

**ASSURANCE SECTION**

**REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

Lake Superior State University  
Sault Ste. Marie, MI

October 24-26, 2011

FOR

**The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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## **I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**

### **A. Purpose of Visit**

The purpose of the visit was a comprehensive evaluation of Lake Superior State University (LSSU) for continued accreditation.

### **B. Organizational Context**

Lake Superior State University, situated on the Canadian border in Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula (EUP), is the smallest of the state's fifteen public universities. With a five-year average academic year enrollment of just over 3,100 students, the University, under Carnegie Classification, is considered a small four-year undergraduate institution with a professions focus and a single graduate program.

Lake Superior State University (LSSU) was established in 1946 as a branch campus of the Michigan College of Mining and Technology and was accredited by the North Central Association (NCA) from 1946-1968. In 1968 Lake Superior State College was first accredited at the Baccalaureate level with a review visit scheduled in 1971. At that time NCA approved reaccreditation for 10 years. In 1981 LSSU was granted accreditation to the Master's level with approval for the Master of Business Administration (MBA). A focused visit was scheduled in three years to focus on the MBA and the fiscal circumstances of the State of Michigan and the impact on LSSU.

The next comprehensive evaluation was completed in 1991. At the time of this visit, it was learned that changes to the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) had occurred without approval from the Commission. A sanction was applied to the institution for delivering degree programs at sites not approved by NCA, without seeking prior approval. A team was sent to evaluate a request to change the location of off-campus offerings in 1991, and the change was approved.

Accreditation was approved to 2001 with a focused visit required in 1994 to evaluate the MBA program. In 1994 the university was told to file a report on the Taiwanese MBA program by 1995 with a focused evaluation required by November 1997 to again evaluate the MBA program.

Commission action in 1998 stipulated that accreditation at the master's degree level was limited to the MBA program until August 1999 and to the Master of Public Administration (MPA) just to allow for the graduation of previously enrolled students unable to complete the degree through another university. A progress report was required by January 2000 on the University's commitment to quality graduate education in the MBA.

Finally in 1999 the institution reported to the Commission its intent to offer degrees at the Baccalaureate level only. Affiliation status was revised to indicate accreditation at the

Master's degree level, limited to the MBA, until August 2003 and to the MPA until August 1999 to enable the teach-out of both programs. A progress report was required on the elimination of the MBA and the status of the teach-out plan by January 2000.

In 2001 a comprehensive visit to LSSU recommended that the institution be granted continued accreditation at the Bachelor's level with the next comprehensive evaluation during the academic year 2010-2011. The team recommended that a progress report be sent to NCA by April 2004 to be focused on plans for and accomplishments in addressing issues of diversity and assessment. The institution submitted the required reports on diversity and assessment to the NCA and the reports were accepted by the Commission. The 2010-2011 Comprehensive visit was delayed for one year due to a request from the institution.

In 2004 the institution requested a focused visit for an institutional change request to offer a new degree program leading to the Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction. The team recommended a progress report on the Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction be submitted to the Commission in June 2008.

LSSU has experienced considerable turbulence in critical leadership posts since the last visit. In particular, turnover in the positions of president and provost has proved disruptive and impeded the school's progress in areas such as assessment. However, the current regime appears to have brought a measure of stability and clarity of purpose to the campus. Across the campus as a whole, there is belief that the Higher Learning Commission can play a constructive role by remaining engaged with the university to ensure that LSSU "stays the course" in terms of its current direction.

### **C. Unique Aspects of Visit**

The self-study process at Lake Superior State University was organized around the theme of *Redefining the Classroom*—a theme that speaks to LSSU's focus on experiential learning. This is a theme repeated throughout the Self-Study as LSSU reaffirms the unique experiential learning opportunities that inform the education it offers. The Self Study is built upon HLC's four cross-cutting themes that describe an organization as future-oriented, learning-focused, connected and distinctive. Each of the four major chapters addresses one of these themes. Each chapter is further organized around sub-themes established by HLC in its *Exploring the Usefulness of Cross-Cutting Themes as Context for Evaluation* document.

### **D. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited**

No other sites were visited.

### **E. Distance Education Reviewed**

None

**F. Interactions with Constituencies**

- President
- Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Vice President for Finance
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Vice President Enrollment Services
- Director of Human Resources
- Evidence Team (7)
- Academic Deans (2)
- Staff Association (66)
- Shared Governance and Oversight Committee (5)
- Open Forum with Students (23)
- Interim Director of IT and staff (2)
- Librarian
- Information Technology and Media Specialist
- School Chairs (9)
- Curriculum Committee (11)
- Assessment Committee (7)
- Strategic Planning Committee (9)
- Community Members (6)
- Student Government Association (10)
- Teacher Education Director
- Assistant Director of Charter Schools
- Associate Provost
- General Education Committee (11)
- Admissions and Financial Aid Staff (3)
- Academic Policy and Procedures Review Committee (11)
- Alumni Relations Staff (2)
- Director of Development
- Athletic Director
- Board of Trustees (2)
- Faculty (40)

**G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed – Please fill in the documents you reviewed**

Fiscal year 2011-12 Higher Education Appropriations Report  
 Materials provide by the Grants and Contracts Office, Office of Sponsored Programs  
 Guidelines for Fraternity and Sorority use of Alcohol  
 Shared Governance Preamble, Process, and Bylaws  
 Faculty Handbook  
 Academic Advising Handbook – Working Edition  
 Crosswalk - Cross-cutting Themes, Core Components

TMR Strategic Framework for Planning, July 2010  
LSSU Facilities Master Plan  
Budget Development Guidelines  
Shared Governance Policy, Process and Bylaws  
Academic Improvement Plan, 2011  
School of Education Consultant Report  
Diversity Report, GNakagawa  
Faculty Association Agreement  
SPBC \$120,000 Strategic Initiatives Evaluation Process  
SPBC \$120,000 Strategic Initiatives Recommendation to President  
Cherry Commission Report  
LSSU Grants and Contracts Chart  
Assessment Training Events, Full Descriptions  
Mokhtar-Duesing - CAD Course Assessment, Powerpoint  
Assessment within Academic Areas - College of Natural, Mathematical, and Health Sciences  
Assessment within Academic Areas, Rec Studies and Ex Sci Senior Exit Survey  
Assessment within Academic Areas - College of Professional Studies  
Assessment within Academic Areas - College of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences & Honors  
Assessment within Academic Areas - Engineering Full Report  
Assessment within Academic Areas - Self Study Outside References  
General Education - Bylaws  
General Education - Format  
General Education - Student Survey, Data and Results  
General Education - Student Survey, Exit Survey Form  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Natural Science  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Communication  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Diversity  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Humanities  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Mathematics  
General Education - Subcommittee Full Reports - Social Science  
General Education - Subcommittee Report - English  
Resource Center for Students with Disabilities, 2007-08 Executive Summary  
Faculty and Student Scholarship, CALSS  
Faculty and Student Scholarship, CETED  
Faculty and Student Scholarship, CNMHS  
Faculty and Student Scholarship, CPS  
Examples of Faculty Sabbaticals  
Academic Integrity Statement  
University Organizational charts - Administration  
Shared Governance PowerPoint, Convocation 2010  
School of Physical Sciences, Mission and Program Outcomes  
2005 Diversity Plan Update  
Self-Study Report including the Federal Compliance document  
Contract between the LSSU Faculty Association, NEA MEA and Lake Superior State

## University

Correspondence and documents exchanged with the HLC between previous accreditation renewal and the present

## Webpages:

Student Financial Aid

Student Course Catalog

Ombudman

Athletics

Minutes of the Board of Trustees September 2006 through April of 2011

Shared Governance Oversight Committee: Policy, Procedures and ‘Issues Resolved’

Resources for Transfer Students (Articulation and course transfer data)

LSSUS Self-Study

LSSU Strategic Plan

LSSUS Resource Room

Faculty Vitae

Course Syllabi

## II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW

### A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process

Since the last accreditation visit in 2001, the institution has been led by four presidents, six provosts, four financial vice presidents, four student affairs vice presidents, three deans/directors of enrollment management, one vice president for enrollment management and three Foundation executive directors. The institution also welcomed eleven new Board of Trustee members, underwent three academic reorganizations and weathered a multitude of administrative realignments. The first decade of the new century found LSSU in a state of constant flux.

While the self-study process was fraught with challenge, participation from administration, faculty and staff was evidenced. Interviews affirmed that the campus community, site employees, and Trustees were somewhat involved and aware of the Self-Study process. It did appear that there was a lack of clear understanding of the process, but those individuals involved did realize the importance of a successful reaccreditation visit. It appeared that the self-study was written within the year before the comprehensive visit by a select group of individuals. Due to the constant change in administrative leadership over the past 10 years, the self-study process was delayed by one-year to ensure that the institution was prepared for the reaccreditation visit.

The decision to build the self-study emphasizing the four cross-cutting themes provided the institution to better describe the university and all its interrelated functions. The organizational structure of the review process provided a platform for an open and honest review.

**B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report**

The self-study evidence team membership included a faculty representative, administrators and Institutional Research. Sub-committee activities brought broader segments of campus constituencies into the self-study process and presented evidence regarding change for the institution. The institution chose to use a thematic approach to the self-study which highlighted their strengths, challenges and areas in need of improvement. The institution chose this non-traditional, holistic approach to better describe the university and its interrelated functions. This thematic approach was beneficial to the institution, but it was very hard to follow from the team's perspective.

**C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges**

The team considers the response of the institution to previously identified challenges to be adequate.

**D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment**

Requirements were fulfilled.

**III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS**

The team reviewed the required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information and found the institution to be in compliance with federal requirements.

The institution reports an excellent low rate of default on student loans. Recently, although not required for compliance, a student ombudsman has been added to the staff. This person will provide an additional means of resolving student complaints at the lowest level. Lastly, a concern was expressed that Lake Superior State University interprets its contract with a bookstore provider as prohibiting faculty from providing textbook information directly to students. The Higher Education Opportunity Act, Sec. 112 amended the Higher Education Act, Title I, Part C, 20 U.S.C. 1015b, to require institutions, *in a manner of their choosing*, to disclose on the institution's internet course schedule the ISBN number and retail price information for required and recommended textbooks. Lake Superior State University has chosen to do this by linking and driving students who access the schedule to the bookstore site. A student can only obtain the ISBN and price information through the bookstore site. Since the statute does not require the institution to have a site and the required information can be obtained by clicking through the site LSSU is not out of compliance but it has created extra steps to obtain textbook information.

#### IV. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA

**CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

##### 1. Evidence that Core Components are met

Lake Superior State University's mission/vision statement clearly defines its core values of being a student focused institution, offering quality academically programs to Michigan's Upper Peninsula including its nearby Canadian neighbors. In particular, its goal of creating a nurturing learning environment for students which will allow them to realized their full potential.

The Mission Statement approved by the LSSU Board of Trustees in 2008 concludes with the statement Mission Statement is, "We also serve the regional, national, and global communities by contributing to the growth, dissemination, and application of knowledge". In addition, the Values Statement that follows the Mission Statement affirms a commitment to, "welcome diverse perspectives and remain open to change and innovation." Further, the document states that three of the core values of the institution are to, "respect and value each person as an individual, welcome diverse perspectives and remain open to change and innovation, and work cooperatively in the interest of achieving our common mission" ..

##### 2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention

The instability in leadership combined with a severe budget cuts to LSSU has led to an environment in which the future direction and success of the institution is unclear at this time. At present a broad number of very important initiatives are in the very earliest stages of adoption. These include: a) Academic Improvement Plan, b) Shared Governance Preamble, Process, and Bylaws, c) A New Strategic plan, d) Facilities Master Plan, and e) Budget Development Guidelines. The successful implementation of these initiatives will have a substantial impact on the future of LSSU.

The LSSU mission statement does not contain specific language regarding diversity. However, sufficient evidence can be found across the institution that supports this goal. Documents reviewed provide the basis for organizational strategies to address diversity in the classroom, student body, and among faculty, staff, and administrators.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

Across campus there is a general understanding and support of the institution's teaching focused mission, yet its implementation is hampered by a noticeable lack of clearly defined processes and procedures. These include the role and expectations for the faculty in regards to the traditional triad of teaching, scholarship and service and how they are used to determine tenure and promotion. A working model and understanding of both shared-governance and communication between the faculty and administration must be formulated to ensure success of this new concept of shared governance.

During interviews with faculty and staff on supporting the mission, there were several comments that indicated a desire for more transparency in how budget allocations were arrived at. The university should make the link between planning and budgeting more transparent.

LSSU's planning and budgeting priorities will continue to struggle to support the mission until a transparent campus-wide assessment of programs and educational priorities is undertaken. The realization of the mission appears to be occurring at the department level, but not necessarily across schools, or the campus as a whole. The success of such an effort depends in part on the process being open to all stakeholders. Significant inconsistencies exist within the faculty as to the purpose, expectation, and role of research in LSSU's mission.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; No Commission follow-up is necessary.

**CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

The challenges of frequent turnover in the top leadership at Lake Superior State University (LSSU) with respect to planning for the future is frankly discussed in the institution's Self Study. These challenges were confirmed by interviews and

discussions with faculty, administrators, staff and students during the visit to campus by the Higher Learning Commission Team of consultant evaluators on October 23 – 26, 2011. LSSU has had five presidents, seven provosts and numerous other vice-presidential leadership changes in the past decade. In addition to the leadership changes, the institution has faced decreasing resources because of reduced funding from the state of Michigan and fluctuating student enrollment. The constant flux of administrative changes and realignments along with uncertainty of resources has led to five changes of the mission/vision statement, four distinct strategic planning processes, and frequent restructuring of the LSSU organizational structure.

In spite of the loss of Michigan appropriations; problems in other resource areas such as retirement benefits, the loss of the Michigan Promise, and a decrease in the Michigan Work Study program; and some fluctuations in enrollment, LSSU has taken actions to stabilize the fiscal resources and turned the corner on a low composite ratio. Planning efforts are under way to bring a new strategic plan to the campus.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

In spite of the numerous changes and challenges, LSSU has recently formulated a strategic planning process with a new Strategic Planning and Budget Committee (SPBC) that is part of the recently adopted shared governance structure. This committee has held a retreat with the Board of Trustees and started a campus wide discussion for a new strategic plan which included yet another revision of the mission and values statement. The previous planning efforts have lacked continuity and follow through. The current effort needs to demonstrate completion, communication with campus and evidence that the plan is being implemented and utilized for directing LSSU into the immediate and near future.

A recent LSSU Facilities Master Plan will be overseen by the new Infrastructure Committee of the shared governance system. Significant deferred maintenance, major planned renovations of South Hall, the recently discovered safety issues at the Child Development Center, a planned upgrade of athletic facilities, and the challenges of being housed on an old Army facility are among the challenges facing LSSU. While facility planning is under way, progress needs to be monitored to see if the potential of the Infrastructure Committee is realized and the university is able to invest the resources for implementation of the Master Plan.

A lack of IT planning was noted during interviews with faculty, administrators and students. All three groups pointed to different needs related to technology on campus, including upgrading of campus computers, additional staff to handle IT issues, and more professional development and training for the IT staff.

In the current fiscal climate, LSSU faces the challenge common to many institutions to preserve access for those in need of financial aid. The university should act creatively find solutions to compensate for dwindling availability of need-based financial assistance.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

Given the many changes in leadership, the numerous starts and stops of strategic planning, the importance of implementing the Facilities Master Plan, and the recognition of a need for planning in Information Technology, there is a need to see evidence that the new policies and procedures are actually moving the institution forward and there was a clear and publicly stated understanding of what LSSU should do and be in the future.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

The newly-created position of Associate Provost for Assessment, Education, and Graduate Programs will provide a much needed catalyst for the process to take hold institutionally. As the process matures, the integration of the many seemingly diverse and dissociated assessment approaches such as writing samples, thesis projects, standardized test, licensing exams, employer surveys,

portfolios, supervised internships, capstones courses, and accreditation reviews can begin to coalesce under the guidance of the Associate Provost into a snap-shot of student achievement across campus. In addition, The University's newly formed Assessment Committee appears to be making strides in attempting to address the need for assessing student learning and for using the results of those assessments to improve curriculum, pedagogy, instructional resources, and student services. This progress is especially notable in the area of general education assessment where data has been collected over three semesters on incoming freshmen. The disconnect with assessment has been the lack of university alignment, not with the gathering of assessment data. The data has been gathered; it has not been utilized effectively in decision making.

The Grants and Contracts office supports effective teaching by working with faculty to submit research and teaching grants which support the educational mission of the institution. The indirect cost policy of 15% to the principle investigator encourages and supports professional development for the faculty while also allowing for students to receive the benefits of working with faculty on real world projects.

The faculty of LSSU desires services to improve pedagogies. The services range from simple requests such as current computer software and hardware to the creation of a learning center dedicated to the development and refinement of teaching pedagogies. The creation of a learning center might prove to be an appropriate investment, particularly in light of LSSU's commitment to redefining the classroom.

LSSU faculty members have maintained a strong commitment to remaining current in their field. This is demonstrated by the scholarship generated across campus, presentations given to professional societies, and the use of faculty sabbaticals.

The University's honors program and newly implemented Living Learning Houses for Chemistry, Engineering, and Criminal Justice/Fire Science demonstrate the literal creation of effective learning environments. The assigning of a faculty advisor to each program will facilitate and enhance the added academic value.

Students benefit greatly from the hands-on experience gained during senior projects. Opportunities due to the Robotics Laboratory, Aquatic Research Lab (ARL), and the Environmental Analysis Laboratory (EAL) afford LSSU students unique and valuable research experiences. Laboratories equipped with state of the art equipment allow students to conduct independent research on issues relevant to the local community.

Lake State supports and supplements student learning outside the classroom by hosting the LSSU Learning Center. The center offers academic support for all

students and is staffed by members of the National College Learning Centers Association (NCLCA). Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, and Student Success Seminars are just a sample of the programs offered.

Feedback from students indicates they are very satisfied with their experience at LSSU. Research opportunities, the personal attention given by faculty members, student involvement, faculty accessibility, leadership opportunities, community involvement, and the student-centered orientation of the campus all have a significant impact on students.

Students at LSSU receive valuable instruction that goes beyond the traditional classroom. Through the use of Internships and senior projects, there is value added to the educational experience of LSSU graduates. The effect of real world experiences while still a student allows time for reflection and perspective that helps prepare them for the transition to professional schools, graduate studies, or today's job market.

LSSU's Student Association enjoys the strong support of the President, faculty, staff, and student body. Student Association members feel empowered to make a difference on campus and perceive themselves as having a major voice on campus. Their recommendations for change have made a notable difference at LSSU. Students feel empowered to discuss needed changes with the President and the Executive Cabinet. The institution currently has two students who also serve on the State Student Association board.

Review of course syllabi, the university catalog, and assessment data as well as meetings with faculty members demonstrate a broad institutional commitment to outcome statements that align with program goals and the most recent university mission. Review of assessment documents indicates that outcome statements are widely used to ensure that courses and program changes align.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

After numerous false starts over the past decade, a culture of assessment is clearly beginning to form at LSSU. Student learning outcomes for both general education and academic programs have been developed and shared with the campus community. The required assessment tools have been created and are currently being used to guide collection of appropriate data. While some areas of assessment are further along than others, overall the institution is moving in the right direction.

The institution has identified a small cadre of faculty with strengths in assessment through presentations and publications, it appears that the rest of the faculty members have received very little training and/or professional development related to the assessment of student learning outcomes. There has been no comprehensive or

systematic attempt to provide assessment learning opportunities for all faculty members. As a result, many faculty members and some administrators appeared to have limited knowledge of how to implement assessment of students' learning outcomes into programs. Confusion often exists between student satisfaction and opinions about learning and direct measures of student learning.

It is critical that LSSU continue to collect the identified assessment data in order to have robust baseline data which will then be used to judge future results. Once that has been achieved, it will be possible to use the results to drive programmatic improvements to general education and academic programs.

Discussions with students and faculty alike suggest that Information Technology is an area of concern that will require additional attention and resources. The current staff is overwhelmed by requirements and desires additional training. During discussions with the IT staff, it was evidenced that the institution needs consultative advice on the IT infrastructure to better serve faculty and students.

The University utilizes the NSSE. The only use of its findings that the team could discern was that the information was made available so that Colleges could use it if they found anything useful. There is no apparent use of the data at the institutional academic leadership level. The self-study did provide some of the findings from this instrument, which appears to validate that many positive things are happening institutionally, especially with student-faculty interactions.

### **3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

LSSU's mission statement clearly states it is a university community that recognizes the need "...to help students develop their full potential. We do this by providing high-quality, academically rigorous programs in an engaged, personal and supportive environment." This commitment is not clearly reflected in the teaching evaluation process, criteria for personnel decisions (tenure, promotion, and possible merit), teaching loads, and faculty development opportunities. An enhanced teaching evaluation form should be developed based on current literature and best practices. The data from the development of this form should be used for faculty development and assessment of programs for evaluative and formative purposes.

The institution has created a new position of Associate Provost to oversee the review and evaluation of programs. At the time of the comprehensive visit, it was unclear as to the timeline or cycle of review of programs, other than those reviewed by outside agencies. An established program review cycle needs to be developed and implemented to ensure that all programs are meeting learner outcomes for graduation. Reviews by outside agencies appear to be much more comprehensive and rigorous than those conducted through the campus review process.

Although some progress has been made since 2001 in the assessment of student learning, the team found that progress is inadequate for this stage of development with a Commission expectation that has existed since about 1995. Some good examples do exist, but these are generally the result of external mandates rather than internal inquiry. Further, responsibilities for assessment are unclear and systems are not apparent. Few examples of direct measures of student learning were provided to the team. The team is convinced that improvement in assessing student learning will aid the institution in its priority areas of retention and higher graduation rates and complement its stated emphasis upon teaching and learning.

Although each undergraduate program is reported to have an assessment plan, the quality of the plans and the implementation of the plans varied significantly from program to program. While some data is collected, there does not appear to be a systematic means for evaluating the data, making recommendations for change, and then reassessing the impact of the change. Programs (such as Nursing) with discipline-based accreditation appear to have a more systematic assessment program in place. Many of the programs appear to rely on indirect assessment measures, such as alumni surveys. These do not measure precisely what the students have learned.

Because of the Commission's clear statements regarding the need for institutions to assess the extent to which the organization's intended learning outcomes are met, and the fact that the issue of assessment had been raised by both the 1991 comprehensive team and a 2001 comprehensive visit team, different team members probed varied campus representatives on the topic of assessment of student learning. The team was unable to discern any demonstrable evidence regarding either the assembling, or the integration, of constituent assessment activities that were taking place on campus into an institutional database, or any locally preferred equivalent. Nor was the team shown evidence that whatever data that were either available to, or acquirable by, the institution were being analyzed to inform the planning and execution of academic, administrative, and support programs, and other activities that are important to LSSU's future.

- 4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

#### **Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up is necessary.

**CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE.** The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

LSSU has made significant strides forward in the conduct of socially responsible research within the framework of its mission as a teaching-centered institution. LSSU encourages faculty and students alike to continue learning and extend the benefits of innovative practices to the Upper Peninsula and Michigan as a whole.

The LSSU administration has nurtured a culture of academic inquiry and research, particularly in the sciences. For faculty, especially those with doctoral degrees hired during the last decade, continuous professional development is established as an intrinsically valuable element of an academic career. In turn, faculty impart this value to their students, many of whom directly participate in innovative research projects.

LSSU has made a virtue of its small size to maximize the faculty role in directing student research. Student engagement in senior projects across the spectrum of disciplines fosters habits of mind that last far beyond graduation day.

Facilities such as the Environmental Analysis Laboratory, the Aquatic Research Laboratory and the Robotics Laboratory offer excellent opportunities for students to master research practices that will serve them long into the future.

LSSU's commitment to general education promotes rounded academic perspectives and helps equip students with the skills and background to adapt to the demands of a changing and ever more diverse society.

The Undergraduate Research Committee promotes a variety of student projects. The LSSU Foundation offers grants of up to \$1,500 per student to cover the costs of equipment, supplies and travel.

Despite declining funding, the LSSU Library makes extensive efforts to inform faculty and students about research tools at the disposal of the campus community.

At this point in time LSSU has invested approximately two years in creating and initially implementing a process of shared governance. It is clearly intended to be collaborative. The President of the Faculty Senate, who is a member of the Oversight Committee and who will be co-presenting at a national conference on the LSSU evolution of shared governance, says she is a supporter of this process

that has been created at LSSU because it gives the Faculty Senate President a voice in key institutional decisions. The process has been carefully crafted not to infringe on matters controlled by collective bargaining agreements and not to remove final decisions from appropriate administrative or board action, but to result in more informed actions.

The institution has created a web site for the Shared Governance process which features a flow chart, forms to submit policy or processes for consideration and a list of “Resolved Issues.” Additional communication will be necessary but if the process continues to add to the list of resolved issues—and to decline to become involved in issues outside of its charge, it will continue to gain supporters.

Attention has also been focused at Lake State on recognizing and responding to diversity. The subject of a 2005 Progress Report to the Higher Learning Commission, enhancing the educational experiences of students by providing cultural diversity has clearly been a goal of the board, of faculty and staff members. Diversity is a component of the mission statement and programming activities have been provided. Institutional representatives report that participation and attendance has been discouraging, and while this is not optimal, it is not a reason to discontinue efforts. Closer integration with faculty and coursework was mentioned as one remedy. It will be important for the institution to remain committed to providing a wide range of experiences and perspectives for students since the majority of students are from a relatively isolated region near Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan and Sault Sainte Marie, Canada.

Plans have been discussed to ask a former visiting professor, Dr. Gordon Nakagawa, to commit to future visits or teaching obligations in residence. His previous visit was successful and some of the recommendations made as a result of his time spent on campus have been instituted. There are other individuals who could provide this form of educational programming for students and professional development for faculty and staff. The institution needs to attend further to this issue, but team members found evidence of efforts to engage individuals who bring diversity, to celebrate it and demonstrate that different perspectives are valued. During the team visit the art gallery featured the work of a Native American artist. In addition one Board of Trustees member is an enrolled member of an area tribe and is a tribal judge.

Alumni are surveyed and serve on advisory boards, reflecting interest in life-long learning and fostering of learning by new generations. Evidence was provided in campus meetings and among materials available to the team on campus.

Hiring practices were discussed with the Director of Human Resources to assure that search procedures employ recruitment strategies to seek individuals who would increase diversity among employees. One specific example from the academic side was the opportunity nursing students have for international clinical placements. By serving both in Canadian and local hospitals, they are introduced to different nursing and clinical philosophies. Citing these examples is not intended to indicate that Lake Superior State University has achieved its objectives where diversity is concerned and more thoughtful work is needed. However, there is some evidence of value placed appropriately on enhancing diversity.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.**

LSSU has been making the transition from an institutional culture in which scholarship is an incidental aspect of academic life to one in which scholarship plays a vital role in support of the teaching mission and faculty professional development. The university needs to sustain faculty scholarship in departments such as business, criminal justice, English, mathematics, psychology and sociology in which scholarly output has not always been a regular feature of academic life.

Although some opportunities exist for continued professional growth, employees reported that more training was needed on the administrative policies and procedures within the university setting. In addition, more training was welcomed in the area of diversity, dealing with both attracting a more diverse faculty and staff, and also handling diversity issues with current faculty and staff. A comprehensive professional development program may benefit the University.

Although LSSU articulates a diversity commitment to the value of study abroad programs, attempts have been unsuccessful. The institution initiated a pilot program with Northwest University in China, however, the program was not continued due to the low return on investment between the two institutions.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

The institution contracts the services of WebCT/Blackboard CE 8 for online opportunities. However, it is very unclear as to how many fully online course offerings are available to students. The institutions has implemented other forms of technology in the classroom such as i>clickers, WIMBA and interactive whiteboards. The infrastructure is in need of expansion to fully utilize the benefits of Blackboard CE 8, which is a very expensive LMS to use based on the relatively small number of full online course offerings. A strategic plan would enhance the ability for more courses or programs to be offered for students who are not physically located near the LSSU campus. At the present time, it is unclear as to how courses are developed with only one staff member fulfilling the duties of this role. There is identified faculty on campus that assists with training, but this is in addition to their full time faculty responsibilities. The university may benefit from the services of a consultant for web-based education or from other universities which have online education to gain more perspective on how to expand and/or enhance its online presence. Opportunities exist for the University to further serve its constituencies.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; Commission follow-up is necessary.

**CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met.**

The Aquatics Research Laboratory is a good example of responsible practices yielding considerable benefit to Michigan and its natural environment. LSSU has the primary facility in the state for supporting efforts of the Department of Natural Resources to maintain levels of Atlantic Salmon.

LSSU has partnered with multiple external organizations in response to prompts from those organizations or from LSSU's own environmental scans. Examples of these partnerships are: Little Traverse Constituency in developing the Vermilion Project, and with Algoma Public Health in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, the establishing of an International School of Public and Environmental Health. LSSU has also has partnered with the local Coast Guard agencies to make classes available to its service members at the station and on those members' schedules. LSSUS and the Coast Guard also partnered in establishing an Environmental

Analysis Lab that is able to serve local needs while providing on-site laboratory experience for students.

The University is committed to providing services that are of mutual benefit to the community, town, and constituencies and to align its resources and programs to meet their needs. Recent examples in the science and engineering programs include the Environmental Analysis Laboratory (EAL), the Produce Development Center (PDC), the Exercise Physiology Laboratory (EPL), and the Aquatic Research Center (ARC). Each program provides student and faculty expertise to benefit community needs.

LSSU is responsive to constituencies that depend on its services by offering service-oriented connections to the community. These connections are enriched by students' senior projects and other capstone experiences. Examples of student community service include fund raisers and unpaid internships, practica, or clinical experiences. For example, in the School of Engineering and Technology, students are required to participate in a capstone project. The projects enable students to interact with other engineering and technology students with diverse educational backgrounds. Students in Environmental Health and Environmental Management are required to complete an internship working in their field. Students spend summers working for public health departments, tribal agencies, municipalities, townships, state agencies, Ontario public health agencies, and private businesses. Criminal Justice students typically are assigned work with local police, border patrol, customs, LSSU security, state police, and other agencies

The community and other internal and external constituencies value the many services and resources that LSSU provides. Examples of recent collaborations with the community include pursuit and successful designation as a SmartZone in the state of Michigan, expansion of the role of Environmental Analysis Laboratory and Aquatics Research Laboratory by a donation from the Edison Sault Electric Company of a 16,000 square-foot building. Also, some students and staff voiced the opinion that the university needs to become more of a "college town" rather than a "town with a college", and perhaps value students more in the downtown area. In response to these sentiments, in 2010 the City of Sault Ste. Marie received a 21st Century Communities (21c3) grant and began collaborating with LSSU to establish a town/gown strategy integrated with the region's economic development.

2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- 4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up is necessary.

**V. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS**

**A. Affiliation Status**

No Change

**B. Nature of Organization**

**1. Legal status**

Public – No Change

**2. Degrees awarded**

A, B, M – No Change

**C. Conditions of Affiliation**

**1. Stipulation on affiliation status**

No Change

**2. Approval of degree sites**

No Change

**3. Approval of distance education degree**

No Change

**4. Reports required**

### **Monitoring Report**

**The following reports are due by February 1, 2013:**

1. A clearly defined Tenure and Promotion process aligned with the faculty collective bargaining agreement
2. IT Strategic plan and Professional Development/Training Plan for IT personnel
3. A university assessment plan outlining a clear process for collecting, disseminating and implementing assessment results.
4. A plan indicating how the Shared Governance model has progressed and results from the model as it has impacted the new reorganizational structure

### **Rationale and Expectations**

**Monitoring Report #1:** During the time of the visit, the team reviewed the faculty collective bargaining agreement for clarity in the area of tenure and promotion policies and procedures. After interviewing faculty and administration, it was evident to the team that this is an area that lacks clarity, procedure and implementation. It was also evident that faculty have little input on the tenure and/or promotion guidelines. Junior faculty indicated that they were not sure when consideration for their tenure would be possible and only became aware of tenure if the department chair or Dean notified them.

**Monitoring Report #2:** The team also found during the visit that a clearly defined IT Strategic plan did not exist. With the fast-paced change in technology, it is imperative that the institution plan for infrastructure updates and hardware and software replacement. The team also noted that the IT area lacked a professional development plan to stay current and abreast of IT needs and updates. Faculty and staff clearly articulated the need for professional development/training in all areas of technology. In addition, the team was unclear about the actual use of online course offerings due to varying responses to this question from faculty.

**Monitoring Report #3:** The team also found that assessment had not been articulated across campus. The institution was cited for assessment during their accreditation visit in 2002 and progress in this area lacked evidence on the university level. The team saw evidence of assessment on the department level and college level, but there was no “closing of the loop” of centralized location for university assessment plans. The team believes that assessment is being completed but is not being aggregated or implemented as a part of a university assessment plan.

**Monitoring Report #4:** The team did confirm that the institution had implemented a new “shared governance” model during the past academic year.

There was evidence of the beginning stages of the process of shared governance with newly formed committees and the discussion of new policies, but there was no evidence at the time of the visit that demonstrated that this model will be continued beyond what is written in the self-study and what was shared with the team. The team would like to see how the model of shared governance moves the institution into the state of continuous improvement across all levels to help reconnect the constant flux of administration with faculty and staff.

If the institution is not able to clearly articulate the results needed in the monitoring reports required then a focused visit is recommended immediately to evaluate the progress made by the institution.

**5. Other visits scheduled**

None

**6. Organization change request**

None

**D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action**

None

**On Notice**

**Due Date for Report**

**Rationale and Expectations**

**Areas That Must Be Addressed**

**Probation**

**Next Evaluation Visit**

**Rationale**

**Areas That Must Be Addressed (requirements for removal of probation)**

**Denial or Withdrawal of Status**

**Rationale**

**E. Summary of Commission Review**

Timing for next Comprehensive Visit: 2016-2017

Due to the constant flux in administrative changes the past decade, the institution has not had an opportunity to reevaluate its priorities. With each new President came a new mission and vision for the university. Since 2001 the institution has changed its mission and vision three times. Even though they have focused on serving the region and State with undergraduate programs, it has not been able to move forward with advancing these programs due to leadership and budgetary constraints. With the flux of leadership and the implementation of yet another organizational restructure, the team believes there is a need for a shortened reaccreditation timeline to ensure that the institution is moving forward and has implemented the structural mechanisms for a culture of communication with the new Shared Governance model. This new model includes an avenue for faculty and administration to work as a collaborative unit. This model includes a committee on Strategic Planning and Budget Committee which was discussed by faculty and staff as an area in need of improvement. This reaccreditation visit will also lead the institution into the new pathways model being implemented at this time.

## **VI. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND EXPLANATIONS**

NA

## **WORKSHEET FOR THE EVALUATION TEAM ON FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS**

This worksheet becomes an appendix to the team report.

### **INSTITUTIONAL MATERIALS RELATED TO FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWED BY THE TEAM:**

The Self Study provided by the institution including an attachment addressing Federal Compliance.

**One page document provided by the President regarding financial challenges. Websites for the Admissions Office, Registrar, Risk Manager and Ombudsperson.**

**Notes taken in meetings with the Vice President for Finance and Administration, Director of Athletics and Provost.**

**Notebooks used to maintain records of student complaints and dispositions.**

### **EVALUATION OF FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

*The team reviews each item identified in the Federal Compliance Guide and documents its findings in the appropriate spaces below. Generally, if the team finds in the course of this review that there are substantive issues related to the institution's ability to fulfill the Criteria for Accreditation, such issues should be raised in appropriate sections of the Assurance Section of the Team Report or highlighted as such in the appropriate AQIP Quality Checkup Report.*

**1. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition:** *The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition). New for 2012: The Commission has a new policy on the Credit Hour. Complete the Worksheet in Appendix A and then complete the following responses. Attach the Worksheet to this form.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

  X   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

**2. Student Complaints:** *The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints for the three years prior to the visit.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

**3. Transfer Policies:** *The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

**4. Verification of Student Identity:** *The institution has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided to the student through distance or correspondence education and has appropriate protocols to disclose additional fees related to verification to students and to protect their privacy.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

X The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

**5. Title IV Program and Related Responsibilities:** *The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program.*

- **General Program Requirements:** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the fulfillment of its Title IV program responsibilities, particularly findings from any review activities by the Department of Education. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.*
- **Financial Responsibility Requirements:** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the Department's review of composite ratios and financial audits. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area. (Note that the team should also be commenting under Criterion Two if an institution has significant issues with financial responsibility as demonstrated through ratios that are below acceptable levels or other financial responsibility findings by its auditor.)*
- **Default Rates.** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about three years of default rates. It has a responsible program to work with students to minimize default rates. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.*

- ***Campus Crime Information, Athletic Participation and Financial Aid, and Related Disclosures:*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about its disclosures. It has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations.*
- ***Student Right to Know.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about its disclosures. It has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations. The disclosures are accurate and provide appropriate information to students. (Note that the team should also be commenting under Criterion One if the team determines that disclosures are not accurate or appropriate.)*
- ***Satisfactory Academic Progress and Attendance.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations. The institution has demonstrated that the policies and practices meet state or federal requirements and that the institution is appropriately applying these policies and practices to students.*
- ***Contractual Relationships:*** *The institution has presented a list of its contractual relationships related to its academic program and evidence of its compliance with Commission policies requiring notification or approval for contractual relationships (The institution should review the Contractual Change Application on the Commission's Web site for more information. If the team learns that the institution has a contractual relationship that may require Commission approval and has not completed the appropriate Commission Contractual Change Application the team must require that the institution complete and file the form as soon as possible.)*
- ***Consortial Relationships:*** *The institution has presented a list of its consortial relationships related to its academic program and evidence of its compliance with Commission policies requiring notification or approval for consortial relationships (The institution should review the Consortial Change Application on the Commission's Web site for more information. If the team learns that the institution has such a consortial relationship that may require Commission approval and has not completed the appropriate Commission Consortial Change Application the team must require that the institution complete and file the form as soon as possible.)*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

**Comments:**

**There were references in publications to additional locations and it was not clear whether these locations already had or require HLC approval. The Commission was advised to communicate with the institution to gather additional information to determine if approval is**

**required. Given the institution's history of leadership change, the question of whether there are any ongoing Contractual or Consortial relationships which need review and approval should be looked into by the Commission.**

**6. Institutional Disclosures and Advertising and Recruitment Materials:** *The institution has documented that it provides accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies as well as about its programs, locations and policies.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments:

**See above section.**

**7. Relationship with Other Accrediting Agencies and with State Regulatory Boards:** *The institution has documented that it discloses accurately to the public and the Commission its relationship with any other specialized, professional or institutional accreditor and with all governing or coordinating bodies in states in which the institution may have a presence. Note that if the team is recommending initial or continued status, and the institution is currently under sanction or show-cause with, or has received an adverse action from, any other federally recognized specialized or institutional accreditor in the past five years, the team must explain the action in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report and provide its rationale for recommending Commission status in light of this action. In addition, the team must contact the staff liaison immediately if it learns that the institution is at risk of losing its degree authorization or lacks such authorization in any state in which the institution meets state presence requirements.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

**8. Public Notification of an Evaluation Visit and Third Party Comment:** *The institution has made an appropriate and timely effort to solicit third party comments. The team has evaluated any comments received and completed any necessary follow-up on issues raised in these comments. Note that if the team has determined that any issues raised by third-party comment relate to the team's review of the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, it must discuss this information and its analysis in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report.*

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE THAT REFLECTS THE TEAM'S CONCLUSIONS:

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends follow-up.

\_\_\_\_\_ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NA

Additional Monitoring, if any: None

# **ADVANCEMENT SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

Lake Superior State University  
Sault Ste. Marie, MI

October 24-26, 2011

FOR

**The Higher Learning Commission**

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

### **EVALUATION TEAM**

Dr. Robert Baumann, Director, Graduate Programs, U.S. Army Command and General Staff  
College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027

Dr. Patricia A. Clanton, Assoc. Prof., Southern Arkansas University, Magnolia, AR 71754

Dr. David M. Sammeth, Professor, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM 87701

Ms. Judith P. Siminoe, Special Advisor to the President, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud,  
MN 56301

Dr. David E. Todt, Provost, Shawnee State University, Portsmouth, OH 45662

Dr. Gayle A. Kearns (Chair), Associate Dean, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK

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## I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Despite the institution's history of accreditation successes, dating back to their first accreditation in 1968, the past 20 years have presented accreditation challenges for the institution. The 2001 team did recommend that the institution be granted continued accreditation at the Bachelor's level with the next comprehensive evaluation to take place during the academic year 2010-2011. However, the team recommended that a progress report be sent to NCA by April 2004 to be focused on plans for and accomplishments in addressing issues of diversity and assessment. The institution submitted the required reports on diversity and assessment to the NCA and the reports were accepted by the Commission. The 2010-2011 Comprehensive visit was delayed for one year due to a request from the institution based on the constant flux of administration for the past 10 years and a lack of leadership to drive the institution forward with a model of continuous improvement.

The 2011 team visited a university that has made an attempt at moving the institution forward. The current President has been at the institution for the past two years and has been the catalyst to rejoin the campus. A disconnect between faculty, staff and administration has caused the lack of progress in many areas—assessment, shared governance and growth in campus leadership. However, there is the rebuilding of trust with the new leadership team which will allow the university to move forward. With the stability of leadership the understanding of the mission is much more widespread by all constituencies. There appears to be a coherent, dynamic planning process that links external and internal trends, institutional values, and the concerns of multiple constituencies to actions and resource allocation. Governance structures are formed and policy is being formulated. Assessment has begun to pervade the institution and with consistent leadership, the loop should be closed and a university assessment model should drive the improvement of the programs. The beginnings of improvement are in place now to ensure continuous improvement. Effective teaching is valued and promoted. Academic integrity, scholarship and creative activities, and a lifetime of learning for all constituencies are clearly supported.

## II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

### Charter Schools

There is ambivalence about the benefits and burdens of charter schools. Management of this responsibility has been recently assigned to a newly hired individual in the College of Education. While it would be inappropriate for the team to advocate for a particular approach to charter schools, these schools could be used to strengthen academic programs or provide community engagement experiences. They are distant from campus but there are ways to move people and to communicate without being present. It is possible that the institution's primary role is an administrative one involving only a few members of the campus community but it is also possible that greater involvement could enrich the campus community.

### Governing Board Role

Governing Board members have a handbook for their new members and have expressed interest in board development. Finding the exact calibration of board involvement within the institution is challenging. Board members who understand the board's policy role must hold one another accountable to maintain that focus and to trust administrators to carry out implementation steps. The high level of administrative turnover Lake Superior State University has experienced calls out for leadership from the Board of Trustees as well as from faculty and student leaders. Lake Superior State University seems to have almost a new lease on life. It has weathered very significant financial and leadership challenges. Now it is poised to embrace shared governance approaches to planning for the future. There will likely be more changes in leadership at the institution and faculty leaders have said their hope for shared governance is to provide institutional stability and preserve progress. In these activities there are important roles for the governing board. The staggered terms and members with multiple terms mean the Board of Trustees can assist with continuity. Board members must share the internal work with the rest of the state and protect the credibility of the shared governance processes.

### Student technology fee

Many institutions have determined that the only way to maintain current technology is to permit students to adopt a dedicated technology fee. There may be legislative restrictions on adding fees in Michigan. If not, students will sometimes vote to impose this dedicated fee on themselves since they see the direct return in ensuring higher quality technical capabilities. Usually when students take on technology fees they also adopt criteria for eligible investments and review and approve some or all of the funding requests annually. This provides additional experience for students.

### Undergraduate Research

LSSU has done a commendable job of engaging undergraduates in research projects. Both the Aquatic Research Laboratory and the Robotics Laboratory, to cite only two examples, involve students in scientific investigation of great relevance to Michigan and society as a whole. The excellent opportunities afforded undergraduates are possible by virtue of both the institution's small size and its dedicated faculty. One of the best ways to instill an appreciation of research in students is for faculty members to model appropriate scholarly behaviors. While LSSU has made significant strides during the past decade in cultivating a culture of scholarship among the faculty, the institution would if interest in scholarly pursuits continued to spread more widely among the faculty. Given the current wording of the labor agreement with faculty, it remains possible for individual faculty members to focus almost exclusively on teaching. Although good teaching rightfully holds first priority among the skills expected of LSSU faculty, there is benefit to scholarship as well, both in terms of maintaining currency in a discipline and in imparting to students a sense of wonder associated with the discovery of new knowledge.

Moreover, increased faculty scholarship would create additional opportunities for undergraduates to make direct contributions to ongoing projects.

### Diversity Challenges

From an analysis of data provided in the self-study due to the 2001 team visit report on diversity, it is clear the university is generally perceived by constituents to be a “warm, inviting, and welcoming place.” The evidence also suggests that the university is committed to advancing its diversity goals as exemplified in part by the initiatives outlined in their diversity report and the recommendations made by the consultant that have been implemented. The university also appears to be taking a more aggressive stand in diversifying its faculty and staff by employing more international individuals and by ensuring that applicant pools are much more diverse.

However, it is equally clear from the evidence that the University recognizes the challenge it still faces in diversifying the campus. In this regard, the university may want to consider SOME widely-used strategies employed at other institutions: (1) include leading members from the area’s minority community in the university’s search process; (2) create targeted searches, specifically aimed at recruiting minority faculty; (3) train and encourage search committees concerning inclusiveness and proactive recruiting in searches; (4) continue to examine the pattern of searches--are they launched early enough, proceed expeditiously, etc. What happens to candidates along the way?; (5) consider spousal/partner hiring and hiring in specific disciplines that offer distinct opportunities; and (6) consider whether the leadership team is sufficiently diverse and modeling in its own actions aggressive searches with diverse outcomes.

### Administrative Leadership

LSSU has made clear progress in strengthening the role of the President and Provost. The leadership team has been strengthened with the hiring of the new President and the internal selection of a proven faculty member to serve as Provost. These two administrative roles working as a strong academic leadership team will enhance the continuous improvement of assessment, general education, and research development.

### Enrollment Strategies

While continuing to increase full-time undergraduate enrollment is feasible, there are two issues that the University must confront: first, the Sault Sainte Marie area has a limited pool of potential full-time students; and second, the number of traditional age high school graduates has declined across the nation—statistics have predicted that this decline will continue through 2016. These facts underscore the importance of the University making decisions about its niche and developing/implementing a strategic enrollment plan to achieve its niche through a University-wide effort that cannot be left solely to the enrollment management staff to achieve. If the University pursues a strategy to increase full-time student enrollment, it must be prepared to address two additional issues:

improving co-curricular student life on campus and reviewing housing needs regularly. This will be especially important if the full-time undergraduate enrollment continues to increase.

### Community Support

Lake Superior has a very unique campus, a strong, caring faculty, and a supportive local community that should enable it to shape its image and niche, to market that niche successfully to people in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Canada, and to develop increasing pride among its students, faculty, staff, and alumni. LSSU is postured well to make important strategic decisions that can stabilize enrollment and can solidify the public image that it desires – what a great opportunity for the leadership of this University.

### Co-Governance and Educational Unity

A well understood and clearly defined interface between the administration and the faculty requires considerable effort. The goal is not to divide duties and responsibilities, but rather create a system which promotes and encourages debate and discussion. Typical models require that faculty input is provided to the administration in the form of a recommendation before any final decisions are made by the administration. And while the final decision ultimately rest with the administration, it requires at the minimum that the voice of the faculty is heard. This guarantees that channels of communication remain open even during times of intense disagreement between parties. The present discussion regarding co-governance at LSSU is crucial to the future success of the institution. It is strongly encouraged that LSSU make use of the vast information available regarding the implementation of various models of co-governance.

LSSU Faculty has the responsibility of oversight for not only their courses, but also the structure and content of programs in their department, then school, and ultimately the entire institution. A strong functioning model of co-governance drives the oversight of academics from the bottom-up, i.e., the faculty, as well as the top down, i.e., the academic vice-president. The views of the LSSU faculty must ultimately create a consistent academic vision across the institution. This requires a strong, functioning faculty governance system which successfully interacts with the administration.

**III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES**

The team wishes to conclude by commending LSSU for fully embracing the reaccreditation process during a time of constant leadership changes and a lack of consistent leadership across the institution. The institution has worked purposively to reengage the faculty, staff and administration to provide focus on the areas of improvement to inform, promote and advance the continued development of the institution's newest strategic plan. In addition to the transition of leadership during the past 10 years, the institution has experienced a drop in campus morale, serious budget implications and a static enrollment. The focus of the institution has been fraught with change, yet the institution has managed to enjoy the scholarly success of its students and faculty.

*Team Recommendations for the  
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS*

**INSTITUTION and STATE:** Lake Superior State University, MI

**TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS):** Continued Accreditation

**DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW (from ESS):**

**DATES OF REVIEW:** 10/24/11 - 10/26/11

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**Nature of Organization**

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**LEGAL STATUS:** Public

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**DEGREES AWARDED:** A, B, M

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**Conditions of Affiliation**

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**STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS:** Accreditation at the Master's level is limited to the Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction. International offerings are limited to courses in Canada.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**APPROVAL OF NEW ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS:** The Commission's Expedited Desk Review Program is only available for offering existing degree programs at new locations within the state.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES:** New Commission policy on institutional change became effective July 1, 2010. Some aspects of the change processes affecting distance delivered courses and programs are still being finalized. This entry will be updated in early 2011 to reflect current policy. In the meantime, see the Commission's Web site for information on seeking approval of distance education courses and programs.

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**REPORTS REQUIRED:** None

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** Monitoring Report due February 1, 2013; a report on aligning tenure and promotion with collective bargaining agreement. Monitoring Report due February 1, 2013; a report on Information Technology planning and professional development. Monitoring Report due February 1, 2013; a report on Assessment. Monitoring Report due February 1, 2013; a report on shared governance.

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**OTHER VISITS SCHEDULED:** None

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION:** No Change

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**Summary of Commission Review**

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*Team Recommendations for the  
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS*

**YEAR OF LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2000 - 2001**

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**YEAR FOR NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2011 - 2012**

**TEAM RECOMMENDATION: 2016 – 2017**

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## ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

**INSTITUTION and STATE:** Lake Superior State University, MI

**TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS):** Continued Accreditation  
\_x\_ No change to Organization Profile

### Educational Programs

	Program Distribution	Recommended Change (+ or -)
Programs leading to Undergraduate		
Associate	24	
Bachelors	66	
Programs leading to Graduate		
Masters	1	
Specialist	0	
First Professional		
Doctoral	0	

### Off-Campus Activities

In-State:	Present Activity:	<b>Recommended Change: (+ or -)</b>
Campuses: Additional Locations:	None Dearborn (Lake Superior State University - Dearborn University Center) ; Escanaba (Escanaba Regional Center) ; Gaylord (University Center at Gaylord Michigan) ; Iron Mountain (Bay de Noc Community College, Iron Mountain, MI) ; Lansing (Lansing Community College) ; Newberry (Newberry) ; Petosky (Petoskey Regional Center)	
Course Locations:	3	
Out-of-State:	Present Wording:	<b>Recommended Change: (+ or -)</b>
Campuses: Additional Locations:	None None	
Course Locations:	None	
Out-of-USA:	Present Wording:	<b>Recommended Change: (+ or -)</b>

Campuses:	None
Additional Locations:	None
Course Locations:	None

**Distance Education Programs:**

Present Offerings:

Bachelor - 43.0201 Fire Prevention and Safety Technology/Technician (BS, Fire Science) offered via Internet; Videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs

**Recommended Change:**

(+ or -)

**Correspondence Education Programs:**

Present Offerings:

None