



CONCLUSION

# Living the Promise

*The best way to predict  
the future is to invent it.*

— Alan Kay



CONCLUSION

# Living the Promise

UWRF has experienced a significant number of changes, and has a full list of accomplishments since our last review. We are building on our strong tradition of commitment to the teaching and learning process, taking action to ensure that we will continue to be a vital organization responding to change, and taking the lead in solving the challenges facing our region, state, and world.

This report presents the results of the self-study undertaken by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for the re-accreditation visit by the Higher Learning Commission / North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The self-study process has provided a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the many changes and challenges that have occurred since the last NCA visit in 1998. The process has guided us to look forward to building on the traditions of excellence that have marked this institution. The process has included a wide cross-section of the campus community and has provided an opportunity to evaluate and affirm our continued commitment to educational excellence.

## **THE SELF-STUDY**

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## THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

The coordinator of the self-study was appointed in the spring of 2005, and the members of the central planning committee and the larger steering committee were appointed to begin their work in August of 2005. We have made conscious efforts to assure that the self-study process was as inclusive as possible. The committees include representatives from every major academic and administrative unit on campus. [The membership](#) includes faculty, administrators, academic and classified staff, as well as students and representatives of the community and the alumni. We have conducted a number of workshops for the campus and provided regular electronic updates to all faculty and staff. Awareness of the self-study is widespread and a large number of individuals across campus have contributed to its development.

In August 2005, the first organizational meetings were held for the members of the planning and steering committees, and a [timeline](#) was established for the process. A general information session was conducted for the entire campus as part of the faculty development workshop schedule. At the end of August,



Members of the campus community participate in an HLC/NCA workshop during faculty development days, August 2006.

Dr. John Taylor, our NCA campus liaison, came to campus to meet with administrators, members of the committees, and the campus community to kick off our efforts. The fall of 2005 was devoted to studying the re-accreditation process and organizing tasks. The report was divided around the major criteria, and the members of the steering committee were assigned to six task force groups. The members of the planning committee served as chairs or co-chairs of the task forces.

In January 2006 we held a meeting just prior to the start of spring semester as a workday to define the objectives and outline the work of the task forces. In the spring of 2006 the task force groups began the process of responding to the criteria, compiling lists of needed information and data, and creating draft outlines for each section of the report.

During the faculty development days in August 2006, a second workday was held for all of the task force groups. This was followed by a workshop for the entire campus to help everyone understand the self-study and re-accreditation process and timelines.

During fall 2006 the task forces wrote initial rough drafts for the self-study, which were circulated online to the campus for comments, suggestions and corrections.

A third workday for all of the taskforce groups was held in January 2007. Based on the responses to the first draft, the task forces created a second draft that was circulated in April 2007, and again comments were solicited. In the summer of 2007 a small writing team prepared a third draft that was submitted for public comment in August 2007.

Another campus-wide presentation was made on the self-study process during the faculty/staff development days in August 2007. External stakeholder comments were solicited through notices placed in publications, and presentations were made at local service clubs. In fall semester 2007, the task forces took one more look at their section of the criteria in the context of the entire self-study report, a reading team made editorial suggestions, and responses were collected from across the university community. Final comments and data elements were integrated into the report and the final report was prepared for publication in December 2007.

As part of the self-study process, all institutions are asked to address four cross-cutting themes and demonstrate that they are a learning-centered, connected, distinctive and future-oriented university. We believe the preceding chapters make the case that UWRF is such an institution.

## **CROSS- CUTTING THEMES**

### **UWRF IS A LEARNING-CENTERED INSTITUTION**

The UW-River Falls mission is clearly focused on student learning, and that mission is embedded in all that we do as a university. Our faculty is committed to the teaching/learning process, and faculty members are hired, retained, and promoted based largely on their abilities as teachers. The institution recognizes and celebrates outstanding teaching and advising. The university and the UW System provide many opportunities for faculty development and renewal, and resources are committed for that purpose. We have a strong commitment to undergraduate research and co-curricular programs that complement the learning taking place in our classes and laboratories.

Our general education program focuses on five assessable goals: communication; knowledge of past and present human endeavor; the ability to apply scientific principles to the natural world; multidisciplinary inquiry; and responsibilities to self, society and the world. There are two related university-wide requirements to provide students with a global perspective and knowledge of American cultural diversity. Together these requirements provide the basis for a well-rounded liberal arts education. With that base, students can explore a wide range of majors and minors to match their individual interests and career aspirations. Together we expect these areas of study to produce graduates with an appreciation of life-long learning who will become the “productive, creative, ethical, engaged citizens and leaders” promised in our mission statement.



The university's dedication to excellence is also demonstrated by our commitment to disciplinary accrediting programs. The College of Business and Economics is fully accredited by the [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International](#) (AACSB). Nearly every program in the College of Education and Professional Studies is externally accredited, as are all of the education programs in departments across the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. In all, the university reports to 12 [external accreditation bodies](#), in addition to the Higher Learning Commission. All hold strenuous academic standards and most have exacting expectations for assessment.

UW-River Falls has taken significant steps to institutionalize a culture of assessment. General education and programmatic goals for student learning are clearly stated, and assessment plans have been developed and implemented across the university. There is wide-spread use of assessment data to make programmatic change at the departmental level. We now have university structures in place, including annual reports and collection of data, to ensure that we maintain a campus-wide commitment to effective assessment.

Many additional structures and resources have been created to encourage and enhance the learning process. Our mentoring and support services are strong, and Student Affairs offers many opportunities for student growth and learning. Students have access to research funds, special presentations, international experiences, technology and library resources, and many student organizations that support the academic mission of the university. Most important, they have ready access to the faculty and staff, who practice a life of learning, sharing and applying their knowledge about real-world issues.

### **UWRF IS A CONNECTED INSTITUTION**

UWRF is a public institution that is seriously committed to the Wisconsin Idea—the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state. In fact, with our location on the western border of Wisconsin, our activities go beyond the state boundaries as we provide leadership to the communities of the St. Croix River Valley on “both sides of the river.” The river that divides the two states also unites us as we deal with the challenges and opportunities of the rapidly changing region.

The university is actively engaged in the region and has taken leadership in the regional tourism alliance, economic development corporations, arts and cultural events, and in many other areas. Our participation in the [UW Extension](#) program provides service in a wide variety of community development, land use planning, agricultural and natural resources areas. The entities in the [Regional Development Institute](#) (RDI), the [Center for Economic Research](#), the [Small Business Development Center](#), and the [St. Croix Institute for Sustainable Community Development](#) provide services that are valued by the communities, organizations, and businesses of the region. The [Office of Outreach and Graduate Studies](#) (OGS) provides classes and activities for people of all ages, and faculty and staff across the campus lend their expertise to provide guidance and help solve problems.

Our students are connected with the region through service-learning projects, engagement in community service, research, and internship opportunities. The [involvement center](#), [career services office](#), [student organizations](#) and individual faculty and staff coordinate student involvement in the region. These activities capture students' interests, provide opportunities for teamwork and leadership, and promote the values of engaged citizenship.

In addition to the learning opportunities for students, this work helps our community partners address issues and challenges for which they might seek expertise and resources. The university fulfills its mission of service and engagement by listening to and learning from our constituents and working closely with them to solve problems.

UWRF has not confined connections to our immediate area. We have been actively engaged in finding and working with partner institutions and organizations around the country and internationally. Our efforts on the Gulf Coast following [Hurricane Katrina](#) and our work with groups like the [American Democracy Project](#) are exemplars of our connections across the country. Under the leadership of Chancellor Betz, faculty and administrators have traveled around the world to create exchange partnerships and international internships, and to work on special projects. Our work with the [China Exploration and Research Society](#) to develop yak cheese is one example of these efforts. By being responsive to our partners' needs and taking action on possibilities, we develop relationships that connect the campus to the community, region, and the world.



In March 2006, Evan Johnson's Special Topics in Speech class joined more than 40 students and staff on a service-learning trip to the Mississippi gulf coast. They produced a six-minute video documenting the students' cleanup and rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Katrina, including bringing Grace Ladner's "dream home" to life.

Photo by Ryan Griffin.

## UWRF IS A DISTINCTIVE ORGANIZATION

The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has a clearly articulated vision statement that identifies our distinction.

*We will be the learning nucleus of the St. Croix Valley. We will act in close collaboration with communities, institutions and private enterprise to create a dynamic economy, sustainable communities and environment, and an optimum quality of life. Our efforts will be firmly rooted in unbounded inquiry and a cultivated sense of civility, public service and creative expression. We will be a highly accessible gateway to explore the full range of human potential. We will inspire and educate citizens and leaders who, guided by core values, will purposefully and ethically serve society. We will link our students and our*



*communities to global opportunities and collaborative relationships in the St. Croix Valley, in Wisconsin and beyond. We will be a life-long learning partner for all those who seek to discover their own potential and the richness and complexity of our multifaceted world.*

We are the leading educational and cultural resource in a truly dynamic part of the country. Located along a National Scenic Waterway and on the edge of the active and growing Twin Cities metropolitan area, our region is undergoing a rapid transition from rural small town to an increasingly suburban environment.

We possess unique expertise to provide aid to the region. Our strong programs in agriculture have an exceptional history of service to Wisconsin and the upper-Midwest, and we are helping to provide leadership with the major agricultural industries in the region and state. Increasingly, expertise in areas like soils and plant science are being applied in areas like urban and suburban landscape development and golf course management. Our nationally recognized programs in education serve both small rural and inner-city urban schools. Our business programs are aiding developing businesses and educating new leaders for the changing needs of local companies and organizations. Our arts and humanities programs support the cultural base of the region, and our strong science programs provide an excellent fit for the region, contributing to the development of the biotechnology industry. For a relatively small institution, we are making a significant impact.



**Students in the dance program traveled to Hawaii in January 2006 for an intensive eight-day study of the ancient hula dance form.**

We are poised to provide leadership in the issues of sustainability, energy efficiency, environmental awareness, and responsible, sustainable growth. Our new sustainable agriculture emphasis and the St. Croix Institute for Sustainable Community Development are role models for the future. Our growth agenda is intended to serve the state of Wisconsin and the region by increasing access to higher education and developing the educated citizens and leaders we need to ensure future prosperity.

A few of our unique programs were listed in the introduction, and several others were discussed in the body of this document. Our commitment to internationalizing the campus is evident in a number of ways. In the past three years we have sent students and faculty/staff to nearly every part of the world, including Antarctica. Recently, our chancellor was one of five American educators invited to a conference in the Middle East to discuss ways to expand educational opportunities in that part of the world.



## UWRF IS A FUTURE-ORIENTED ORGANIZATION

The university prides itself on its tradition of excellence in education and service to the region, and we plan to continue our heritage of commitment to the teaching/learning process. However, we fully realize that the region and the world around us are changing rapidly. We are prepared to make the necessary changes so that we can continue to provide future leadership.

UWRF is an active and vibrant institution that is successfully responding to change. Representatives from across the campus and from all of the governance groups worked to develop our strategic plan. “Living the Promise 2007-2012” has clearly defined goals and we are regularly developing and assessing action steps to make this a living plan. Regular benchmarking and re-evaluation will ensure that our vision is continuing to serve the needs of the institution and our many partners.

“Living the Promise” has 10 clear and distinct goals:

- create a culture of learning
- model sustainability principles
- expand global literacy and engagement
- develop engaged leaders
- foster a culture of inclusiveness
- promote the University of Wisconsin-River Falls
- invest in human resources
- enhance the use of technology
- invest in facilities to support our mission
- secure fiscal resources

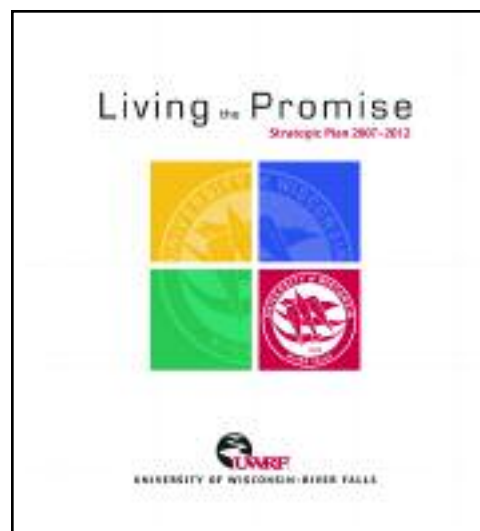
The premise that undergirds every step of the plan states:

*UWRF will engage in continuous quality improvement and assessment, define its priorities, and use solid information to make future decisions about how to use its resources. Working to make progress on these goals will help us to build a strong foundation for future achievements.*

In addition to the university’s strategic plan, planning for the future is occurring in virtually every area of the campus.

The campus has a comprehensive space plan that looks at space needs and the condition of current facilities. Within the next year, the university will be engaging the services of a firm to assist with developing a comprehensive campus master plan. We regularly re-examine and update that plan. We have seen significant changes in the past 10 years to the physical facilities, and clear and consistent planning will be essential if we hope to continue to be able to provide contemporary instruction.

Over the past 10 years, the university has made substantial investments in technology to support our programs. We have invested in campus network infrastructure, hardware and server upgrades, lab and computer modernization, the creation and maintenance of tech classrooms, software implementation,



A pamphlet produced in summer 2007 and widely distributed on and off campus details the university’s strategic plan.



and UW System common systems. Most significantly, the university has dedicated time and resources to the Information Technology Redesign Project. The project will ensure that we are creating an infrastructure that will meet future demands for technology on campus.

While state funding has continued to decline, the university has successfully utilized program revenue, cost recovery, special state allocations, grants and fundraising to meet university needs and priorities. The UWRF Foundation plays a critical role in the present and future funding of the university's scholarships and other priority needs. The foundation has been carefully planning approaches to substantially increase the future support for the university. Continued reductions in state funding will place our work in jeopardy.

We are engaging in additional and continuous planning to develop and support a wide range of areas, including our international programs, our first-year student programs, and our outreach programming. We are planning to meet System President Reilly and the UW System Board of Regent's [growth agenda](#) and to answer Governor Doyle's challenge to increase energy efficiency. We have not been content to accept things as they are or to simply replicate what has been working. We are consistently focused on planning to enhance our work for the future in a rapidly changing environment, and we look forward to continued successes.

## OVERVIEW

This has been a period of substantive adjustment and transformation for the institution, with new people in nearly every key leadership position and revisions in the administrative structure. Psychologists tell us that change, even positive change, creates stress. These adjustments have the potential to be particularly difficult here, because we have been stretched so thin. In every area of campus from the custodians and other classified staff to the faculty in the classrooms to the administration, people have been expending a great deal of time and energy, with full plates and declining support.

However, this is a resilient campus, filled with people who are very dedicated to the mission of the university and to providing service to our students and constituents. We have developed a legacy of strong programs shepherded by committed individuals. Chancellor Betz has brought exciting energy and commitment to campus, and together we have created a clear mission and vision of our future and a strong plan for how we are going to achieve that.

While self-reflection in the midst of a whirlwind might not be optimum or easy, the self-study process has provided energy and a sense of importance for all that we have been doing. Particularly when everyone is working so hard on particular tasks, we don't always take time to look around to see and appreciate what is being done across campus. The self-study has provided a unique opportunity to look at where we have been and where we are going.

## CHALLENGES

### DATA COLLECTION

UWRF is committed to basing strategic decisions on data, and we face a significant challenge with the collection of data. The lack of stability in the Office of Institutional Research has been a major problem. We are in the process of hiring our fourth director of institutional research in 10 years, and the office was vacant for over a quarter of that time. One of the first priorities for the self-study process was to fill that position. We had hopes that the problem had been resolved in December 2005 with the hiring of a new director. That hope faded when the subsequent resignation revealed additional gaps in our data collection processes.

The re-establishment of a strong office of institutional research is a top priority. However, we are taking time to adequately analyze our needs so that we can effectively search for the right person. We clearly understand the importance that a strong IR office plays in providing reliable data for our decisions and we know that this self-study process would have benefited greatly from the continued involvement of an effective IR professional. We have a data analyst in place at the beginning of 2008, and expect to have the search for a new director of institutional research successfully completed in the spring of 2008.

Early in the self-study process, the committee recognized that UWRF had a very decentralized assessment process and requested the appointment of a new campus assessment coordinator. That position was filled in January 2006. By the spring of 2007, we had revised assessment plans in place and reports on those plans for every academic program on campus.

Decentralized processes, short-staffed offices, changes in personnel, and changes in structures have complicated data collection in other areas as well. A particular problem is the absence of a single faculty database. Various offices have held information on credentials, demographics, appointments, class loads and student credit production, but those data elements have not been integrated. Inevitably, errors or omissions in one place can cause confusion when attempting to create consistent reports. The self-study process has increased our awareness of that problem and we have taken action to solve it. In 2007 campus administration made the decision to invest in faculty database subscriptions with [Digital Measures](#) and [Sedona](#) that will provide more complete information on the work of our faculty.

### TIME FOR ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The campus has accomplished an incredible amount in the past three years. The new mission and vision statements and the creation of a comprehensive strategic plan provide concrete evidence of that work. This is particularly impressive because of the campus-wide involvement in these processes. These were not top-down documents developed for perfunctory approval by the governance groups. All steps of the process were thoroughly vetted. At the same time, our faculty and staff continued our efforts on a wide variety of fronts while managing heavy workloads. External consultants have been impressed by how much we have accomplished in a short time.



We realize that we are still in the process of documenting our campus-wide assessment data and the results from the action steps of our strategic plan, but we have strong structures in place. The self-study has helped us understand and appreciate how much we are accomplishing, and we have begun to take steps to address areas of concern.

## **RESOURCES**

Perhaps the ultimate challenge is finding resources sufficient to maximize our potential. We continue to work to develop alternative sources of funding and external support. However, as a public institution, it is difficult to build in an era of continually diminishing state support. Concerns about faculty/staff salaries and the maintenance of adequate facilities are not only demoralizing, but they can ultimately become destructive for our long-term ability to hire and retain quality faculty and provide effective instructional environments.

University funding and support in Wisconsin has become more problematic as the UW System has served as a favored political target. The state regulates both funding levels and positions. In recent years, budget proposals have attempted to target specific positions and offices, cutting budgets while increasing the number and complexity of reports and required audits. We continue to be hopeful that our state legislators and the general public will understand the long-term value of investing in higher education. Most recently, we have made some tangible progress in that regard. However, the level of uncertainty in this process and Wisconsin's overall economic condition results in a level of uncertainty that can constrain effective long-range planning.

## **STRENGTHS**

This self-study provides evidence that we are a distinctive institution, closely connected to our community and region and committed to the teaching and learning process. We have a clearly articulated mission, and we have a planning process in place that defines how we will continue to build on those efforts. We are developing a strong culture of assessment, have evidence that documents that our curriculum is evolving in response to assessment results, and have put the structures in place to more clearly document the quality of our programs. Our self-study has made us more aware of the work of individuals and offices across the campus and of the work we might do to be even stronger and more effective.

We are proud of the strengths and accomplishments cited in this report. We are pointed to a future of greater possibilities and opportunities. Michael Middaugh, the IR director from the University of Delaware, said while on campus to lead a workshop on strategic planning: “The best days for UWRF clearly lie ahead.”

Grounded in a historic tradition of commitment to personalized teaching and service, rooted firmly in the present, and growing into a future that we are working to invent, UWRF is an institution that is poised to assume greater leadership in dealing with challenges of the region and beyond.

The introductory chapter summarizes the university’s response to the challenges noted by the last accreditation visit. The subsequent chapters present patterns of evidence that demonstrate that we have met all of the criteria for accreditation. The University of Wisconsin-River Falls submits this self-study in support of its request for re-accreditation, and we look forward to continuing involvement with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

## **REQUEST FOR REACCREDITATION**

