Reflective Introduction and Executive Summary For The University of Minnesota at Crookston

The following consensus statement is from the System Appraisal Team’s review of the institution’s Systems Portfolio Overview and its introductions to the nine AQIP Categories. The purpose of this reflective introduction is to highlight the team’s broad understanding of the institution, its mission, and the constituents that it serves.

UMC is a relatively young four-year degree granting institution with a lengthy history. Unique to UMC is a joint baccalaureate/technical education mission. UMC began offering baccalaureate degrees in 1992, with roots extending back to 1906. Transitioning from a boarding school for children of the region’s farming communities first to a two-year technical college, then a four-year institution, UMC is clear in its current mission and the role that it serves as one of five institutions in the University of Minnesota system and focuses on northwestern Minnesota as its primary service area.

UMC has had changes in top leadership positions including a new Chancellor (appointed July 2012) and a new Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (appointed July 2013). As a regional educational provider, UMC implemented quality improvement efforts in 2010. The University has advanced its focus on continuous quality improvement through the implementation of the AQIP Steering Committee to oversee the selection and accomplishment of Action Projects as well as creating a new position, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, to focus on planning, research, and analysis. UMC has developed a process for systematic selection of Action Projects that includes campus-wide input and implementation of consistent communication mechanisms for institutional improvements and reporting. The University has chosen enrollment management, community engagement, and regional economic development as core strategic priorities.

The following are summary comments on each of the AQIP Categories crafted by the Appraisal Team to highlight the University of Minnesota at Crookston’s achievements and to identify challenges yet to be met.
• UMC identifies itself as a teaching institution of the University of Minnesota System. As a baccalaureate-granting institution, UMC is systemically linked to the University of Minnesota’s policies and structures. Through faculty led efforts, program level outcomes and assessments were developed in 2012-2013 and are currently being implemented. UMC’s processes for helping students learn range from developing to mature. Beyond processes aligned to U of M system practices, processes for determining common and program-level outcomes are systematic with all learning outcomes reviewed and refined across the campus. UMC primarily serves incoming students whose high school performance places them among moderately-performing students nationally, requiring a mixture of remedial and advanced educational offerings. The institution describes its assessment of learning outcomes as in flux: expected learning outcomes are developed and strategically aligned but outcomes data is either not collected or assessed systematically. The University has developed plans to employ technology to systematically improve the class scheduling process as a priority.

• UMC has defined community engagement, diversity, and sustainability as high priority objectives. Priorities are identified for each distinctive objective. Aligned with U of M system priorities, UMC is participating in the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment requiring all campuses to develop a greenhouse gas inventory and climate action plan. UMC has pursued other activities that support this initiative such as the construction of a LEED certified residence hall and the implementation of a “Green Fee” to support sustainability initiatives. UMC’s commitment to community engagement is evident in its focus on the student experience through community service and service learning. UMC recognizes its less mature aspects including the ability to effectively track and evaluate engagement and diversity initiatives that have been reactive.

• UMC describes its initial process as reactive, collecting a variety of data but neither analyzing nor sharing it systematically. Recent strategic planning has focused on growing online enrollment, cultivating alumni and donors, and supporting economic development regarding understanding of student and other stakeholder needs. UMC has collected data to drive improvements in the areas of retention and graduation, advising needs, transfer student needs, interest in new programs, and student services.

• The processes for valuing people range in levels of maturity. UMC benefits from policies, procedures, and tools utilized across the University of Minnesota system. All of
these processes are aligned. However processes native to UMC are reactive or in early stages. UMC describes its processes for valuing people as having reached a higher level of development and maturity and has developed three strategic goals for the coming years: building a culture of trust and open communication, identifying and addressing opportunities for improvement based on a recent employee survey, and promoting performance excellence through enhanced faculty and staff recruitment, performance-based pay, and expanded professional development opportunities.

- UMC has a mature process for the setting and deployment of its mission, vision, and values. UMC is mature in its efforts at leading and communicating, particularly in areas related to strategic planning and governance. UMC has prioritized for improvements its efforts guided by employee engagement. Using employee engagement survey results to identify opportunities for improvement demonstrates a commitment to improving. Systematically, UMC has focused on Key institutional operations (facilities, business office, housing, and information technology) and linked to the U of M system with a comprehensive audit conducted every four to five years. UMC has a strong understanding of the key institutional processes needed to support its operations, and the small nature of the campus is a benefit in the institution’s ability to leverage system resources efficiently. The University notes that long-range planning for facilities and other instructional support needs is still reactive. UMC identifies facilities planning as an area in need of improvement, and has identified three priorities as a new wellness center, computing and electrical infrastructure, and a campus building plan.

- UMC has both an internal data warehouse and evaluation mechanism and a system-wide data storehouse. UMC is able to benefit from the U of M system in the collection of data to measure effectiveness. Through U of M, UMC can utilize the following for data collection: U of M data warehouse and other data structures, centralized data reporting system, support by central institutional research and analysis personnel, central submissions of institutional research data to external groups such as IPEDS and the National Clearinghouse. UMC indicates internal progress in measuring effectiveness through use of the system’s data warehouse, additional staff to support research and analysis, centralized submission of key data, and new data and collection processes.

- UMC has a series of strategic planning systems and its levels of development vary accordingly. UMC has established a three-tier strategic planning system based on the scope of the activity being considered. A system-wide Campus Compact addresses
short range planning, the Executive Committee focuses on medium-range planning, and large constituent-inclusive groups address long-term planning. By having multiple processes focused on various needs and issues, the institution demonstrates maturity in its understanding relative to the importance and alignment of planning.

- UMC identifies collaborative relationships as key to strategic planning initiatives and for developing a systematic approach to regional support and being viewed as a leading resource for rural economic development. UMC has established priorities for building collaborative relationships with current and potential stakeholders. Relationships that bolster community engagement, advance regional economic development, and directly impact students are strategic priorities for UMC.

Note: Strategic challenges and accreditation issues are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

Strategic Challenges For the University of Minnesota at Crookston

In conducting the Systems Appraisal, the Systems Appraisal Team attempted to identify the broader issues that would seem to present the greatest challenges and opportunities for the institution in the coming years. These areas are ones that the institution should address as it seeks to become the institution it wants to be. From these the institution may discover its immediate priorities, as well as strategies for long-term performance improvement. These items may also serve as the basis for future activities and projects that satisfy other AQIP requirements. The team also considered whether any of these challenges put the institution at risk of not meeting the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. That portion of the team’s work is presented later in this report.

Knowing that the University of Minnesota at Crookston will discuss these strategic challenges, give priority to those it concludes are most critical, and take action promptly, the Systems Appraisal Team identified the following:

- As a member of a larger system of universities, UMC benefits from the mechanisms and processes supported by the U of M system. Significant work remains for those processes at UMC. Identification and ongoing longitudinal analysis of relevant measures could provide information to understand how well the University is performing toward
desired targets. Opportunities exist for the University to mature and improve in matters related to the ongoing use of comparative and benchmarking data with peers both inside the U of M system and beyond.

• UMC has a significant opportunity to develop a more systematic approach in the collection and analysis of data to better understand needs and strategic opportunities. UMC regularly describes data sources the University collects throughout the first response in most of the categories’ results sections. However, many times the data collected is not shared or analyzed in the subsequent responses in the results sections. UMC has an opportunity to audit the data sources it collects and has access to and realign those sources to improve its knowledge of the different processes across campus and how it compares with other U of M system campuses and beyond.

• Building upon the planning infrastructure UMC has developed, the University has an outstanding opportunity to create a sense of urgency incorporating Plan Do Check Act activities. Important next steps could include establishing performance targets for its key measures to evaluate effectiveness of design processes and operations toward meeting desired performance.

• UMC may want to reaffirm its commitment to AQIP and reexamine its processes to continuously improve. For example, the rejuvenation of the AQIP Steering Committee, the use of data to inform decisions, and the use of comparative data with peer and aspirational institutions beyond the U of M system are all elements that are not evident in the Systems Portfolio.