



**HENDERSON**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

EXCELLENCE • SPIRIT • TRADITION

## **BOLD STROKES: A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR HENDERSON**

The development of a strategic plan for Henderson State University commenced in 1988 with a commitment to fully implement the mission adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1987. That mission, to structure the growth and development of the university around its foremost role as Arkansas's public liberal arts university, led to a number of significant efforts. Three major goals were pursued in an effort to strengthen the educational program of the institution and to improve its image in the state and region. First, Henderson would recruit a diverse, superior student body. That goal was achieved by adopting admission standards which permitted and encouraged admission of a better prepared freshman class. During the decade that followed, the average ACT of first-time freshmen rose from the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally to well over the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. Further, the commitment to diversity was achieved through an aggressive effort to maintain African-American enrollment at approximately fifteen percent of the enrollment and by increasing the presence of international students at Henderson.

Second, Henderson would fully integrate the liberal arts into every undergraduate academic program. While many productive efforts were implemented, a great deal of latitude was left to each department to determine how best to integrate the liberal arts. Certainly, stronger emphasis on undergraduate research was one beneficial outcome, as was the development of a strong liberal arts-based Honors College. Several academic departments initiated "capstone courses" for seniors that were designed to permit students to demonstrate their use of the liberal arts foundation of their undergraduate studies in a study or activity within their academic major. While these efforts were not closely coordinated, that fact permitted extensive experimentation among departments.

Finally, Henderson would identify several *programs of distinction* that would be known for their quality throughout the south. That effort produced some success. For instance, it is clear that HSU programs in music, accounting, the sciences, elementary education, and aviation are known for their quality throughout the region. Accreditation by NASM, AACSB and NCATE and certification by the FAA provide some indication of success in those efforts; however, the institution has not systematically invested sufficient resources to provide the recognition that should be given these distinctive programs. Developing new programs, such as electronic media arts, television, and sports medicine, also need an infusion of capital to adequately serve Henderson students. With heavy dependence on state tax funds for support, funding for growth and development has been limited.

A second major step in the strategic planning process was inaugurated in 1994. The result of that step was to identify a number of specific steps which the university might take to fully achieve the goals it established in 1988. The success of these efforts has dramatically changed Henderson. Those successes are cataloged in earlier reports; however, a decade later, it became clear that another planning effort was needed.

The third phase of strategic planning at Henderson State University began in 1997 with discussion and research by the President's Council (a newly formed committee designed to assist with the planning efforts). The Council examined four areas—significant higher education trends, external environmental analysis, enrollment analysis, and the current circumstances faced by Henderson. This provided background information for beginning the third phase of planning.

Asked to envision the future and describe current reality of Henderson State University, major ideas began to surface. The fall 1997 retreat resulted in the development of seven initiatives. Some of the key points developed by the strategic teams asked to consider those initiatives are:

**Initiative #1:** Henderson State University will implement its liberal arts mission by:

- A. Developing a common definition and understanding of the liberal arts at Henderson
- B. Achieving state and national recognition as a public liberal arts university by developing a comprehensive plan that:
  - 1. recruits excellent students,
  - 2. provides opportunity for student and faculty involvement on and off campus in their academic disciplines,
  - 3. retains students through graduation,
  - 4. promotes funding and alumni coordination
- C. Developing benchmarks to monitor university progress in implementing its mission

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Adopt a formal definition: A liberal arts education provides breadth of knowledge through a liberal arts core of courses and allows in-depth participation in a specific field of study. Liberally educated students have the ability to think logically and critically, communicate effectively, appreciate the complexity and diversity of world cultures, understand the physical universe, participate as concerned and intelligent citizens, mature intellectually, emotionally, and physically, and acquire mastery of a particular field of study. Students grounded in a liberal arts education will have gained not only the skills desired in the job market but also the self-confidence to reach beyond the bounds of their own experiences when making career and other life choices.

- B. Change in liberal arts core: Reduce natural science by three hours, reduce social science by three hours, add four hours of foreign language and two hours of liberal arts capstone.

**Initiative #2:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by supporting the implementation of technology necessary for a premier liberal arts university and encouraging all stakeholders to explore and implement innovative strategies and techniques

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Technology Accessibility—provide resources routinely to all users independent of location by providing a networked computer to every faculty and staff member, contracting with a vendor to supply low-cost computers to students, and maintaining sufficient software licenses.
- B. Technological Literacy—develop methods to instruct all in the use of resources by requiring all freshmen and new transfers to enroll in a computer class or demonstrate computer literacy and providing training for faculty and staff.
- C. Technology-Enhanced Education—provide resources to enrich teaching and research by establishing classroom standards, providing a sufficient number of instructional technology classrooms, and developing departmental/school technology plans.
- D. Support—increase financial support for technology and technical support by establishing a Learning Technology Committee, conduct on-going studies of user needs, and update university technology plan on a continual basis.

**Initiative #3:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by improving communication internally and externally to promote better understanding of common goals on campus and greater recognition of Henderson’s strengths statewide and nationally BY:

- A. identifying impediments to internal communication among all members of the Henderson community;
- B. developing strategies to improve internal communication in all directions;
- C. aggressively increasing marketing and promotional efforts statewide;
- D. interacting with other public liberal arts institutions to provide benchmarks to assist in accomplishing our goals

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Communication and Technology Initiatives: Employ a webmaster, provide networked computer stations to all, institute an *Excellence in Teaching* resource center, and install computerized information kiosks.
- B. Communication and Advisement/Retention Initiatives: Provide advisor training and incentives, develop pre-orientation program, encourage advisor-advisee interaction

- C. Communication and External Constituencies Initiatives: Increase signage, educate Henderson personnel, expand and improve recruitment efforts

**Initiative #4:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by providing strong professional and graduate programs that reflect an enriching, enabling, ennobling, and empowering culture and produce a variety of professionals whose practice is informed by a liberal education

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Strengthen program content requirements—require graduate students to submit a "reviewed" article for publication prior to graduation or complete a juried performance/competition specific to the discipline; require/encourage graduate students and faculty to join at least one professional organization; require a comprehensive exit examination and thesis for all graduate programs;
- B. Promote and recognize professional and graduate programs—reward top three teachers/researchers; gather marketability data for all professional and graduate programs; increase number of graduate assistant positions to 50
- C. Provide for equitable representation on university committees—reconsider faculty senate representation; additional School of Education representative to graduate council; expand University Academic Council membership to include additional School of Education representative and graduate dean
- D. Empower professional and graduate faculty—decrease number of cross-listed courses in professional and graduate programs; seek specialized accreditation at the highest level for all graduate and professional programs; reduce faculty-student ratio and reliance on adjunct faculty

**Initiative #5:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by building a community of learners in which mutual stakeholders fully engage in discovery and construction of knowledge within the liberal arts culture

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Designate one hour during the day for non-instructional activities
- B. Establish a University theme which will be integrated into the curriculum each year
- C. Establish a senior year experience program which enables undergraduate students to *pull it together* and to better prepare for the life which comes after college

**Initiative #6:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by providing an open forum for external and internal collaboration and partnering

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Internal Collaboration—develop interdepartmental/interdisciplinary cooperation; develop interdepartmental recruitment teams; maintain a directory of collaborative activities
- B. Regional collaboration—expand collaboration with Ouachita Baptist University; enhance collaboration with area community and technical colleges; expand involvement with area businesses and organizations
- C. International collaborations—create an international studies minor; create a meaningful study-abroad program involving students and faculty

**Initiative #7:** Henderson State University will achieve initiative number one by empowering individuals to be creative, innovative, and flexible to meet the challenge of Henderson’s mission through managing resources at the dean, departmental, and director level.

**Team Recommendations:**

- A. Empowerment of staff—provide training, regular staff meetings, improve evaluation process, develop operations manual, increase staff representation on committees
- B. Empowerment of faculty, department chairs, deans, and directors—provide scholarships for each department, include summer in sabbatical leave program, encourage interdiscipline/interschool programming, decentralize more administrative decisions, improve flow of information, improve faculty and administrative evaluations
- C. Empowerment of students—publish senate minutes in Oracle, increase student representation on committees, improve University catalog, improve advising and registration process, increase interaction with other university students, increase availability of technology

A series of open forums on these initiatives provided feedback and the interest for developing strategic teams. From spring 1998 through early fall 1998, seven teams worked to develop each initiative. Summary team reports were periodically distributed and open forums held to give all stakeholders a chance to provide feedback. All this led to specific implementation plans (including cost and timelines) for each initiative.

In November 1998, a planning group wrestled with the plans of the seven initiatives to identify 3-5 key themes. The process included verbalizing expected outcomes, recognizing successes, envisioning headlines of the year 2020, and identifying three key themes. This led to the identification of three *bold strokes* for directing the future of Henderson State University. Those *bold strokes* are:

- ◆ **A distinctive, mission-driven liberal arts educational program characterized by excellence**
- ◆ **The University as a community of learners**
- ◆ **A University connected to the world**

These bold strokes will be accomplished by building on a foundation that includes technology and enhanced communications. To ensure that the process does not stop, success indicators must be developed to enable monitoring and adjustment as key themes are implemented.

*A Distinctive, Mission-Driven Liberal Arts Educational Program Characterized by Excellence*—Those who participated in the 1997-98 planning process determined that Henderson had not yet fully achieved its potential as Arkansas's public liberal arts university. Work must commence immediately to examine every aspect of the undergraduate curriculum to determine how well the current curricula enables the institution to achieve the seven tenets included in the mission statement. Those tenets are as follows:

- To think logically and critically*
- To communicate effectively*
- To appreciate the complexity and diversity of world cultures*
- To understand the physical universe*
- To participate as concerned and intelligent citizens*
- To mature intellectually, emotionally, and physically*
- To acquire mastery of a particular field of study*

A strategy that might reveal the extent to which the seven tenets are applied throughout the curriculum is to develop a *curriculum map*. In particular the general education program must be examined in this regard. Are we achieving our mission? What do we wish for students to learn through the general education program? What competencies do we expect? Mapping the curriculum may enable us to determine if the courses we required were actually designed to implement our mission. A further effort would involve determining how well students who have completed the general education program have achieved the goals set out in the seven tenets. This assessment process would assist in modifying the curriculum when warranted. Finally, fully defining the competencies we expect students to possess would permit better placement of entering students into appropriate courses.

Other strategies are likely also. Certainly the university might better utilize its scarce financial and human resources by developing collaborative efforts and interdisciplinary efforts to strengthen the undergraduate program. Capstone programs or senior-year experience programs that might be based on community service or the liberal arts also are an option. Strengthening the ability of the faculty to utilize technology as a tool in courses will add a dimension to the educational program. Also, adoption of a *university*

*theme* each year that would be integrated into courses in many academic areas may enhance the undergraduate and graduate experience.

*The University as a Community of Learners*—Much depends on the ability of the University community to come truly together as a *community of learners*. Certainly there are structural steps which may be taken which will encourage greater development of community and will strengthen the communication opportunities which are essential for the functioning of a community. Building on the success of the freshman-year experience program initiated in 1998, close contact with students *after* the freshman year, such as by providing annual fall (and, perhaps, spring) reunions of Henderson Seminar alumni, will assist in that effort. Expanding the orientation of freshmen to a 2-3 day program may also help develop the spirit of community among students that is desired. Further, new students might also benefit by the development of a cadre of well-trained faculty/staff advisers who can provide continuous support and advice to students during their first few semesters.

Other changes are possible also. It is reasonable to designate one hour per class day for non-instructional activities which will permit greater communication and involvement. The development of a *university theme* has already been mentioned; however, that effort would permit all university stakeholders to address them theme through coursework, distinguished speakers, and a multitude of activities and events during the year. Finally, numerous efforts to improve communications on campus may be undertaken, including strengthening the availability of technology, improving academic advisement, and joining with faculty to assist to participate in disciplinary professional associations.

These efforts and others may permit the University to address the challenge of creating community within an effective organizational structure while balancing efforts that foster individuality with efforts that foster building community and the common good. Much depends on the extent to which University stakeholders join in this effort to create community.

*A University Connected to the World*—It is imperative that Henderson State University recognizes that the importance of increased connections to the world outside of the institution. To fully achieve this goal, the University must strengthen its connection with two-year colleges in the state and region. That step involves more than recruitment of students. It also includes improving articulation between institutions and removing many of the barriers to access to the Henderson instructional program.

Implementation of this goal must also include expansion of the University's academic program through the many possibilities offered by *distance learning*. Much of our success in this area will depend on how well we can envision the opportunities provided by technology, whether through interactive video instruction or through web-based courses serving students throughout the world.

Opportunities to assist the community and region through the development of a regional workforce training center and through strengthened professional and graduate programs should be pursued. Finally, the University's commitment to international collaboration must be strengthened by increasing the number of international students to 150, enhancing the experience of the international student on campus, developing a minor in international studies and establishing a true "study abroad" program. The impact of increased *connection* to the world will be a stronger university that serves its students better.

*Concluding Observations*—If this strategic planning document is approved, the University should immediately empower academic leaders to identify the steps which must be taken next. Many steps have been identified in this report and in the reports of the strategic teams that can be taken quickly. For instance, development of a *working* definition of what it means to be Arkansas's public liberal arts university that can be used with prospective students and parents can be achieved. More importantly, the definition should be provided every employee of Henderson so that any person, staff or faculty, can articulate why Henderson State University is unique among its sister institutions. The planning efforts of 1998 will continue as academic leaders define and design the implementation steps. Many of the details developed by the earlier teams will be used as the foundation for that effort.