Report Summary

Henderson State University is pleased to submit this report of its self-study for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Henderson community has engaged in two years of self-study to produce a report that provides evidence to the Commission that it fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation, that constitutes formal application for the continued accreditation, and that will serve as the frame of reference for the review that the visiting evaluation team conducts in February 2012.

The extensive two-year self-study process which involved a significant portion of the faculty and staff has led to this report and to the conclusion that Henderson does indeed fulfill the five criteria for accreditation set forth by the Higher Learning Commission.

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.

• Henderson and its constituencies support the publicized university mission statement which may be summarized: 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.

• People and departments throughout the university make a conscious effort to build healthy and diverse learning environments in accordance with the mission statement. This has assisted the increase in racial diversity: between 2002 and 2010, the number of all employees who are minorities has increased 4.4 percentage points, the number of minority faculty members has increased 6.7 percentage points, and the number of minority students has increased 8.6 percentage points.

• The results of the campus climate survey of faculty, staff, administrators, and students administered in 2009 showed positively that the different constituencies believe in, understand, and support the mission of Henderson.

• Strategic planning, assessment, unit mission statements, and governance structures all tie into the university mission statement.

• Rigorous academic programs and extracurricular and co-curricular activities strengthen and uphold the integrity of the university and the liberal arts mission.
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.

- Henderson engages in multiple types of planning based upon an understanding of its current conditions, remaining prepared for social and economic trends both foreseen and unforeseen. In particular, the current 2010 Strategic Plan is structured as a flexible document that can guide the university on the path to the future but evolve with changing circumstances.
- Henderson has been able to sustain educational quality despite decreases in state funding and rising expenses through conservative budgeting and restrained spending. The university was able to report to the HLC in 2010 its highest ever Composite Financial Index number (a measurement tool used to help determine the financial health of a public institution).
- The university has supported evaluation and assessment through hiring a director of assessment, supporting a funded Office of Assessment and Research, purchasing a campus-wide assessment management system and survey software, and revitalizing the Assessment Team. As a result, academic and administrative units of the university have created a culture of assessment by making plans to collect data, reviewing data, and using data to make decisions leading to continuous improvement.
- Planning processes align with the university’s mission, and budgeting processes are increasingly transparent and tied to planning processes and the mission.

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.

- Henderson has transformed its assessment efforts into a well-structured and evaluative system for measuring student learning. A persistent effort has been made to create a culture of assessment across campus.
- Although Henderson is able to provide only nominal funding for faculty travel, research, and sabbatical leaves, the current system nonetheless results in excellent professional productivity among the faculty, producing a well-qualified faculty who exert significant control over teaching and the curriculum.
Eighty percent of Henderson’s classrooms have multimedia capability, and the university appropriately uses technology to produce multiple optimum learning environments on campus and online.

Henderson’s learning resources such as Huie Library, the Writing Center, computer labs, science laboratories, music performance spaces, and clinical practice sites effectively enable student learning and effective teaching.

**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.**

- Henderson is committed to supporting free intellectual inquiry in myriad ways, including support for the Arkansas Undergraduate Research Conference, for faculty and student travel and research, and for the Honors College.

- The faculty actively and increasingly engages in scholarship. Since 2004 the faculty has published approximately 18 books, 200 articles, and 31 chapters or essays, exhibited, displayed, or performed their work in the fine arts in 140 public venues, presented 455 papers or posters, and obtained 73 grants.

- Henderson has integrated the mission of the liberal arts into curricular and extracurricular learning through the updated Liberal Arts Core requirements, assessment plans that tie program goals to the university mission, and support for learning inside and outside the classroom which encourages connections across disciplines.

- Ongoing formal and informal program reviews and curricular evaluations which involve faculty, staff, alumni, employers, and students contribute to learning that is relevant to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

- Students, faculty, and staff work together to learn how to acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly in a rapidly changing world through exposure to global concerns in the curriculum, international travel, opportunities to serve the community, clear policies that encourage ethical conduct, and practice using technology responsibly.

**Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. As called for by its mission, Henderson identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.**

- Henderson understands the value of education to transform individuals and communities and responds to identified community needs through outreach programs such as TRIO, Community Education Center, Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center, Alliance for Continuing Excellence in
Education, Education Renewal Zone, South Arkansas Math and Science STEM Center, and M.H. Russell Center for Economic Education.

- As a university, as departments, as extracurricular groups, and as individuals, Henderson connects significantly with the broader communities to the benefit of all. Henderson students learn about and engage in service to the community through curricular and extracurricular activities, particularly through internships and service projects such as Henderson Halloween and Reddie to Serve days.

- Through outreach programs and partnerships, Henderson serves the needs of its external and internal constituencies. Clear transfer policies and articulation agreements help make Henderson accessible to all and enable students from a diversity of backgrounds to obtain the skills, training, and education they need to improve their own lives and to satisfy the economic and educational needs of Arkansas and the region.

- In a wide array of academic areas and programs, the university makes its facilities, its faculty, and other resources available to the public. By their participation in the many varied activities and by their use of the facilities and other resources, the community has clearly come to rely upon Henderson and value its services.

In addition to showing how Henderson fulfills the criteria for accreditation, the self-study process has highlighted multiple strengths of the university:

- Henderson has long-cherished traditions that inform the lived mission of the university.

- The governance structures lead to a collaborative form of governance in which constituents increasingly believe their contributions matter.

- Henderson has been successful at developing and allocating its resources even during difficult financial times while an improved culture of assessment at all levels has improved the quality of education and services.

- Planning efforts have evolved at Henderson to the current, broad, and comprehensive strategic plan that addresses long range priorities and includes an understanding of enrollment trends, technology needs, and quality academic programming. This 2010 Strategic Plan is a working document designed to have set priorities and timelines.

- Technology planning and implementation have provided many opportunities for classroom enhancements with the use of multimedia stations, internet connections, and SmartBoards, among other learning technologies. The institution enjoys having modern facilities, the majority being new or renovated over the past fifteen years.
• Much work has been accomplished in the development of university-wide comprehensive assessment plans. Ninety-eight percent of academic programs currently have assessment plans. Academic assessment plans link learning outcomes to the Henderson Mission Statement, to academic program goals, and to courses where measurement is occurring.

• Great care is given to the hiring of excellent full-time and adjunct faculty members. New faculty members are mentored, provided with training, and evaluated each semester. Three and six-year reviews have served the university well in the evaluation of all faculty members.

• Henderson offers a wide range of physical facilities to support student learning and effective teaching.

• Partnerships with two year colleges, school districts, and community businesses have made a tremendous impact upon students and community members.

• A strong emphasis on undergraduate research directly supports Henderson’s commitment to a life of learning.

• Faculty engage in and model scholarly and creative activity, steadily increasing the production of grants, articles in refereed journals and conference proceedings, books or book chapters, reviews, creative productions and performances, and oral or poster presentations.

• Henderson is deeply committed to serving the needs of the community. The creation of the vice president for external affairs position signifies its commitment to engaging with the external communities.

• The university has many excellent outreach programs and participates in strong partnerships, including the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center, the Community Education Center, the South Arkansas Math and Science STEM Center, the Education Renewal Zone, TRIO programs, and the Alliance for Continuing Excellence in Education.

While Henderson has many strengths, the university also recognizes in this report that there are challenges that it must face:

• The campus community must be very conscious to continue forward momentum despite the great uncertainty caused by the transitions in leadership.

• Support for the mission is generally strong, but Henderson continues to have difficulty articulating it clearly and consistently across campus and to constituent groups. Particularly, the connection between the liberal arts focus and the excellent professional and graduate programs needs to be more consistently articulated.

• Policies and procedures, as well as data, information, and documents are sometimes difficult to find. While most offices on campus strive to be transparent and use email to effectively communicate, there is not an accessible location or a records management
system to help locate information with which to make decisions.

- State appropriations continue to be of concern to the university. If the downward trend in state revenue continues, Henderson will find it increasingly more difficult to support existing programs without considerable tuition increases or other outside sources of funding. Increasing Henderson Foundation support through the Office of Institutional Advancement will be critical over the next several years. Along with this, the institution must increase retention and recruitment in order to generate additional funds through SSCH. All of these things will be necessary to offset state funding shortages and rising costs in utilities and health coverage. And these things will be more difficult as Henderson is located in an economically depressed part of the state, with population and employment steadily decreasing.

- Delayed funding of long term investment in real and human assets has put Henderson in a position where continued delay may have an adverse impact on the faculty, staff, or students.

- There continue to be some academic areas that need to refine their assessment plans and a few that still need to develop such plans. The culture of assessment must continue to embrace all areas of the university.

- Our process of faculty evaluation during the past ten years, although acceptable, needs to be given increased attention, both annually and for tenure and promotion.

- More funding for research and professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and students is necessary. The 2010 Strategic Plan makes sound recommendations to assist in this endeavor: increasing grant funding by 20 percent in two years, hiring a professional grant writer or retaining other grant-writing services, reviewing current grant writing procedures, and educating faculty and staff on grant writing procedures and availability of potential grants.

- Henderson needs to make the internal and external communities it serves more aware of the activities of engagement and service offered.

In conclusion Henderson’s self-study process has led to a greater understanding of the university’s strengths as well as its challenges. Overall, the report concludes that Henderson’s mission, resources, and human commitment poise it for success in facing the future of continued changes in our state and in higher education that are certain to come. The “Reddie Spirit” continues to infuse “The School with a Heart.”