

President's Vision Taskforce Final Report June 2014

Executive Summary June 2014

In the spring of 2014, Middle Georgia State College President Christopher Blake charged the President's Task Force on Vision with a main focus: establishing a three- to five-year trajectory that will take the college to University status. The Task Force's agenda was informed by the President's White Paper: A New Vision for the College "The Public University of Middle Georgia, Leading Georgians to New Heights and Sights," disseminated to the college community. Since then we conferred with and surveyed numerous faculty members, students, and staff members.

Three sub-committees formed, each with a specific agenda that addressed aspects of the college's future. The sub-committee to survey institutional strengths identified current practices; the survey ranked the perceived importance, the performance of the college on these issues, and identified the gaps between perceptions on each issue. A sub-committee assessed obstacles/threats (challenges) to MGSC success and reconfigured that information as opportunities for the future. A third sub-committee focused on the abilities and improvements that would facilitate the awarding of university status. In addition to the specific results of each sub-committee, the task force recommends attending to factors that increase both reputation and healthy function as these would strengthen the institution's ability to advance in all three areas. The results of the sub-committees' research produced a vision informed by data, documentation and recommendations that characterize the vision of an institution as our community wishes it to be.

Background

The consolidation of two colleges begun in 2011 has been completed and the requisite 2013 SACS visit has occurred. With these important milestones in order, the time for Middle Georgia State College to reexamine its vision, direction, and scope is now. In order to more fully understand the potential of the unified institution, the Task Force wrote a vision statement, revised the mission statement, and created a list of core values.

Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Our Vision Statement: Middle Georgia State College (University) is to be an innovative leader in delivering distinctive, rigorous, and internationally connected education that prepares students to transform their economic and cultural community.

The Task Force affirmed the existing mission and suggested syntax changes that frame education as our primary task and responsibility for leadership as integral for regional advancement. Our revised Mission Statement for Middle Georgia State College (University): to educate a diverse population through quality programs connected to community needs in a global context and to serve as an intellectual, economic, and cultural leader.

The Task Force generated a list of Core Values to answer the questions: What does Middle Georgia State College (University) stand for? What does it want to be known for?

Our core values are:

- student-centered
- knowledge-empowered
- readily adaptable
- community-connected

As the institution continues its growth and extends its participation in the region, the Task Force wrote a set of statements that highlight conduct we see as critical to the vision's success. The vision of Middle Georgia State College as it moves toward university status is of an institution that will

- be known as the “institution of excellence” that focuses on creating flexible, convenient, and affordable quality learning opportunities for students to succeed in their academic, extra-curricular, social, and civic endeavors.
- provide a 21st century learning environment by using a planned model of innovation, integration, and deployment of technology and student services across the institution.
- make consistent, publish, and adapt its administrative and support processes to enable student participation.
- focus on retention, graduation, and student success.
- recruit, develop, and retain the highest quality faculty and staff.
- be the higher-education leader and collaborate within our region to ensure that academic programs meet the workforce needs of our constituents.
- be a partner in the community, joining others who strive to improve the economic, cultural, and social well-being of our region.
- promote the institution by focusing on its distinctive contributions to improving the education, economic development, and quality of life within Middle Georgia.

The following commentary and explication of each sub-committee's results affirms concepts identified in the President's White Paper, and addresses our vision statement, one that characterizes Middle Georgia State's aspirations.

Institutional Strengths

The Survey of Institutional Strengths was addressed by a sub-committee through a survey instrument listing twenty-eight topics in which participants ranked their perception of importance to the institution and assessed the institution's current performance in each topic area. The survey was electronically disseminated to faculty, staff, and students.

The results of the survey were tabulated and ranked based on perceived importance of the topic and how well MGSC is performing on that topic. The survey participants ranked each of the 28 topic areas above a 3.0 (on a 1 – 4 Likert scale) showing that the participants found all identified areas to be important for the institution as we move to university status.

The chart below captures the highest ranked categories based on importance and the categories with the highest ranked perceived performance. The survey provided a gaps analysis based on the difference between the numerical rankings of importance and performance. The smaller gap

indicates that based on the individual ranking, the topic area is performing well in comparison to its importance.

STRENGTHS SURVEY RESULTS - TOP TEN RANKINGS		
IMPORTANCE	PERFORMANCE	GAPS (Lowest First)
Institutional Affordability	Campus Appearance	Diversity - Student Body
Financial Aid & Scholarships	Institutional Affordability	Diversity - Faculty/Staff
I.T. (Hardware/Software)	Library Resources	Campus Appearance
Reputation - Academic Programs	Rigor in Core	Small Classes
I.T. - Support	Small Classes	Facilities
Campus Services	Facilities	Athletics
Student Support Services	Diversity - Student Body	First Year Programs
Campus Appearance	Diversity - Faculty/Staff	Library Resources
Rigor in Core	Student Support Services	Cultural/Diverse Opportunities
Library Resources	Reputation - Academic Programs	Rigor in Core

The survey respondents also identified areas that we can build upon to elevate areas in which performance was considered to be low (below 3.0) in the open response areas of the survey. The difference between importance (high) and performance (low) supports the findings and recommendations of the obstacles/threats sub-committee. Looking forward, these areas can all be addressed by the strategic planning task force as it reviews processes and builds action plans.

The Task Force, which will disband mid-June, will recommend to the Strategic Planning group that it survey the community. We believe that a design targeting the connection between the institution and its communities will yield workforce and local suggestions from our partners, both current and potential, as well as identify potential opportunities we might engage.

Challenges Facing Middle Georgia State College

A second sub-committee examined the challenges (obstacles and threats) our college faces. We sought input from faculty, staff, and students, categorized these challenges into practical goals, and envisioned the challenges as opportunities for Middle Georgia State. We suggest seven ways these challenges can be turned to opportunities that can guide the College toward university status.

- Create a University learning environment for our diverse student body: establish a reputation as the “institution of excellence,” that focuses on creating opportunities for students to succeed in their academic, extra-curricular, social, and civic endeavors, which includes providing flexible, convenient, and affordable high quality educational and learning experiences.

- Commit to a resilient and a vibrant infrastructure for the 21st century: plan for innovation, integration, and deployment of technology in the classroom and in delivering services for students.
- Embrace a shared communicated, and practiced student-centered philosophy: revising administrative processes and communication strategies to develop student engagement in processes for admissions, financial aid, advising, registration, and support services.
- Develop programs, partnerships, and entrepreneurial initiatives: be the higher-education leader and collaborator in our region to ensure that our programs meet the workforce needs of business, government agencies, and other organizations.
- Establish effective communication and marketing plans: create a “culture of communication” using multiple channels to connect our institution’s five campuses and our college community everywhere that regularly informs faculty, staff, and students about the institution’s strategies, goals, initiatives, processes, and services.
- Promote Middle Georgia State by focusing on its distinctive contributions to improving the education, economic development, and quality of life within our region.
- Plan to assess external threats: develop a set of practices to address external obstacles the institution may face in accomplishing its Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan.

These themes bring to light the future of our institution as we compete in the marketplace for high quality students, faculty, and staff who deliver excellence in all aspects of university life.

Steps to Becoming a Public University for Middle Georgia

The third sub-committee studied the steps needed to obtain university status. A state university, which Middle Georgia State College seeks to become, differs from a state college in three primary ways: the types of degrees offered, the selectivity of admissions, and the extent of research engagement. The sub-committee focused on the abilities and improvements that that would facilitate the awarding of university status to Middle Georgia State.

Graduate Programs

In order to decide which graduate programs to offer, the sub-committee suggests polling hiring firms, alumni, community stakeholders, and potential students to find a demand for graduate degrees that are not being offered by nearby USG schools. In 2012, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, as part of their job-classification and compensation plan, prepared a brief Graduate Program Needs Assessment for Middle Georgia State. The results of their survey indicated a demand for Master’s degrees in Education, Nursing, and Accountancy. The CVIG information needs updating to include any changes in the marketplace. The immediate future includes

assessing the viability of offering these graduate degrees. For the longer term, Middle Georgia State can initiate graduate degrees across several schools, offering distinctive degrees that can create a high profile in the community.

Admissions

Our current admission requirements are slightly above the average for State Colleges but below the average for State Universities. In brief, the current minimum freshman index (a combination of GPA and SAT/ACT scores) for state universities is 1940, for state colleges is 1830; and for Middle Georgia beginning fall 2015 is 1850. Until our funding formula changes to “graduation rates” versus “credit hours,” increasing admission standards should proceed gradually.

To increase admission selectivity the College needs to articulate and communicate a clear brand and value proposition. The subcommittee recommends enhancing Middle Georgia State admissions to include such options as

- communicating the branding of “greatness” to give community sense of how we deliver on this promise,
- increasing scholarships to highly qualified students,
- providing a full array of university-quality extracurricular experiences (concerts, weekend events, socials, and Greek life),
- measuring the effectiveness of marketing initiatives,
- adjusting funds to favor the effective avenues; encouraging community outreach, joint ventures, and engagement,
- identifying high achievers in core classes for recognition, scholarships, honors courses and undergraduate research opportunities, and
- creating a master plan to become a leader and partner in major Middle Georgia public and private organizations.

Faculty Research

The University System of Georgia indicates that State Universities have a level of “research engagement,” typically applied research. We suggest that Middle Georgia State create a culture where all faculty produce scholarship but that the level and amount depend on faculty contract. We envision having our faculty identify regional problems that they have the expertise to address or recruiting faculty with the ability to address the identified problem. Where clusters of complimentary expertise exist, create Centers of Excellence useful in improving Middle Georgia citizenry and enterprises.

Middle Georgia State must increase faculty credentials to State University levels, requiring a plan to recruit and keep faculty who have terminal degrees and are research active. As of fall 2013, the percentage of Middle Georgia State College faculty with terminal degrees is 53.8; which is slightly above the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees for state colleges, 49.9. However, the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees for State Universities is 66.7. Our vision recommends a structure that supports scholarship/research production including such possibilities as student research assistants, bonuses for quality journal publications, a cadre of research faculty capable of obtaining grant funding, and release time for grant-writing and book publishing. We also see the need to hire and retain qualified faculty at market wages while simultaneously creating a structure that supports a graduate faculty.

Conclusion

The President's Task Force on Vision embarked on this endeavor with optimism and energy for the historical moment in the life of Middle Georgia State where we find ourselves. A response to the White Paper with a focus on vision positions our leaders to chart the direction toward university status. As we seek to create an educational infrastructure that prepares all of our students for a life-time of learning wherever that may be, we are committed to the institution's future and its critical role in the region. We are aware that we will need everything we know now and everything that we will learn along as we progress to meet the responsibility of university status, setting our sights to enact transformational change in Middle Georgia.