outcomes are more oriented toward inputs, e.g. appointments to boards of community organizations or time contributed to community-based partnerships, enrollment in community-based education or service learning projects. They are not generally geared toward specific strategies and outcomes of community economic development.

Many efforts to focus on indicators of community engagement capture the organizational and system imperatives of the academic institutions but not those of the community. In a presentation to the 2002 Conference on Outreach Scholarship, Judith Ramaley drew upon the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities’ definition of “engagement” as “the redesign of teaching, research and extension and service functions to become more sympathetically and productively involved with community concerns and needs”(2002). She also enumerated the expected consequences of service learning, outreach and campus community partnerships, including:

- a. Enhanced individual and institutional citizenship
- b. Social capital creation
- c. Leadership development opportunities
- d. Employability
- e. Promotion of learning
- f. Capacity for solving complex societal problems

- g. Contributions to economic and community development
- h. Fulfilling a campuses' service mission

Consolidated Measurements

Two British scholars, Charles and Benneworth, developed a framework for measuring engagement as follows:

Benchmark category	Inputs (financial, time, human resources, infrastructure, etc.)	Processes (consultation mechanisms, agreements, local partnerships, etc.)	Outputs (University and regional priorities achieved)
Regional Governance			
Human Capital Development			
Economic Competitiveness			
Social Development			
Sustainable Development			
Cultural Development			
Equity Issues			

Adapted from Charles and Benneworth (2001).

Within this framework, Charles and Benneworth offered a set of benchmarking measures for use by universities in Great Britain. Those that are relevant to Minnesota's rural campuses include:

- Benchmark 1.1 Engagement in regional infrastructure planning and assessment
- Benchmark 2.1 Access for students from disadvantaged groups
- Benchmark 2.2 Retention of graduates in the region
- Benchmark 2.3 Involvement in regional skills strategies
- Benchmark 2.4 Responsiveness to regional labor market demands
- Benchmark 2.5 Involvement of employers in developing the curriculum
- Benchmark 2.6 Course provision for employers and employees
- Benchmark 3.1 Strategic plan for business support
- Benchmark 3.2 Creation of spin-off firms
- Benchmark 3.3 Engagement in inward investment
- Benchmark 3.4 Promoting graduate entrepreneurship
- Benchmark 3.5 Graduate startups arising from HEI programs
- Benchmark 3.6 Availability of entrepreneurship modules
- Benchmark 3.7 Student placements with local employers
- Benchmark 3.8 Incentives for staff to engage with business
- Benchmark 4.2 Contribution to regional economic analysis
- Benchmark 4.3 Analysis of regional futures
- Benchmark 4.4 Staff exchanges

(Source: "Evaluating the regional contribution of an HEI: A benchmarking approach" Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2002.)

The first step to employing this benchmarking framework is to track the outputs or results as identified in the framework. Only by capturing the results can the campus and its partners determine whether the right inputs and processes were employed.

The next and equally important step is to find other institutions that are also tracking this information. A benchmarking process is only useful when comparative data is acquired. One approach emerging for Minnesota's rural campuses is the Academic Quality Improvement Project. Developed and administered by the Commission of Higher Learning of North Central Association, this new accreditation model supports institutional improvement based on the quality of service to multiple stakeholders. While the current model doesn't go into the detail of the benchmarks provided by Charles and Benneworth, it is an intentional comparative model encouraging institutions to work with those from whom they can learn. Many of Minnesota's rural campuses are applying for admission into this quality assessment mode of accreditation. Chapter 6 includes a recommendation that addresses the development of a tool that would be useful for rural campuses and compatible with the quality accreditation model.

For the full potential of a rural campus to be realized in terms of impact in community economic development, it is paramount that faculty and staff conceive that role as central to their day-to-day missions and operations. An Australian scholar, Steve Garlick, has examined the potential of benchmarking "good practice" in university-region engagement. He suggests that engagement is and should be viewed by all in the college community as an investment strategy and "not simply a cost that can be minimised when funds are tight"(2003).

A rural college cannot advance the regional economy alone. It only succeeds when it partners with employers and community leaders. It is critical that rural campuses regularly and carefully collect data on their partners' satisfaction with current efforts and their expectations regarding future efforts. These satisfaction measures should then be combined with the appropriate quantitative measures identified in this chapter in order to form a comprehensive measurement of the effectiveness of the college's efforts in community economic development.

Chapter 5

Recommended Initiatives and Models

This report emphasizes the importance of college and community acting together. Success cannot be achieved without both institutions moving toward the same goals. This chapter outlines a range of approaches that Minnesota's rural colleges and their communities can use to become more effective participants in the economic growth of their regions. These are not meant to be prescriptive but illustrative of the range of activities which will enhance the value of rural campuses within their regions.

Focus on the College.

These models assume that the college, rather than the community, will take the initial implementation steps for several reasons:

- The level of required institutional change is usually greater for the college than for the community
- Some colleges have been less focused on regional economic growth than have the leaders in their communities.
- Commitment to change must come from all constituencies of the college; without up-front buy-in from college leadership, staff and faculty, there can be little hope of successful implementation, regardless of the degree of commitment in the community.

The models vary significantly in their scope of change. For some, all that is required is for the college and community to increase their level and quality of interaction. For other models, the college would revamp major portions of its curriculum and operations. The greater the degree of required institutional change, the greater the importance of full buy-in by all of the college constituencies.

Recognition of Current Efforts.

These alternative models do not detract from the basic and important roles already played by the colleges in their regions. Preparation for productive careers and rewarding lives has always been a part of the mission of Minnesota's rural colleges. More recently, workforce development has become an important role for most rural colleges in the state. Rural colleges in themselves are important contributors to their regions' economies through the people they employ and the products and services they consume. None of these models need to undermine these critical roles already played by the colleges. The Minnesota examples cited indicate that some parts of these recommendations are already in place.

But a simple continuation of current roles is not adequate. The economic and demographic perils faced by rural Minnesota demand that the state's rural colleges partner more effectively with the communities in their region. Implementation of the following will help achieve that goal.

The initiatives move, in ascending order, from those that represent the least departure from current norms, progressing to those that represent the greatest departure from current mindsets. This "ranking" is evaluative.

These recommendations are meant to be provocative. The intent is to provide community and college leaders the opportunity to imagine new kinds of relationships that fit their needs and opportunities. Communities and their colleges must determine for themselves the appropriate degree of change.

1. College as Convener for Economic Visioning:

Helping to envision and anticipate a region's economic future can be a valuable exercise. This strategic thinking can help a region's leaders identify the area's core strengths and opportunities. From this exercise can emerge a consensus on how the region's leaders can work together to help ensure a strong economic future.

Minnesota's rural colleges are ideally suited to help their regions develop these long-term strategic visions:

- Staff and faculty typically have been in their positions for many years, seeing the good times and the bad for their regions, and they have a sense of history that will be useful in envisioning the future.
- Analyzing and balancing competing interests and theories is a major part of academic life and a critical tool needed in regional visioning
- The college's access to broad sources of data can help inform the strategic thinking.

College leadership should probably not direct the visioning exercise. While residents of an area undoubtedly appreciate what the college brings to the region, there are community leaders, regional development officers, and Initiative Foundation executives who often have more experience in economic development work than do local college leaders.

On the other hand, many rural colleges are ideally suited to provide the convening function for strategic visioning. Because the "reach" of a college typically extends across county lines, it will be logical for the college to host the activity. And the convening function is one that academic institutions often play in other contexts. College leaders know how to do this.

This report does not attempt to describe exactly how the strategic visioning for the region should occur. Instead, the process should be tailored to the history and culture of the region. In some communities, long-range strategic plans already exist, and for those the existing plans could be the basis for the new exercise. In other cases, the process will have no precursors in the region, and the college could play the role of researching how other regions have done similar efforts.

Although specific processes are not prescribed, the region's economic planning should begin with a thorough understanding of the current economic underpinnings of the region and the trends and factors that are shaping the local and global future. The college might perform a very useful research function in cataloguing the current economic strengths from which a stronger economic future might flow.

2. College as Leader of a Coordinated Learning and Career Partnership:

Rural colleges could serve as initiators in creating a seamless K-16-lifelong learning and working environment. A rural college or university would establish a set of contractual agreements with regional rural K-12 school districts that may be experiencing declining enrollment. A limited set of courses (e.g., English, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences) would be offered in the "hometown" high school by a core permanent faculty employed by the local school district .

The remaining secondary school courses, along with academic and career advising, would be coordinated by the college and taught by college or secondary school faculty, as required. The coordinating higher education institution would provide a limited set of collegiate courses offered on campus (focus dependent on whether it is a community or technical college or a university) with many more accessed through contracts with accredited e-learning providers and articulation agreements between associate and baccalaureate degree institutions.

The partnership would provide for:

- Expanding course and career opportunities for high school students;
- Basing career and professional programming at the collegiate level primarily on regional need and opportunity;
- Designing and scheduling intermediate and collegiate programs and curriculum through close engagement with regional employers; and
- Incorporating integrated learning and work opportunities into the curriculum in conjunction with regional employers.

The kind of coordinated partnership described here could respond to calls for a "seamless" educational

experience. Working together, local school districts and the college could help small, rural communities retain a secondary school while increasing students' opportunities to access advanced courses and new programs and to explore a broader set of career possibilities available in the region. Engaging employers closely in the design of the career programs would provide for continual curriculum updating for changing industry requirements. Annual meetings of advisory groups won't achieve what's needed. These relationships must be ongoing with curriculum updated constantly. The examples cited earlier at Alexandria and at Northland are good models for these relationships.

While much progress has been made in improving the ability of Minnesota students to move from associate to baccalaureate institutions, it will be important for MnSCU to continue to strengthen its articulation agreements. The time has come for universities to recognize the learning achieved by students at community and technical colleges, rather than setting undue restrictions that limit recognition of learning to that which happens in courses controlled by the university. The next step in this process is contracting with baccalaureate institutions to ensure that upper division and even graduate programs are available either on-site or online. These agreements would make it possible for recent high school graduates as well as other residents of the region to continuously advance their education and their careers without needing to arrange for extended absences from their families and employment or long weekly drives to a distant university campus.

3. College as Provider and Translator of Data:

Depending on the specialty of their faculty, the rural college could offer translation of a wide range of data (economic, demographic, environmental, scientific research) into information useful by governments, businesses, non-profits and community organizations in the region. Traditionally, educators' and higher educational institutions' core competence has been around this type of activity. However, this activity has been geared primarily toward communicating research findings and knowledge to their peers through writing articles for peer-reviewed journals or presenting papers at workshops and conferences with other academics. This initiative would encourage faculty to participate more fully in these types of activities with another set of audiences — local business leaders, community officials and agency personnel.

The Center for Small Towns at the University of Minnesota, Morris, has shown how they have used real community issues to integrate lessons into classes and solve local problems. For example, a statistics class analyzed how to best optimize the snow-plowing routes to save time and energy for the city. They also helped township governments interpret Census data to help local officials better understanding possible responses to economic, demographic and other regional issues.

Rural Minnesota would receive great benefit if their rural colleges could provide a series of "access portals" to existing research and education centers that would help inform local businesses and community decision-making. Coupled with programs to integrate service learning and applied teaching into existing curricula, such a model would offer local governments and businesses valuable new information tools.

4. College as Integrator of Core Strengths/Industry Cluster Model:

The rural college would streamline its programs and curricula to align with regional economic opportunities. This is similar to the coordinated learning and career partnership but without the rural school district involvement. The rural college or university would review all of its programs and eliminate all but a streamlined set of well-funded programs of excellence. The result would be a more focused higher educational institution built on technical strengths that could attract an expanded enrollment to meet regional or statewide needs. At the same time the institution would concentrate on raising the level of technology and skills among workers within key industry sectors/clusters in the region through its convening and customized learning services. General education programming and liberal arts degrees beyond the core strengths would be accessed through e-learning opportunities provided by accredited baccalaureate institutions inside or outside of the state. This could well expand the range of liberal arts programming available to local residents.

The integrator function would provide for:

- Increasing the density of interactions between the rural campus and employers, supporting industry groups/cluster/specializations and expanding efforts to understand and advance the use of technology;
- Accelerating the incorporation of work world changes into the curriculum and new skills into the workforce through frequent assignments of faculty teaching at employer sites and business practitioners engaged as adjunct teachers and guest lecturers on campus;
- Serving as an extension of employers' human resources departments, involved in their longer-term strategic planning and orchestrating opportunities for learning-on-demand and for career enhancing training opportunities; and
- Integrating learning opportunities for starting or expanding businesses in areas of new demand and competitive advantage, e.g., ethanol, bio-mass, agriculture-biotechnology, information and computer sciences.

Again, the examples of Alexandria Technical College and Northland Community and Technical College apply. Both colleges have shown that the kind of knowledge and capability acquired in these close working relationships increases the institutions ability to bring together a broad set of companies with similar processes (though often very different products) to identify new technologies and new skills that will increase their productivity and their competitiveness.

5. College as a Business Location:

The college would host one or more businesses in an on- or off-campus facility. The businesses would receive “incubation” space and services including:

- affordable office/production/research/computing/telecommuting space and facilities,
- clerical and logistical support services, equipment and laboratories (as needed)
- enhanced customized training for staff,
- applied learning opportunities for students and
- business development programs for business owners and managers.

This model would provide classroom and online courses leading to associate and baccalaureate degrees, internships with businesses in the region, applied learning opportunities for faculty and students, and access to a range of business development services. Examples of existing facilities that now have one or more of the above programs include Technology Plus of Mankato and the TeleWork Centers of Northeast Minnesota. The latter are part of the TechNorth Centers initiative of the Northeast Higher Education District.

A second model for direct college involvement in business development would have a college campus serve as a location for a Business Assistance Center. Some Minnesota colleges already provide this function; several of these began as sites for federal Small Business Administration assistance programs. Others developed entirely in response to regional needs. Thus, there are models in existence for others to emulate.

Not all of these existing models have been successful. Some centers in other regions have experienced problems because they lacked the planning, talent, and resources to guide and sustain them. Others have been hurt by downturns in particular industry sectors, or they never developed the critical mass to make the efforts sustainable. However, with careful planning, sufficient support at an appropriate scale, a seasoned businessperson as “champion” of the center, and some ties to already existing related industries in the region, these models can lead to acceleration of business success and regional industry growth.

6. College as Leader in Research/Technology Commercialization:

Most rural campuses are too small to develop commercialization infrastructures on their own. This reduces the likelihood of research spin-off growing in rural regions. To accelerate the transfer of applied research from the academic institution to businesses with the capacity to succeed in commercialization, a rural campus could develop a research-commercialization process in partnership with organizations that specialize in such commercialization.

Such a partnership would provide for:

- startups in the region that would expand the economic base;
- licensing agreements and technology transfer agreements that would initiate a revenue stream for the college and for faculty researchers;
- real-world experience for students in the research-to-commercialization process; and,
- networking among higher education institutions around applied research in promising areas for rural Minnesota.

The partnership would support faculty successfully transferring technology or “know-how” from applied research in the academic environment to business opportunity.

The commercialization of technology occurs on a continuum that requires sufficient early stage support for “proof of concept” and prototyping, as well as business planning and organization. As part of this process, the college would need to assess and link to existing sources of business technical and follow-on financial assistance. The partnership would need to be linked to early-stage angel financing and other sources of financial capital in the region for successful businesses to start and remain in the rural region. Participating educational institutions may also need to adjust their incentive and reward systems to encourage closer working relationships with businesses.

7. College as Entrepreneur:

This idea greatly expands the way colleges have historically related to business. This model goes beyond being the educator of workers, the location of business assistance programs, or the transferor of technology. Under this model, the college would be the owner and operator of an enterprise. The business could be for-profit or not-for-profit; it could be free-standing or it could be a formal subsidiary of the college or its foundation. Whatever the structure, all revenues derived from the college’s investments would inure to the college’s ultimate benefit.

The enterprise should have ties to the basic academic mission of the institution and help to meet local economic needs. Examples might be:

- The college operates a nursing employment agency to help its students (as interns) and its graduates meet temporary or part-time needs of local healthcare institutions.
- The college sells alternative energy equipment and processes for on-farm use.
- The college sells excess capacity in its own energy generation facilities or telecommunications system to near-by homes and businesses.
- The college operates a business services center providing office support for home-based entrepreneurs, health billing and insurance management for elderly residents.

Several caveats are warranted for this model:

- a) The legal structures need careful study in order to ensure that the college is not needlessly exposed to liability and other problems. The legal and ethical issues (including potential conflicts of interest) must be clearly, completely, and convincingly resolved.

- b) Success under this model depends on the existence of a true entrepreneurial spirit within the college community. It will not be enough merely to have an in-house champion; the college community as a whole must be supportive.
- c) Direct competition with an existing business must be avoided.
- d) The college should be prepared to “spin off” the business if later conditions warrant.
- e) There may be tax consequences: e.g. local governments may seek to impose a property tax on college buildings used for these “for-profit” purposes.

A college business can have educational benefits for the college’s students. If the business relates to academic programming at the institution (as it ideally should), students enrolled in that program could work as interns. If the business develops, the interns might become employees of the business after graduation.

Chapter 6

Policy and Leadership Implications

This report began with a reference to a recent Twin Cities newspaper editorial headlined, “Higher ed system: too many campuses, too few dollars.” The research did not attempt to determine whether the state has either too many or too few campuses. In part, this is because the state’s current approach of valuing its colleges is based on traditional measures like student hours per classroom. The changing demographics of the state and the financial pressures faced by all public sector institutions are driving discussions about narrowing what the public sector might be expected to accomplish. The “golden rule” of a college within 35 miles of every Minnesota home is no longer seen as a useful standard.

The real question should be whether Minnesota’s 32 rural campuses are organized and operated so as to provide maximum value to Minnesota residents of today and of tomorrow. This basic question is not being systematically asked by Minnesota’s college, community, or state leaders. This should change.

Each of the state’s rural colleges must be directed to undertake a review of options like those set forth in the preceding chapter. The colleges’ governing systems — the University of Minnesota in respect to Crookston and Morris, and MnSCU in respect to the other 30 campuses — should mandate such reviews. Minnesota colleges should be given the message that they are expected to play forceful roles in the economic development of the regions they serve and be rewarded for doing so. California’s community colleges offer a model for a state system to make economic development an integral part of their operations. That state’s legislature spelled out the roles of these institutions as follows:

- a) To advance California’s economic growth and global competitiveness through quality education and services focusing on continuous workforce improvement, technology deployment, and business development, consistent with the current needs of the state’s regional economies.
- b) To maximize the resources of the California Community Colleges to fulfill its role as the primary provider in fulfilling the vocational education and training needs of California business and industry.
- c) To collaborate with other state and local agencies, including partners under the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-220), and the Trade and Commerce Agency, to deliver services that meet statewide and regional workforce, business development, technology transfer, and trade needs that attract, retain, and expand businesses.
- d) In consultation with the Economic Strategy Panel of the Trade and Commerce Agency, local economic development agencies, the private sector, labor and community groups, to develop innovative solutions, as needed, in identified strategic priority areas, including but not limited to, advanced transportation technologies, biotechnologies, small business, applied competitive technologies, including computer integrated manufacturing, production, and continuous quality improvement, business and workforce performance, environmental technologies, health care delivery, information technology, multimedia/entertainment, international trade, e-commerce and e-trade, and workplace literacy.
- e) To identify, acquire, and leverage community college and other vocational training resources when possible, to support local, regional, and statewide economic development.
- f) To create effective logistical, technical, and marketing infrastructure support for economic development activities within the California Community Colleges.
- g) To optimize access to community colleges’ economic development services.
- h) To develop strategic public and private sector partnerships.
- i) To assist communities experiencing military base downsizing and closures.

Using a traditional academic lens and today’s demographic and economic trends, it may be hard to justify the continuing existence of Minnesota’s 32 rural colleges, especially those with declining enrollments and those whose programs are duplicated at nearby institutions.

Roles for Policymakers.

Minnesota's public rural colleges do not operate independently. They report to and are held accountable to a variety of constituencies. This concluding section of the report suggests roles that these policymakers should be expected to play in determining the future of Minnesota's rural colleges.

The Legislature should consider the real impacts of recent funding cuts made to Minnesota public colleges. These declines in real-dollar (not just a slowing of growth) funding are worrisome and bode ill for the institutions, even those that are growing in enrollments. It is important to realize that without adequate resources, the institutions will find it difficult to undertake any of the new initiatives outlined in this report.

At the same time, the Legislature should expect the two higher education systems and their campuses to respond more to local needs and interests. As noted below, the Legislature should encourage the systems to expect more from their institutions in the promotion of regional economic development, but the Legislature should be careful about delving into decisions directly affecting the future of individual institutions.

The Higher Education Systems (the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota and the Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities) should be forceful advocates for institutional change, particularly at the rural colleges. The systems should expect their campuses to be more active participants in the economic development of their regions. To assist in this, the systems should disseminate models for facilitating economic development. In addition, if economic development is a valued outcome, then the systems need to acknowledge in their metric evaluation that enrollment growth is not the only sign of success.

Campuses should be challenged by their governing boards to review their options and any other reasonable plans developed in collaboration with their communities. The governing boards and systems can catalyze this effort by offering a challenge grant — to be matched at least one to one by local non-institutional resources — to plan and implement strategies and/or projects in collaboration with communities surrounding rural campuses. Each campus should evaluate the options for change and submit a viable plan for transforming itself.

Institutional Partners play an important role in the health of rural colleges. These partners range from the Initiative Foundations in six regions of the state, to other foundations having rural emphases, to regional and local community development corporations, to local businesses and chambers of commerce. Each of these entities should help encourage the local governments and the colleges to become far more aggressive in promoting local development.

Local Governments have always supported their local campuses as the generator of jobs and other direct economic investments. But many of them have done little to urge the campus to assume a larger role in regional development. These governmental units should broaden their vision of what the institution can contribute and help it achieve these broader goals of being a major participant in the economic growth of the region.

University and College Internal Constituencies of administrators, faculty and staff have the power to determine if their institution will choose a responsive, engaged, or integrated mode of working with external stakeholders to strengthen the region's economy. As noted earlier, serving the region through engaged or integrated processes requires that this be central to the mission and core to daily operations. This requires that metrics be established in conjunction with community partners for campus projects and operations intended to provide this service. These approaches need not limit the value of the education that students receive. In fact, working more closely with community partners can be an expansive bridge that fosters the "thinking globally and acting locally" that is essential to regional viability.

Future Research.

Not surprisingly, opportunities for additional research beyond the limitations of this study emerged. Rural educators and community leaders who were contacted were excited by the attention this study gives to their

challenges. They expressed the need for additional applied research to inform their work. Specific areas suggested include:

1. Documentation of the impact of projects funded by the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Board in building long-term partnerships between rural employers and educators. Emphasis should be directed to a better understanding of the new models of long-term partnerships emerging and to the impact of these partnerships on the core curriculum of the rural campus.
2. Research to support the development of a benchmarking tool that is compatible with the quality accreditation model of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Such a tool could be used for rural campuses to document their current practices and to learn from successful practices at similar institutions.
3. The establishment of a roundtable of economists from rural campuses, administrators engaged in continuing education, and regional economic development leaders to identify additional research needs and to explore ways to support ongoing collaboration to accomplish the research in a timely manner.

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Research Resources: Interviews

Dr. M. James Bensen, President Emeritus, Bemidji State University, Bemidji, Minn.

Dr. Cornelia Flora, Director, North Central Rural Development Center, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

Dr. Orly Gunderson, President, Northland Community and Technical College, Thief River Falls, Minn.

Mr. Roger Hughes, Director of Business Services, Century College, White Bear Lake, Minn.

Dr. Louis Johnston, Professor of Economics, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn.

Dr. Kevin Kopischke, Vice President of Customized Services, Alexandria Technical College, Alexandria, Minn.

Mr. Jacques Koppel, Former President, Minnesota Technology Incorporated, Minneapolis, Minn.

Ms. Jane Leonard, Acting Executive Director, Minnesota Rural Partners, St. Paul, Minn.

Dr. Duane Lund, Retired School District Superintendent, Staples, Minn.

Mr. Roger McCannon, Director, Center for Small Towns, University of Minnesota, Morris, Minn.

Dr. Ellen Nelson, Dean of Continuing Education, Rochester Community and Technical College, Rochester, Minn.

Ms. Shari Olson, Dean of Outreach and Innovation, Northland Community and Technical College, Thief River Falls, Minn.

Mr. Frank Starke, President Emeritus, Dunwoody College of Technology, Minneapolis, Minn.

Dr. Ron Wood, President, Minnesota West Technical College, Granite Falls, Minn.

Recommendations Review Roundtable Members

The research team appreciated the valuable perspective and advice provided by a group economic and economic development professionals that reviewed a preliminary set of report recommendations. Roundtable members included:

JoAnne Berkenkamp, Management Consultant

Kathy Gaalswyk, President, Initiative Foundation

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Researchers' Biographies

Monica M. Manning, Ph.D., is executive officer of The Nova Group, an education firm supporting innovation in higher education. She served as the executive director of the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Board when that board was established to foster industry/higher education collaboration with a special responsibility to address the needs of rural communities. She has just completed her term as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of Minnesota Technology Inc., which has the mission to advance the competitive position of Minnesota companies, with particular attention to rural companies. Dr. Manning is former chair of the Trustees Candidate Advisory Council which is responsible for recommending candidates to the Governor for appointment to the Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. She served on the Blue Ribbon Advisory Group for MnSCU metropolitan higher education planning. She has frequently been invited to present legislative testimony on a diverse set of issues, including by the Minnesota Senate Higher Education Budget Division on academic initiatives, by the Senate Jobs and Economic Development Division on workforce development, and by the U.S. Commission on Workforce Issues 2002 on workforce and academic issues. She was invited by Sen. Roger Moe to provide leadership to the Senate Majority Leader's Workforce Committee in 1998. In addition, she served as the facilitator for the two Joint House and Senate Higher Education Committee Retreats in 2001 and 2002. Pertinent research projects include "Jobs for Connecticut's Future" with Yankelovich, Skelly, White; "Creating Business-Education Partnerships" for Minnesota Wellspring; "Project Success II for Valley City State and Mayville State Universities." Her most recent research, "Academic Institutional Formation," was funded by Lilly Endowment and The Fetzer Institute.

Candace Campbell has served as chief executive or architect of several of Minnesota's economic development initiatives. She is currently engaged as part of a working group to bring together the CEOs of the Twin Cities' largest employers to address issues surrounding the economic competitiveness of the region. In 2000 she staffed the 21-member panel of business and institutional leaders appointed by the University of Minnesota's President Mark Yudof, which prepared "a Report to the People of Minnesota: Building a Knowledge Economy for the 21st Century." Earlier in 2000 the McKnight Foundation commissioned her to prepare a white paper, "A New Economy Strategy for the Twin Cities Region," which was reviewed by roundtables of the region's business and institutional leaders. In the past 20 years she led two initiatives aimed particularly at extending resources and information to rural communities — Minnesota Project Outreach and the Minnesota Center for Community Economic Development. She has worked as a consultant with clients in rural Minnesota and elsewhere on initiatives to support entrepreneurship and innovation. As a Fellow at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, she led a number of research and policy projects on science and technology, transportation and the economy, the role and potential of information technology and other technology transfer and small business development initiatives.

Thomas J. Triplett, J.D., served as Commissioner of Finance, Commissioner of Revenue, and Director of State Planning for the state of Minnesota during the period 1983-89. In all three of those roles he was actively involved in rural and economic development strategies for the state. From 1986 to 1989 he also served as chair of the state's Ag and Economic Development Board, which was charged with using state financing tools to promote job creation in Greater Minnesota. From 1979 through 1983 he was president of The Minnesota Project, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to the promotion of Minnesota rural development. From 1997 to 1999 he was Interim Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. In that role he was directly involved in the development of funding formulas affecting rural college financing. From 1993 to 2000 he chaired the board of the Community Reinvestment Fund, a nonprofit creator of secondary market opportunities for smaller-scale economic development activities. In 2002 he was a consultant to CRF in its pursuit of federal New Markets Tax Credit allocations (yet to be awarded). If awarded, NMTCs can be structured to provide a strong new development tool for rural communities. Also in 2002 he chaired and was the principal author of "Project Success II for Valley City State and Mayville State Universities," a study of how two smaller public universities might restructure themselves to better serve the needs of North Dakota residents and the rural communities surrounding the two universities. Key recommendations from that report were adopted by the North Dakota Higher Education Board in 2002 and initial implementation is under way.



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