



Promoting the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.

708 South Third Street, Suite 500
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415
Telephone: (612) 338-0791 Facsimile: (612) 337-5919
Email: info@citizensleague.net
www.citizensleague.net

Citizens League Higher Education Study

Draft Proposal April 21, 2004

Introduction/Background

Governor Pawlenty has asked the Citizens League to do an assessment of higher education in Minnesota. Vance Opperman and Rondi Erickson will co-chair the six month effort. The committee members -- who are yet to be selected -- will represent a broad range of interests from throughout the state. This effort is timely, as a comprehensive study looking across all sectors at the whole of higher education has not been done in over twenty years. The league will focus its work on three things:

- Assessing our current higher education system in Minnesota. This will include determining the objective criteria and data to be used in assessing the current system, reviewing the use of available state and federal resources and examining the role of public and private higher education institutions throughout the state.
- Creating a vision for higher education in Minnesota. What do we need for higher education in this economy, this new century and in light of the rapidly changing demographics we face?
- Developing an agenda that will begin to connect these two points. What are the priority issues and actions that need to be taken to ensure a world-class system of higher education? How do we align our current capacity that we know we will need for the future?

Higher education is perhaps the clearest path connecting Minnesota's proud history with its future economic and civic potential. After all, creating a system of higher education was one of the first four actions of the Territorial Legislature, which established the University in 1851 to "provide the inhabitants of this Territory with the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of Literature, Science and the Arts."

The need for this knowledge, and the tremendous intellectual, civic, cultural and economic wealth it has brought Minnesota, has never been more

important to our future economic success and quality of life. Still, much has changed in the past generation:

- There are now over 175 public, private, and nonprofit higher education institutions in the State of Minnesota.
 - While funding as a share of the overall state budget has declined in the past decade, state funding for higher education exceeded \$2.8 billion in the current biennium – over 10% of the budget.
 - There are concerns that the current system lacks sufficient accountability and incentives for performance, and may not be coordinated to the degree necessary to serve Minnesota in the 21st Century.
- More than ever, our economic well-being depends on world-class higher education system. Online learning and “OJT” have also changed the context for this learning.
 - The demographics of learners will change dramatically in the next 25 years, with disparities between incomes, ethnicities and geographies increasing, and with a broad range of individuals needing access to higher education.

Every citizen, business and organization in Minnesota has a *common* interest in the success of this system. Minnesota’s future prosperity depends on a comprehensive, high-quality, sustainable, integrated, and accountable system of higher education. A critical public policy question is: How can we align our higher education system for tomorrow?

This Citizens League Task Force will frame this issue, provide objective data on our current situation, and chart a principled and actionable course for this future.

Key Objectives of the Higher Education Task Force

- To assess the current state of Minnesota’s higher education system.
- To develop a vision of higher education for the next generation of Minnesotans.
- To establish a higher education agenda: a strategy and set of key recommendations for closing this gap (between the current state and the ideal state), and investing in a world-class higher education system.

Proposed Process

Timeline: 6 months. Whenever possible, key data and findings will be presented early in the process. A ‘staged’ approach will build political support, improve the quality of the findings, and increase/improve participation.

Leadership and Participation: April

- Co-Chairs, as well as a ‘charge to the committee’ established. Endorsed/announced by Gov. Pawlenty.
- Proposed 20-30 member committee. Participation should include both (positional) policy leaders, and citizens from a variety of backgrounds. Regional/rural representation will be critical. Final approval by Citizens League Board. One-half committee members invited/appointed by Board, one-half open to general League membership.

Review of Background Information: April – June

Review and analyze data on the current system and projected changes, including cost, economic trend data, student demographics, achievement and accessibility trends, etc. Maximize the use of existing sources and partners in this effort.

- Assess the geographical and institutional assets of the higher education system in Minnesota, ‘mapping’ them by geography, program type, and outcome.
- Thorough national research on trends and best practices.
- Gather/review/‘digest’ information for committee members.
- Test *and release* preliminary findings.

A Vision for the Future: May – July

- If possible, regional listening sessions with students, businesses, citizens and representatives from higher education.
- Expert testimony on what system is needed in the future.
- Best practice research.

Preparation of Final Recommendations: August - September

- Summary of key findings and assessment of ‘current state’.
- Proposed vision for system, and clear principles for action.
- Identification of key issues and categories for action.
- Recommendations ready for next legislative session.

Potential Questions to Be Addressed

Mission

- Looking forward, what should be the key outcomes for higher education? Retention? Access? Credentialing? Economic success? How do we measure right now on these?
- Are the current missions of institutions and organizations appropriate?
- What should be the role of the various public, private and non-profit providers?
- What is the special role of the University of Minnesota, MNSCU and public institutions?

Current Assessment

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system?
- Trend analysis on a wide range of indicators.
- Costs of current system, as well as proportional funding from all sources.
- Best practices in other states and countries.

Potential Key Questions/Strategy

- Given the existing characteristics and future trends, how should higher education be organized in Minnesota?
- What governing mechanism(s) will ensure academic and economic success, sustainability and accountability?
- What is the best geographic alignment of programs? What offerings, at what locations, will maximize economic and academic opportunity, and reduce unnecessary duplication?
- What specialization by location or institutional type should occur?
- How do we take advantage of leaps in technology and access?
- How do we maximize the role of the system as an economic engine in Minnesota?
- Financial aid, and how to fund a system.

Potential Success Indicators for Higher Education

- Access
- Productivity of system
- Affordability
- Retention
- Achievement and academic success
- Excellence in research
- Diversity of academic options
- Connections to employers
- Cost and efficiency
- Long-term sustainability
- Geographic equity and availability