



Citizens League
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CITIZENS  LEAGUE

A Competitive Place in the Quality Race

Putting the University of Minnesota in the
Nation's Top Five Public Research Universities

*An overview of a full report
prepared by the Citizens League*

January, 1998



CITIZENS LEAGUE

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A Competitive Place in the Quality Race

In a rapidly evolving global and information-based economy, research universities play a key role in the economic health of both regions and states. The University of Minnesota is such an asset, providing educated workers and cutting edge technology for the state's businesses, and serving as an impetus for economic development.

National rankings of the University show that it still compares favorably with the best public and private universities in the country. But the collective reputation of the University's advanced degree (particularly graduate) programs have declined. Concern over University quality is shared by a variety of local stakeholders, including the business community, policy makers, citizens, even

faculty and administration at the University. In response to this situation, the Citizens League committee addressed these questions:

- How should "quality" be defined in the University's graduate/professional education and research programs?
- What opportunities are present for improving the global stature of the University while also bolstering the state's quality of life and economic health?
- What type of social and institutional culture, and general incentives would facilitate greater quality?

Why has quality stagnated?

Lack of programmatic focus: The University's 165 advanced degree programs have led to a diffusion of priorities and available resources.

Missed opportunities in new areas: The University has not capitalized on emerging opportunities for research, like molecular biology and software programming.

Poor management structures and irrational policies: University bureaucracy has resulted in policies that block program and departmental innovation necessary to remain on the cutting edge of academia.

Salaries and departmental size: Claims of uncompetitive salaries (some merited), and gradual but persistent faculty downsizing have had a negative affect on the University's perceived commitment to quality.

Competing agendas among different stakeholders: Numerous stakeholders impose their agendas on the University, which results in a multi-directional vision.

Culture, expectations and demographics: Midwestern universities appear to be having trouble adapting to the "new generation" of public research universities that are more focused and streamlined.

Converging factors for change

Rapid shift toward a global and knowledge-based economy: This widely-accepted shift puts greater pressure on the University's research and advanced degree programs to keep the state competitive.

Demographic concentration and a diffuse higher education system: The state's higher education infrastructure is geographically dispersed while the student-aged population is concentrated in the metro region. As a result, significant resources are spent to support institutions where students aren't.

Cost and revenue pressures: Pressure from both the spending and revenue sides of the budget — including state and federal research support, and rising tuition — will have to be addressed if the University expects to improve quality.

Public and legislative demand for spending accountability: The level of state support — \$500 million — and a perception of unresponsiveness to the needs of business and the general public has encouraged ever-greater public scrutiny of University spending.

Citizens League Recommendations

The University must establish clear priorities to improve research and advanced degree programs, and commit resources to support those priorities. The Legislature and other stakeholders must provide appropriate support for priorities to take root.

The Citizens League endorses President Mark Yudof's proposal to elevate four high-tech areas as priorities: digital science, biology at the molecular and cellular levels, multi-media and design. However, other issues must be resolved to strengthen all research and advanced degree programs.

1. A new University-state-industry partnership (the "Northstar Research Coalition") should be formed to finance and support the four areas of emphasis proposed by President Yudof.

The Coalition would create a critical mass of world-class faculty in emerging high-tech fields by leveraging public money (between \$20-\$30 million annually over a 3-5 year period) with private support — thereby expanding the University's high-tech expertise and attracting new external research funding. The Coalition's innovation stems from its research focus and the external control of both funds and decision-making.

2. Along with National Research Council rankings, a measurement system should be developed to evaluate quality in all advanced degree programs. The University should then track long- and short-term results and publish a biennial report card for each program, which in turn should be used to reward programs for quality improvement.

3. Eliminate low-quality and low-priority programs, reallocating resources to higher priorities and meeting student and state needs through cooperative ventures.

Limited resources require the University to narrow its field of 165 advanced degree programs. Program elimination should focus on low-quality and/or low-priority programs. One useful strategy is to aggressively pursue alliances with other universities to achieve higher overall program quality and to better meet student needs.

4. Strengthen advanced degree programs by concentrating on areas that offer significant pay-offs for improved quality, such as:

- maintaining high admissions standards to all advanced degree programs;
- expanding the Grant-in-Aid program;
- expanding fellowship commitments;
- improving the University's physical plant;
- streamlining administrative processes with respect to fast-moving opportunities.

5. Improve human resource training and management to unleash the universities human capital resources.

Quality improvements will be driven by faculty. As such, faculty must be properly involved, managed and rewarded for productivity. More specifically, the University should:

- re-evaluate traditional teaching-research-outreach duties for faculty, looking instead to maximize the individual talents of faculty members.
- reconfigure faculty rewards toward overlooked yet desirable activities, such as teaching, advising and interdisciplinary research.
- provide better training for faculty in policy leadership positions; gradually remove faculty from administrative positions unrelated to policy-making, and transition these duties to professional administrators.



Northstar Research Coalition

Northstar seeks to improve the high-tech capacity of both the metro and greater Minnesota economies. With its focus on high-tech research, Northstar fills an industry research gap while fortifying the strength and reputation of the University. Northstar's mission would be two-fold:

- improve the University's expertise and reputation in high-tech research
- create new high-tech industry clusters, and provide better high-tech innovation for existing industries.

There have been many public-private partnerships and outreach efforts in the past. Northstar, however, separates itself from past efforts through its:

- focus on new high-tech research
- externally-controlled board of directors, which helps set the research agenda and controls all resource distribution for three basic purposes: conducting research, endowing chairs, and purchasing research equipment
- use of public and private funds as seed money to later attract external research funds
- ability to achieve objectives without adding significant additional administration.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Committee on University Quality was co-chaired by **Carl Cummins III** and **Jane Vanderpoel**. A total of 30 Citizens League members took an active part.

John Adams	Marvin Marshak
Andy Brown	Nicholas LaFontaine
Richard Clarke	Dick Osgood
Mary Lou Dresbach	Todd Otis
Anne Ducey	Irene Qualters
Jack Evert	George Reilly
Linda Ewen	Jack Rossmann
Ted Ferrara	Mark Schiffman
Howard Guthmann	James Stanton
Rick Heydinger	Paul Taylor
Herb Johnson	Blair Tremere
Steve Kelley	Emily Anne Tuttle
Sheila Kiscaden	Gedney Tuttle
Rick Krueger	Joanna Vail

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