

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-RIVER FALLS

ESTABLISHED 1874

2008 Self Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

prepared for
The Higher Learning Commission
of the
**North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools**





Executive Summary

2008 Institutional Self-Study Report

Prepared for the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Higher Learning Commission

The University of Wisconsin-River Falls has engaged in an extensive, collaborative and intentional evaluation of its work to prepare for the 2008 High Learning Commission accreditation review. The HLC, the accrediting arm of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools



New students participate in Weeks of Welcome at the beginning of the fall semester. The orientation program is designed to ease the transition into college life and improve retention.

(NCA), is one of six regional agencies accrediting US higher education programs; it encompasses degree-granting institutions in 19 states. The Commission focuses on an institution's ability to meet standards that foster learning, scholarship and service.

One of 13 comprehensive institutions in the UW System, UWRF was founded in 1874 as the fourth Normal School in Wisconsin and was designated as a state teacher college in 1927. We received our initial accreditation in 1935. In 1951, with added liberal arts programs, we became the Wisconsin State College at River Falls. In 1964, we were authorized to offer graduate courses as the Wisconsin State University-River Falls. In 1971 when the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin State Universities were combined, we assumed our present name.

We currently enroll just over 6,400 undergraduate and graduate students in our four colleges:

Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences; Arts and Sciences; Business and Economics; and Education and Professional Studies. We

are part of a dynamic and growing section of the St. Croix Valley benefiting from Wisconsin's rural traditions and the metropolitan resources of Minnesota's Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul.

One of 13 comprehensive institutions in the UW System, UWRF was founded in 1874.

The HLC focuses on five fundamental criteria. This summary highlights some of the observations, strengths and challenges responding to those criteria and detailed in the UWRF's 2008 Self Study Report. (The complete report is available at <http://www.uwrf.edu/selfstudy>.)



Criterion One: Mission and Integrity

The University of Wisconsin-River Falls operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff and students.

CORE COMPONENT 1a. The mission documents of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls are clear and articulate publicly the institution's commitments.

CORE COMPONENT 1b. In its mission documents, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies and the greater society it serves.

CORE COMPONENT 1c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

CORE COMPONENT 1d. Governance and administrative structure promote leadership/collaboration to fulfill mission.

CORE COMPONENT 1e. The University of Wisconsin-River Falls maintains and upholds its integrity.

Career Services sponsors a career fair each fall as an opportunity for students and employers to meet one-on-one regarding position vacancies, opportunities, and internships. More than 100 employees participated in this 2007 fair.



Soon after his appointment in 2004 as UWRf's 16th Chancellor, Don Betz led an extended conversation involving faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members that articulated the university's mission, vision and core values.

UWRF FOCUSED MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to: Help students learn so that they are successful as productive, creative, ethical, engaged citizens and leaders with an informed global perspective.

VISION

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.

CORE VALUES

INTEGRITY—We earn trust through honesty and ethical behavior

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE—We help students attain their full potential as critical thinkers, effective communicators and committed life-long learners by providing personalized, integrated educational experiences

INCLUSIVENESS—We create an environment of mutual respect, professional behavior, academic freedom and appreciation of individual differences and rich cultural diversity

COMMUNITY—We intentionally cultivate leadership through community engagement and public service in the spirit of the Wisconsin Idea

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT—We strive for excellence through decisions based on information and analysis
<http://www.uwrf.edu/vision/>

We have communicated our mission, vision and values internally and externally through pocket cards, website formats, printed documents, framed posters in many buildings, and the personal contacts of our faculty, staff and students. We have worked to maintain the spirit and practice of shared governance – an area of concern noted in the 1997-98 accreditation review. Faculty, academic staff and student governance bodies along with classified staff have been involved in the mission, vision and values development and in the strategic planning initiative, “Living the Promise,” which began in 2006.



The University of Wisconsin-River Falls operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission.



A recent survey revealed that 97% of our faculty and staff were aware of the mission, vision and values and that 62% had provided feedback when these were developed.

Inclusiveness is a core value and is demonstrated in our people and programs. Through intentional and proactive recruitment programs, we have reached out to students of color, their families, schools and communities. We are a partner in UW-System's Plan 2008, designed to remove barriers associated with race, ethnicity and economic disadvantage in order to expand educational opportunities statewide. We require all students to complete coursework fulfilling our American cultural diversity and globalization requirements. We have a strong McNair scholars program, active multicultural organizations and programs and extend our annual diversity celebration, Unity in the Community, into the city of River Falls. Both the National Association of College Auxiliary Services (NACAS) and Wisconsin's Office of State Employment Relations (OSER) have recognized UWRF for outstanding diversity efforts. The diversity of our student body has increased by 90% compared to our 1997-98 enrollment, but we must continue working to close the achievement gap in terms of retention and graduation rates.

Inclusiveness is a core value and is demonstrated in our people and programs.



The annual Unity in the Community celebration includes multicultural music and dance performances both on campus and at the city's Veterans Park.

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.

CORE COMPONENT 2a

The University of Wisconsin—River Falls realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.

CORE COMPONENT 2b

The University of Wisconsin—River Falls resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

CORE COMPONENT 2c

The University of Wisconsin—River Falls ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

CORE COMPONENT 2d

All levels of planning align with the University of Wisconsin—River Falls mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

The University is focused on preparing both our students and our state for the demands of the 21st century. We are an active partner in the efforts of the State of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin System to grow Wisconsin's economy through a better educated workforce and more job opportunities. Excellent academic programs, a responsive curriculum, and proactive university-community partnerships are essential to growth initiatives. Fostering such growth also includes embracing a diverse society, meeting global competition, enhancing technology, and sustaining our natural and human resources. Chapter II provides examples of successful initiatives in each of these areas, framed by our strategic planning process.



Members of the classified staff participate in a professional development day activity, offered annually to enrich the work environment and provide training for improved performance.



“Living the Promise,” the strategic planning initiative begun two years ago, encompasses five operational goals: Create a Culture of Learning, Model Sustainability Principles, Expand Global Literacy and Engagement, Develop Engaged Leaders, and Foster a Culture of Inclusiveness. “LTP” also articulates five infrastructure goals: Promote UW River Falls, Invest in Human Resources, Enhance the Use of Technology, Invest in Facilities to Support our Mission, and Secure Fiscal Resources. The goals are grounded in our mission, vision and values; they are pursued with sound growth strategies that require appropriate fiscal, human and capital resources. The colleges and administrative units engage in planning efforts consistent with our university mission and values.



The “Sustainability Starts With You” display in the University Center, also known as the “green” kiosk, includes a wealth of information about green lifestyle choices through touch-screen multi-media technology and panels about energy consumption, recycling and more. The kiosk is sponsored by UWRF, Wisconsin Public Power Inc., and River Falls Municipal Utilities.

The university is in the first year of a revised budget process that will link resource allocation more directly to campus priorities identified through “LTP.” This more transparent budget process increases input from faculty and staff, emphasizes a university-wide cooperative approach and we expect it to better align budgetary priorities and our university mission.

An important component of our integrated planning and budgeting cycle is assessment for continuous improvement. As an example, the self study details the Information Technology Redesign project, an initiative begun in 2006 that is successfully re-tooling our technology resources, from hardware and software upgrades to improved leadership, communication and customer service.

The steady decline in state higher education funding is an on-going challenge for the university. Since 2001, we have experienced \$3.7 million in budget cuts and a reduction of 20.47 positions. Low (regionally non-competitive) faculty and staff salaries, recently exacerbated by limited health care options, and a very lean administrative structure remain significant challenges. Wise planning and prioritizing, managed enrollment growth, and energetic pursuit of external funds are key university responses to these fiscal challenges.

Criterion 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching



The University of Wisconsin-River Falls provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

CORE COMPONENT 3a: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

CORE COMPONENT 3b: UW-River Falls values and supports effective teaching.

CORE COMPONENT 3c: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls creates effective learning environments.

CORE COMPONENT 3d: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls learning resources effectively support student learning.

UWRF's personnel policies and campus culture emphasize effective teaching. The university has maintained this historic commitment to effective teaching and learning while implementing a process of assessment and continuous improvement. In 2000, we began to develop our new general education program, which took effect in 2005-06. Assessment is central to the general education program and was the basis upon which new or revised courses were included in the program.

Each academic program has an assessment plan in place and departments are modifying programs in response to assessment feedback. Ninety four percent of department chairs responding to a summer 2007 survey indicated that they had made course or program changes in response to assessment data. The university recently created a 50% assessment coordinator position to better manage our decentralized assessment activities.

Our Faculty and Academic Staff Development Board administers professional development opportunities such as travel grants, sabbaticals, retraining and renewal opportunities and collaborates with UW System on other development initiatives.

Our faculty retention, tenure, promotion and merit processes give high priority to teaching; scholarship and service are also important components. There are on-campus faculty development programs at the start of each semester and opportunities to share and support professional pedagogical research. The UW System Office of Professional Development (OPID) also provides support for faculty engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

An important component of our integrated planning and budgeting cycle is assessment for continuous improvement.



Both the UW System and our campus recognize outstanding teaching. The UW System annually bestows two Regent's Awards for Teaching Excellence; two UWRF faculty have received the award in the last five years. Every year, UWRF honors an outstanding faculty member as Distinguished Teacher and the individual colleges also recognize their exceptional teachers.

Our advising and tutoring services, student affairs, student health services, career services and disability services support student life and learning. The First Year Experience program, begun in 2006 and funded in part through the UW system growth initiative, is a coordinated effort to provide first year students and families the resources needed for student success.

The "green" UC, dedicated in 2006, is a unifying focal point for the campus and embodies our commitment to sustainability.

Technology supports teaching through general access and dedicated computer labs and through Desire to Learn (D2L) our campus courseware platform, now used by more than 60% of faculty. In 2004, 183 courses had materials on D2L; in 2007, there were 740 such courses. The Technology Leadership Cadre, a College of Educational and Professional Studies initiative, is a group of students trained to assist faculty in technology use. Significant segments of our campus became wireless in 2007 further enhancing our culture of learning. Our library provides a rich array of electronic resources as well as more traditional hard copy holdings; assessments show high campus satisfaction with the customer service librarians provide.

Many remodeling projects have enhanced our facilities. Examples include South Hall, home of our newly accredited College of Business and Economics, and upgraded training and locker rooms in Knowles Center. Major new construction projects include the Wyman Education Building; the state of the art Dairy Learning Center; the C.H.I.L.D. Center providing child care for campus and community members; the George R. Field South Fork Suites, a new suite style residence hall; and the University Center. The "green" UC, dedicated in 2006, is a unifying focal point for the campus and embodies our commitment to sustainability. A new Health and Human Performance building is a campus priority, and we are examining options to improve our science facilities.

Future challenges include improving our institutional data gathering and analysis, increasing financial assistance for students, developing new course delivery methods, growing supporting infrastructure for international programs, and continuing to upgrade technology

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.

CORE COMPONENT 4a: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls demonstrates, through the Actions of Its Board, Administrators, Faculty and Staff that it values a life of learning.

CORE COMPONENT 4b: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

CORE COMPONENT 4c: The University of Wisconsin-River Falls assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

CORE COMPONENT 4d: UW-River Falls provides support to ensure that faculty, staff, and students acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

Public celebrations of faculty, staff and student scholarship are excellent examples of how we live lives of learning. Each year at our Celebrating Research, Scholarship and Creative Activities Day (CRSCA) faculty and staff display their work. Over the last four years, more

than 200 presentations, 100 articles, and books, monographs, productions and artistic work have been showcased at this event.

The University's Office of Grants and Research assists faculty and staff seeking support; 66% of our faculty and staff have received an internal grant and 33% have been funded from an external source. In 2006-07, the university received \$3.65 million in grant funds and has had three Title III Strengthening the Institution grants.



A UW-River Falls Falcon Tutor helps these St. Paul youth with their English assignment.



Our students have become engaged scholars, encouraged by faculty mentors and supported by our student undergraduate research program. Hundreds of students annually attend regional and national conferences on undergraduate research such as NCUR, the Midwestern Psychological Association and other discipline specific meetings. We support student – faculty collaborative research with summer stipends and research grants. Students of color also attend and present scholarship at the American Multicultural Student Leadership Conference, organized by the UW System. UWRF student scholars have done physics research at the South Pole, studied environmental impacts of estrogen pollution in Wisconsin and won a national costume design award at the American College Theatre Festival.

Students in the dance program traveled to Hawaii in January 2006 for an intensive eight-day study of international and intercultural dance forms.



An array of opportunities engage students beyond the boundaries of classroom time. Departments offer internship experiences in our region as well as internationally. Service experiences range from helping Hurricane Katrina victims rebuild

to developing yak cheese production in Tibet. Our Global Connections office facilitates international experiences from a residential Wisconsin in Scotland program to a European Traveling Classroom to a month of teaching English in Taiwan to a research intensive semester abroad. On campus co-curricular activities include some 160+ campus clubs, music and arts groups, Division III athletics and intramurals. University-wide initiatives such as the American Democracy Project and “Coffee With the Times” encourage ethical and engaged citizenship.

Our students have become engaged scholars, encouraged by faculty mentors and supported by our student undergraduate research program.

In our masters level graduate programs, students develop and apply knowledge and, in so doing, meet state and regional needs. The MSE Science program has enabled some 150 high school science teachers become certified in physics, meeting needs of regional and state schools.

Challenges remain in preparing students for a diverse society and sufficiently supporting faculty and staff research and development. Nonetheless, these stories exemplify how we integrate learning and service, leadership and collaboration to develop students prepared for the 21st century.

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service



As called for by its mission, the University of Wisconsin-River Falls identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

CORE COMPONENT 5a

The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.

CORE COMPONENT 5b

The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

CORE COMPONENT 5c

The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

CORE COMPONENT 5d

Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

We will be the learning nucleus of the St. Croix Valley. That first sentence of our vision statement captures our commitment to serving constituents. We exemplify the Wisconsin Idea, UW President Van Hise's 1904 philosophy that the "influence of the university [should reach] every family in the state." Through our Outreach and Graduate Studies office, our colleges, and our collaborative partners, we work on varied and valuable initiatives. Almost 200 external partners, in responding to a survey about our outreach efforts, noted that UWRF overall was "very important (52%) or important (43%) to me or my organization" and was "very important (61%) or important (39%) to the region." Numerous advisory councils provide us with input and feedback on our work.

Through our Outreach and Graduate Studies office, our colleges, and our collaborative partners, we work on varied and valuable initiatives.

A few examples of our colleges' leadership and service include: leadership in agricultural education, Dairy Science, food and animal production and sustainability initiatives (CAFES); expertise and community programming from biotechnology to the fine arts (CAS); business services through the Small Business Development Center, the Center for Economic Research and our Masters of Management program (CBE); and preparing teachers, school counselors, social workers, and communicative disorders professionals as well as exceptional student Falcon Tutors who serve diverse learners (COEPS).



“planning and planting for the future. . . UW-River Falls is an intensely human story about the power of learning to change lives and, thereby, change societies.”

Our office of Outreach and Graduate Studies initiates and coordinates numerous credit and noncredit courses and community programs to serve people of all ages and backgrounds, from children to senior citizens. The Survey Research Center, a component of Outreach, provides a valuable data collection service to academics, non-profits, governmental entities and others. In 2006, Outreach worked closely with Chippewa Valley Technical College to obtain a \$2.5 million Title III grant “Stronger Together: An Educational Partnership for the Changing Economy,” to advance on-line learning. The university’s Advancement Office nurtures our alumni connections, and community members have essential roles in the University Foundation – a key connection as we begin our first comprehensive fund-raising campaign.

Our faculty conduct community musical groups, serve on regional literacy councils, consult on community development throughout the region, give public presentations, and are members of county economic development corporations. Several faculty hold joint appointments with UW-Extension. The university has been a leader and partner in statewide economic summits and in such groups as the St. Croix Valley Regional Tourism Alliance, the Western Wisconsin Intergovernmental Collaborative, and the recently formed St. Croix Institute for Sustainable Community Development. A direct and very beneficial economic impact comes from the Kansas City Chiefs summer training camp, which UWRF has hosted every year since 1991.

Students engage in internships, service projects, research and independent study that benefits stakeholders locally and around the world.

As we continue these successful efforts, we are also working to address challenges of increasing our outreach-related funding and positions, of responding quickly to this dynamically changing region, and of more effectively coordinating our service initiatives.

Conclusion

The University of Wisconsin-River Falls Self Study Report details our strengths and challenges. It “tells our stories” – stories that describe a future-focused, learning-focused, connected and distinctive institution. In the words of Chancellor Betz, we are “planning and planting for the future...UW-River Falls is an intensely human story about the power of learning to change lives and, thereby, change societies.”

