Henderson State University, “The School with a Heart,” offers quality undergraduate and graduate education to a diverse student body. As Arkansas’s public liberal arts university, we empower each student to excel in a complex and changing world.
Introduction
This is the report of the self-study of Henderson State University prepared in advance of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)/North Central Association’s accreditation visit in February 2012. The report is the culmination of two years of work by multiple committees and individuals, written primarily for the HLC Visiting Team. However, as Henderson is undergoing major transitions in administration, the report also serves as the most comprehensive study of the university for those who are new to the university or are transitioning to new positions in the university. The report hopefully will serve as point of reference for those inside and outside the institution who would like to know Henderson better and would like to help the university achieve its goals, strengthen its greatest attributes, and overcome its challenges.

This introduction will provide a history and profile of the university, accreditation history, a discussion of the university’s response to concerns raised by the last HLC Visiting Team, and finally a description and evaluation of the self-study process. The remainder of the report is organized by Criteria, with appendices including the section on Federal Compliance in a separate document.

History and Profile
Henderson is the only Arkansas university that has been controlled by both church and state, and it is the only public university named for an individual. Of the Arkansas public universities, Henderson is one of only two originally established as a four-year, degree-conferring institution and is the second oldest university under state control.

The university was founded on March 24, 1890, and was incorporated as Arkadelphia Methodist College. It was chartered as a four-year, coeducational baccalaureate liberal arts college and as a private university operated under three names: Arkadelphia Methodist College (1890-1904), Henderson College (1904-1911), Henderson-Brown College (1911-1929). In 1929 the Board of Trustees offered the university to the state, and the Arkansas General Assembly enacted legislation (Act 46) to “establish a standard Teachers College in Arkadelphia.” Henderson State Teachers College (1929-1967) became Henderson State College in 1967 (1967-1975) and then Henderson State University in 1975.

In 1987, the Board of Trustees approved a new mission statement that identified Henderson as “Arkansas’s Public Liberal Arts University,” and in 1998 the university joined the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges. While the university focuses on its mission as a liberal arts university, it has continued to honor and incorporate
into its mission the strong tradition of teacher education from its years as a teachers college, expand other professional programs such as business, nursing, and aviation, and strengthen the graduate program that began in 1955.

Today, Henderson enrolls approximately 3,700 students and offers both graduate and undergraduate programs of study that serve the diverse higher education needs of Arkansas and the nation. Degree programs are offered through the Matt Locke Ellis College of Arts and Sciences (Ellis College), the School of Business, Teachers College, Henderson (Teachers College), and the Graduate School. Henderson has been described as “The School with a Heart” since the early 1900s, the colors are red and gray, and the students and athletic teams are known as “Reddies.”

Accreditation History

Henderson is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as a bachelor’s and master’s degree-granting institution. Initially accredited as a baccalaureate institution in 1934, master’s level accreditation was granted to Henderson in 1960. The last comprehensive evaluations and visits from the Higher Learning Commission were conducted in 1992 and 2001. A commission-mandated focused visit on the subject of assessment occurred in 2007. On April 20, 2011, HLC performed a Location Confirmation visit for the distance learning programs at Sheridan and DeQueen, Arkansas.

Institutional Accreditations
The Higher Learning Commission, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
National Association of Schools of Music
AACSB International/The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education
Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education
Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
Federal Aviation Administration (recognition only, not accreditation)
Changes at Henderson

Since the last comprehensive visit, the most significant change at Henderson came when Charles Dunn, who had served the university for twenty-two years, stepped down as president. The Board of Trustees began the search for a replacement by holding open forums on campus with the multiple constituent groups including faculty, staff, students, and the community to determine the attributes to be searched for in a new president. An advisory board made up of faculty, staff, students, community members, and alumni performed an extensive search and interviews of multiple candidates before recommending three candidates to bring to campus. After the three candidates visited campus and met with the constituent groups, the Board of Trustees offered the position to Charles “Chuck” Welch. President Welch infused the university with excitement, new ideas, and momentum for future progress but left in April 2011 after only three years. The Board of Trustees has appointed Vice President for Finance and Administration Bobby Jones to serve as the interim president until a new search process is completed and a new president is named. The search process is taking longer than expected. Two potential candidates were brought to campus by the Board of Trustees late in spring 2011, but both candidates withdrew their names after the campus expressed misgivings about their candidacies. The search will continue into the 2011-2012 academic year.

One result of the present executive search is that some key administrators who retired or left are being replaced with interim appointments in order to allow the new president the opportunity to shape the new cabinet. As a result, there are currently interims in the key positions of president, vice president for student services, vice president for finance and administration, graduate dean, and controller. Fortunately, however, Henderson has strong underlying structures and processes that will enable the university to continue its forward momentum and administrative talent within the university capable of stepping in and performing well in these positions.

Henderson also made another significant change within the last decade that strengthens the university in this time of transition. In 2008 the Board of Trustees approved adding a provost position. Vernon G. Miles was hired shortly thereafter and still serves as the provost and vice president for academic affairs.

Within the last decade, Henderson’s graduate programs have expanded and grown, and the number of partially and fully online courses has grown. Teachers College introduced Henderson’s first degree beyond the master’s level: the Education Specialist degree. New buildings and renovations have greatly improved and changed the face of campus. The construction of three new residence halls
has made it possible to house a greater number of students on campus, creating more of a campus community. Henderson also faced significant financial difficulties caused by stagnant and decreasing enrollment, the national economic recession, and especially the decrease in funding from the state. The enrollment trend, however, seems to have reversed itself, and Henderson welcomed its largest freshman classes ever in fall semesters 2010 and 2011.

**Response to the Last Visitation Team**

The Higher Learning Commission Visiting Team in 2001 identified five challenges that the university should address. There will be discussion of these issues within the context of the criteria in the main text of the report, but the following will highlight some of the actions the university has taken to meet those challenges:

**Challenge 1: The current strategic plan for the implementation of the Bold Strokes focus study is incomplete without established priorities, time lines, and performance indicators.**

Following the 2001 Self-study and HLC Team visit, the university examined the Bold Strokes strategic plan and was advised to begin a new planning process. The 2005 “Designing Our Destiny” strategic plan is discussed in Criterion 2. One aspect of that plan was a much more careful delineation of who should be responsible for each of the actions and a greater emphasis on priorities and indicators. Due to several years of economic distress, the university was unable to fulfill all the goals of the plan. In 2009 the new university president, Dr. Welch, recognized that Henderson needed a new planning document that more specifically addressed just those issues raised by the Visit Team. The **2010 Strategic Plan** that came from the planning process is a living plan that is meant to be updated regularly and that has clear goals, but also addresses all those requirements from the HLC Visit Team and more. Each goal has clearly stated objectives, strategies, activities, necessary resources, responsible parties, and evaluation procedures.

After all the goals were considered, “dates” or timelines for completion were also established. This will make it possible to gauge how well Henderson is accomplishing its strategic goals and where the university needs to concentrate more attention. The Strategic Planning Council has just recently held its first annual evaluation and update, and is in the process of reviewing the results.
Challenge 2: The liberal arts mission needs to be reflected in the curriculum beyond the general education requirements.

The HLC Visit Team suggested particularly that “both the General Education Committee and the Ellis College Curriculum Committee could assume more pro-active roles in revising documents that would better reflect the liberal arts missions and help students make necessary connections between the specific courses, the core and a total liberal arts education.” By 2002 a symbolic yet significant action was taken in renaming the “General Education Requirements” for all students the “Liberal Arts Core.”

The most significant accomplishment in this area has come alongside the revision of this liberal arts core of required courses. In response to a directive to examine the general education requirements, the liberal arts core was reduced in size, but more importantly, the document was revised to make clearer the connections between the specific courses and the liberal arts education. The courses are now divided into sections with descriptions of how the student will become a more educated person as a result of those courses. For the “Essential Skills” courses, “Students who successfully complete the essential skills component of the Liberal Arts Core will understand and appreciate the central role writing and critical thinking play in becoming an active student of the liberal arts. By fulfilling the essential skills requirements, students will be able to think coherently, write clearly and effectively, read with understanding and appreciation, speak effectively, demonstrate fundamental mathematical skills, and practice lifetime fitness skills. Throughout the Liberal Arts Core curriculum, students will develop skills for the appropriate use of various forms of technology.” Academic Enrichment includes explanations of the skills and attitudes that students will develop as a result of completing courses in fine arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The new liberal arts core also includes an elective core class to give the students opportunities to add variety to their studies.

In addition to the liberal arts core requirements for first- and second-year students, Henderson requires upper-level courses that will refresh those aptitudes and abilities begun in the earlier years and keep advanced students connected to the liberal arts mission. Because “in a rapidly changing world, understanding cultural differences is important in fostering a perspective of global concern and acceptance of a range of cultural responses,” students are required to complete an upper-level nonwestern culture course. Students will learn to “appreciate the complexity
and diversity of world cultures. They will develop an understanding of how culture influences behavior, and in turn, how cultural differences impact intercultural interactions.”

More than any other program, Henderson’s ‘Writing across the Curriculum’ program emphasizes how the skills, habits, and attitudes of a liberal arts student “blend together to produce the ability to write well and to think critically.” Upper-level Henderson students are required to pass a junior-level writing course, usually University Writing. To reinforce the importance of writing to thinking critically in all areas of study, each student must also take a course designated as Writing Intensive within his/her major. Every academic department on campus has thus developed Writing Intensive courses to teach to its students the importance of written communication within that discipline.

The Common Book program (discussed in Criterion 4) is another example of how the liberal arts mission permeates the curriculum and co-curriculum beyond the liberal arts core requirements. All Henderson Seminar courses assign a common book chosen each year by a committee of faculty with student and staff representation, giving the entire freshman class a common learning experience. Other courses throughout the university also adopt and use the common book from year to year. Co-curricular activities are scheduled, including a guest lecture by the book’s author, creating a conversation across the university.

Academic programs across the campus are incorporating the basic tenets of Henderson’s liberal arts mission into learning goals for students in their programs beyond the liberal arts core. This will be discussed in more depth in Criterion 3, but over three-quarters of the programs have set the goal that students will think logically and critically. Over half of the programs have set goals that students in their programs will mature intellectually, emotionally, and physically; speak and write effectively; discern appropriate uses of technology; participate as concerned, intelligent citizens; and/or appreciate the complexity of world cultures.

Challenge 3: The institution has made little or no progress developing a comprehensive assessment plan.

The HLC Visit Team found virtually no comprehensive assessment plan at Henderson in 2001 and therefore requested a focused visit on the subject. What the Focused Visit Team found in 2007, however, was a university that had traveled light years down the path toward the development of a culture of assessment: “Since the last visit, Henderson State University appointed a full-time Assessment Direc-
tor (in 2003), revitalized its Assessment Team, and purchased TracDat Software to support record-keeping and reporting of assessment activities. Professional development activities designed to expand faculty and staff knowledge of basic principles of assessment and the mechanics of the TracDat system were held. Campus workshops provided by national experts in assessment and attendance at off-campus workshops, including one sponsored by the Higher Learning Commission, were attended by members of the Assessment Team and other faculty and staff members.” The Focused Visit Team could see that “the beginnings of a commitment to a culture of assessment is evident in the commitment made through these and other efforts.”

The Focused Visit Team found several remaining weaknesses in the nascent assessment program but found the commitment to assessment sufficient to warrant no follow-up by the commission. Since the 2007 visit, Henderson has continued that commitment to assessment and, in particular, addressed some of those weaknesses, including moving all academic departments toward establishing baseline data, closing the loop, and using data for improvement. Henderson has not been completely successful in all departments, but the commitment and the progress has been tremendous. The university assessment plan developed in 2003 is periodically revised and updated, most recently in fall 2011. Criterion 3A explains in significant detail the progress Henderson continues to make in its assessment program and how effectively the university and academic units have responded to the weaknesses pointed out by the Focused Visit Team.

Challenge 4: Faculty and staff need to embrace and take an active role in supporting the efforts of the Student Success and Retention Office.

While faculty and staff still need to do more to support the efforts in student success and retention, they have taken a much more active role this past decade. In October 2007 after the Academics Committee of the Faculty Senate made preliminary suggestions on the topic, the Faculty Senate took up the issue of retention by appointing an Ad Hoc Committee on Retention. After researching national trends and solutions, as well as the particular circumstances at Henderson, the Ad Hoc Committee on Retention presented its report to the Faculty Senate for approval at the April 2008 Faculty Senate meeting. One key recommendation from that report was the creation of an Advising Center. In 2010 the Student Success and Retention Office was reorganized as an Academic Advising Center and placed within the area of the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The Academic Advising Center has a director and two staff who advise students who have not declared majors, stu-
dent students under thirty hours of earned credit who have not completed required remedial classes, students on academic probation, and provisionally admitted students.

Other avenues for faculty and staff to actively participate in the efforts of Student Success and Retention have been increased in the last decade. The (then) Center for Student Success and Transition coordinated an event called “Tutoring with the Stars” for a few years beginning in 2008. Shortly after six-weeks grades were posted, tutors, faculty, staff, and other students met for one evening to assist students who were struggling in courses, especially the liberal arts core classes. Faculty responded very positively to the call for participation.

Faculty have participated in or conducted workshops for the office on topics that help with success and retention. For instance, faculty members from many different academic areas have spoken at “What Can I Do with this Major?” presentations for students during the lunch hour. School of Business faculty member Anita Williams has presented workshops on test taking skills.

Faculty expressed interest in being involved earlier in the advising process, and as a result Heart Start, the orientation for first-year students held in the summers, was redesigned. One afternoon of the two-day Heart Start is now devoted to academic orientation, advising, and registration by faculty members of the departments in which students have declared their majors. Students who have not yet declared are also advised by faculty members who can advise them on the liberal arts core. In addition to Heart Start, faculty members respond to email requests from the Advising Center for assistance in advising at peak registration times, such as the first day of registration each semester.

The Academic Advising Center also coordinates an Early Alert retention program, developed as a retention tool to improve students’ persistence and to promote survival skills. Faculty members are asked to use the system to report students who are doing poorly in class, are chronically absent from class, or are experiencing other kinds of problems that affect academic performance. This enables early detection of problems and possible intervention with students who might be at risk for failure. The Early Alert system has provided some assistance in retaining some students who might not otherwise have stayed in school. However, faculty participation is low. In fall 2011 Henderson will implement a new program, “MAPworks,” which will track students campus-wide and enable faculty and staff throughout the university to report potential problems so that appropriate persons may intercede and help students through particular difficulties.
Challenge 5: The existence of graduate level courses that are dual listed with junior level courses weakens the graduate program.

After the HLC Visit Team’s report in 2001, the graduate program recognized that cross-listing courses between graduate level and undergraduate level that were more than one level apart weakened the program and moved immediately to insure that no 6000-level graduate courses were cross-listed with undergraduate courses. At that point, some programs removed graduate courses dual listed with junior-level undergraduate courses while progress stalled in other areas. In preparation for this self-study, the issue was examined again and it was discovered that several graduate level courses cross listed with junior level courses remained. The provost and vice president for academic affairs along with the interim graduate dean asked every department to immediately move to correct this situation. In August and September 2011 the faculty in those departments who still had such courses re-examined their curricula. They found that some junior-level undergraduate courses were being taught as senior-level courses because of the cross-listing with graduate courses. For those courses, the departments petitioned the University Academic Council to change the course numbers to senior-level to reflect that reality. The departments also found, as indicated by the HLC Visit Team in 2001, that there were a few junior-level courses that were, indeed, being cross-listed with graduate level courses. The faculty in those departments petitioned the Graduate Council to remove those courses from the Graduate Catalog and the graduate department. The Graduate Council met on September 12, 2011, and the University Academic Council met on September 21, 2011, and approved those requests. Henderson no longer offers graduate-level courses that are taught within junior-level undergraduate courses, and this will only continue to strengthen the graduate program.

Preparation of the Report

In 2009 the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Vernon G. Miles appointed one staff member, Jennifer Holbrook, and one faculty member, Angela Boswell, to co-chair the Higher Learning Commission Self-Study Committee. He, along with the two co-chairs and the director of assessment, Wrenette Tedder, attended the PEAQ Workshop at the Higher Learning Commission Conference in 2009. These four individuals would form the executive committee of the self-study process. In spring 2009 Miles appointed the rest of the HLC Steering Committee, including the co-chairs for each Criterion subcommittee. In 2010 half of the steering committee attended the PEAQ Workshop and
HLC Conference, and in 2011 six steering committee members attended, including three who had not attended the previous years.

Each criterion subcommittee’s co-chairs met and appointed their own subcommittees representing the diversity of the university most appropriate to assisting in the gathering of information for their reports. Sixty-seven faculty and staff served on these five subcommittees and the steering committee. Another ten faculty, staff, and students served on the Publicity and Spirit Subcommittee (much better known as the “Rah Rah” team).

At the Fall Faculty Conference in 2009, Bege Bowers and Sharon Stringer from Youngstown State University kicked off the self-study process by introducing the faculty and selected staff members to the self-study process and detailing their success in coordinating the effort at Youngstown. The five criterion subcommittees began their work in fall 2009. Each subcommittee approached its tasks differently, but most of the subcommittees met frequently and brainstormed as groups as well as broke down into smaller divisions to seek evidence and write reports. For instance, the Criterion Four subcommittee began its work with an orientation meeting, followed by a lively brainstorming session which left every member feeling overwhelmed but also invigorated by the depth and variety of Henderson activity in all Criterion Four core components (see picture of Brainstorming White-Board). Using this information as a base, the co-chairs developed and distributed an organizational chart to help subcommittee members work on assigned core components. Through several additional meetings, committee members submitted evidence and reported results of work on their components. Due to lingering confusion over the process, the co-chairs added additional committee members to help with writing the rough draft and distributed a set of instructions for writing the narrative; some subcommittees were re-organized.

Subcommittee members then wrote rough draft narratives. Each co-chair edited two core components, sending questions back to sub-committee members for clarification as needed. Following the Criterion Four open forum, the co-chairs made corrections and added additional suggested evidence, sent the revision to committee members for final comments, and forwarded the completed draft to the HLC steering committee co-chairs.

However they broke down the responsibilities, the members of the subcommittees solicited information from all over campus, giving maximum opportunity for campus input as they prepared their
reports. At the Fall Faculty Conference in 2010, after a brief presentation on the commission’s criteria, all the members of all five subcommittees and the steering committee set up tables around the banquet room and invited faculty members and others to come visit with the subcommittees and give them feedback and ideas for what should be included in the report.

At the beginning of the fall 2010 semester, the members of all five of the subcommittees met for lunch, and the co-chairs set out the goals for the year, including the instructions for writing the first drafts. After an intensely busy fall 2010 semester, the subcommittees presented drafts of their reports to the campus via email and the website. Open forums were held in late January and early February where the entire campus was invited to attend and give feedback on the reports. From these forums, the subcommittees got ideas for revisions to their reports. Most of the subcommittees revised their reports and submitted them by April 2010, while a couple of the subcommittees took just a little longer.

Through the two years of preparing the report, the HLC steering committee met regularly to discuss the progress of the self-study. At the beginning of the process, the steering committee devised a “Campus Climate Survey” to gauge the attitudes and ideas on campus about the university. Eighteen administrators, 148 faculty, 114 staff, and 274 students participated in the survey. This “Campus Climate Survey” indicated widespread satisfaction with how Henderson was fulfilling its mission and served as a starting point for several of the subcommittees. That survey remained a valuable source of insight to the self-study process and other initiatives such as strategic planning. All other surveys by subcommittees had to be approved by the steering committee, and in the end, only one further survey was approved – the Mission Survey. Throughout the self-study process, the steering committee co-chairs regularly updated the Student Government Association, the Faculty Senate, and the Staff Senate about the progress.

A large number of people actually served on the committees to prepare the reports, and through forums, solicitation of information, and published rough drafts and updates, the self-study process sought after and included the input of the campus community. After a summer of revising the individual subcommittee reports, the co-chairs presented this report to the campus again, asking every member of the community to read it and for every major committee and administrator to endorse it. The endorsements are included in the appendices.
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Kenneth Taylor, Co-Chair, (3) Learning and Teaching
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Vickie Faust, Co-Chair, (4) Knowledge
David Thomson, Co-Chair, (5) Engagement/Service
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Wrenette Tedder, Director of Assessment
Ginger Otwell, Research Associate
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Chad Fielding, Interim Vice President for Student Services
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Beverly Quillin, Education Specialist, Disability Resource Center
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INTRODUCTION

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