Expanding the Vision: January 2009 Supplement


The “Expanding the Vision” report submitted in November presented Bethel College’s institutional self-evaluation through the 2007/08 academic year and 2008 fiscal year (as noted in the Introduction, page 9, of that report). This supplement is designed to provide a focused update of institutional developments through the fall 2008 semester and into January 2009.

The following report is organized into three major sections:

1) Progress on challenges identified in the self-study report
2) President’s Report on significant budgetary challenges
3) Preview of board of directors meetings

Progress on challenges identified in “Expanding the Vision”

As reported in the Introduction to the full self-study report (page 9), findings of that institutional self-study process have been disseminated to the entire campus, to inform the campus community of key institutional strengths and challenges, and to serve as an institutional planning document to prompt action and improvement where needed.

As will be noted in the next major section presenting the President’s Report, significant budgetary challenges (exacerbated by the national economic downturn and endowment losses) have demanded primary attention, thus much of the institutional work throughout the fall semester has concentrated on allocation of resources in order to ensure fulfillment of the college’s mission.

While institutional attention has been focused primarily on addressing issues concerning the college’s resource base (Component 2b), progress has been made in several other areas identified as challenges in the self-study report. Examples of that ongoing progress prompted by the self-study follow here:

1. Mission & Integrity

As discussed in Chapter One of the self-study report (on page 31, and noted as a “Challenge” on page 56), the Bethel College mission statement has integrity, but its length and multiplicity of terms risk diffusing the mission and blurring its distinctiveness. In the fall 2008 semester, specific actions to address clarity and distinctiveness of the college mission included:
• Ongoing work by the Committee on the Future of the College (CFC) to focus more sharply and articulate more clearly an academically distinctive program. CFC met August 22-23 and December 13-14 to advance that work, and will hold a late January session in conjunction with the board of directors meeting. At the October board meetings, CFC’s report to the board included the following statement: “Our world changed permanently in the summer/fall of 2008 during the recent period of concern with the financial/market/economic crisis . . .; this has created a heightened sense of urgency, causing the CFC to need to move ahead more rapidly, something [it] will do.”

• A video project launched by the Institutional Communications department to create videos that illustrate the key concepts and core ethics of the Bethel mission statement. The first video in that series, with the entire mission statement for its scope, will be shown at all-student convocation gatherings early in the spring 2009 semester. Additional videos completed for this project focus more narrowly on key traits or ethics of the mission statement: discipleship, scholarship, service, and integrity. (A DVD of these videos is available in the Resource Room.)

2. Preparing for the Future

The President’s Report that follows in a major section below presents a comprehensive review of progress made during the fall 2008 semester to address allocation of resources. In addition to that strategic work conducted in coordination with the board of directors, the college administration continued to address the specific challenge identified in Chapter Two (page 99) of the self-study report: “Bethel must effectively strategize to recruit students from growing demographics.”

During the fall 2008 semester, actions taken by the college to address this challenge included: a) implementation of a “Campus Visit Cash” incentive program, and b) the development of a Transfer Recruitment Strategy.

“Campus Visit Cash” program

Seeking to be proactive in the face of an economic recession that could discourage attendance at private colleges, Bethel launched a new incentive designed to encourage prospective students and their families to make a campus visit and become informed about the relative affordability of attending Bethel College. In addition to promoting this program on local and regional radio and print outlets, the college has made this a prominent link on the “Highlights” section of the website’s homepage (see http://www.bethelks.edu/future_students/visit_bethel/index.php). That link presents prospective students with the following offer:

“The current economic situation may have you asking whether you can afford college at all, let alone a private college. Because we are so confident (1) you will want to attend Bethel College if you visit campus, and (2) we can show you how a Bethel College
education can be just as affordable as a state university, we are offering you $100 to visit campus.

If you are a dependent student – first-time freshman or transfer – who brings a parent or guardian to a campus visit scheduled through the Office of Admissions, completes a financial aid session and submits (or has already submitted) an application, we will waive your application fee and you’ll walk away with $100 cash upon completion of your visit. To take advantage of this offer, you must be planning to enter college during the 2009-2010 school year and must schedule your visit between Nov. 17, 2008, and March 31, 2009.”

As of January 8, 2009, 27 prospective students and their parent/guardian have availed themselves of this offer. Participants are completing a short survey to help the college assess the program’s effectiveness.

Transfer Recruitment Strategy

Prompted by a decline in new transfer students from fall 2007 to fall 2008, and recognizing the critical importance of this segment of potential students for Bethel College recruitment, President Barry Bartel formed a Transfer Recruitment Taskforce in October 2008 with the charge of developing new strategies for such recruitment by the end of the fall 2008 semester.

As stated by the completed report from that group, “The Taskforce was charged by President Bartel to meet several times and finalize a written Transfer Recruitment Strategy report by the end of the fall 2008 semester that would 1) describe existing strategies and changes already implemented; 2) recommend additional short-term strategies for faculty, admissions, marketing, student life, and others; and 3) identify any other long-term issues that need further attention with respect to transfer recruitment. To the extent that mid-year recruitment of transfers is possible, efforts to increase that possibility for spring 2009 semester were also to be considered.”

In completing its charge, that Taskforce evaluated current transfer recruitment practices, conducted a campus forum on transfer recruitment, met with a nearby community college dean of enrollment management for counsel, and met with a focus group of current Bethel transfer students to inform its recommendations. The Taskforce made the following specific recommendations:

Short-term strategies:

- Present financial aid seminar to all faculty with emphasis on federal dollars available and loan forgiveness programs.

- Develop one-page transfer guides/dual advising form for each academic program beginning with Butler Community College and then for Hutchinson Community College for distribution at colleges and placement on Bethel Web site.
Long-term strategies

- Maintain contacts annually – president, department heads, admissions personnel, etc. – with community college personnel.

- Develop one-page transfer guides/dual advising form for each academic program and for general education courses for additional priority community colleges and state colleges for distribution at colleges and placement on Bethel Web site.

- Increase visibility at community colleges via visitation and advertisement.

- Construct joint efforts and experiences with Hutchinson Community College and Butler Community College (similar to previous joint musical and Martin Luther King Day celebration with Hesston College).

- Improve transfer orientation, considering possibility of common opening course for all transfer students.

3. **Student Learning and Effective Teaching**

Two important updates relevant to Criterion Three include: a) progress on assessment of general education and major academic programs, and b) an update on a focused site-visit conducted by the nursing program’s professional accreditation body.

**Progress on Assessment**

As evident in the analysis and evaluation offered by Chapter Three of “Expanding the Vision,” the college’s faculty Assessment Committee has played a critical role in developing an assessment cycle mindset among the faculty, and that committee has continued to encourage authentic, integrated assessment practices by the faculty in order to address the challenges identified in Chapter Three.

Assessment Committee actions in fall 2008 included:

- Developing and implementing an additional assessment of general education oral competency. In conjunction with the coordinator of the course Basic Issues of Faith and Life (BIFL is a “core” general education class taken by every graduate in their senior year), the Assessment Committee developed a rubric to assess the oral component of the interview examination required in that course. That rubric was used by each of the four instructors of BIFL in the fall semester, and will be used for both the January interterm and spring semester in 2009. Data have not yet been entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed.

- Continuing to collect departmental reports of assessment, making further progress toward the 100% compliance goal.
• Conducting an initial review of data and comments collected from the most recent alumni survey focused on graduates’ perception of their major program. Collected data and comments have been sent to each department chair. A full report will be sent to faculty during the spring 2009 semester.

**Nursing Accreditation Focused Site-Visit**

As reported in the Federal Compliance section of “Expanding the Vision” (on page 246), Bethel learned in late spring of 2008 that the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) would “conduct a focused site-visit in the fall 2008 semester regarding the NCLEX first-time pass rate.”

In preparation for that visit, the Interim Director of Nursing submitted “A Focused Self-Study for CCNE Site Visit: December, 2008” (available in the Resource Room). On December 3, two evaluators for CCNE (Betty M. Johnson and Barbara R. Kelley) conducted the visit, accompanied for most of their sessions by Mary Blubaugh, executive director of the Kansas State Board of Nursing.

In their preliminary report offered verbally in an exit interview, the evaluators expressed strong support for the progress that the nursing program has made in recent months. In their oral remarks, the evaluators stated they had not found compliance concerns regarding Key Elements IV-B and IV-C, the foci of their visit.

In a letter dated December 3, 2008 (available in the Resource Room), CCNE Director Jennifer Butlin informed Bethel College that the official team report will be completed in about eight weeks; if that report has been received prior to the February 16-18 HLC site visit, a copy will be available in the Resource Room.

**4. Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge**

Chapter Four of the “Expanding the Vision” report evaluated the college’s revised General Education program and its Athletics program as important contributors to the life of learning on campus, and while it recognized that both programs “have made progress in assessment,” it also concluded that “it is critical that both areas sustain steady progress toward fuller assessment of outcomes” (page 182).

Further steps have been taken toward that goal, including: a) further revision of the general education learning outcomes, and b) drafting of an Athletics Program Review.

**General Education Assessment**

In the subsection of Chapter Four titled “Additional GE assessment in development,” the self-study report stated: “The Assessment Committee plans to revise the specific learning outcomes drafted by faculty across the curriculum into uniform language and assessable form” (page 177). That task was completed during the fall 2008 semester, and the complete listing of those revised outcomes may be found in the Resource Room.
Completion of that step positions the faculty to implement in the spring 2009 semester its plan (as promised in the self-study report, pages 177-178) “for all GE course evaluations . . . to include this indirect measure of learning outcomes.”

Athletics Assessment

While the self-study report’s remarks regarding Athletics focused on the potential for better assessment of specific outcomes such as social involvement, service, and leadership of student-athletes (see pages 168-170), progress prompted by the self-study process has been broader in scope. Prompted by the institutional self-study, in summer of 2008 Athletics Director Diane Flickner completed a working draft of a “Bethel College Athletics Program Review,” a copy of which is available in the Resource Room.

As Athletics Director Diane Flickner notes in her “Opening Commentary” to that document, the purpose of that program review is to examine the strategic relationship of the athletics program and the college. Director Flickner’s report provides a working draft of “recommendations and benchmarks” to measure how well the goals and objectives of the athletic program are being realized.

That working draft includes four sections: 1) an overview, which includes the department’s goals, values, vision and mission, and history; 2) an action plan, which identifies objectives and measurements; 3) resource information, consisting of data collection, focus area narratives, and recommendations; and 4) additional documentation.

This working draft provides the framework for continuing strategic planning in Athletics.

5. Engagement and Service

As noted in the President’s Report that follows in the major section below, the college has decided to continue its current capital campaign, while recognizing that current economic circumstances may slow its progress. Guided by the analysis of the Advancement Office, the college has concluded that suspension of the capital campaign would not necessarily generate additional donations to the annual fund for operations, so it is best to continue in the current quiet phase and simply delay moving to the public phase of the campaign. The college remains committed to engaging its alumni and donor base in order to complete the $21.0 million campaign and achieve its goals of remodeling and expanding Old Science Hall to create an Academic Center/Nursing facility, and doubling the endowment.
President’s Report on significant budgetary challenges

The Introduction of “Expanding the Vision” provides an overview of the “culture of strategic planning” that has characterized decision-making at Bethel College, including a sustained Institutional Plan, long-term strategic planning by the Committee on the Future of the College, and a capital campaign designed to ensure the college’s strength by building for academic excellence and doubling the endowment.

Significant fiscal challenges arising during the fall 2008 semester have underscored the importance of the college’s commitment to (in the words of the Conclusion of the self-study document, page 228) “appraise its challenges realistically, then plan accordingly to act responsibly in order to sustain its mission.” As evident in the President’s Report below, the college has been responding to these challenges with such realistic appraisal and responsible planning and action.

A confluence of factors early in the fall 2008 semester created a projected revenue shortfall of $330,000: 1) student enrollment for fall 2008 (500 headcount; 475 full time) underperformed the budgeted enrollment number, with the number of first-time freshman students increasing over 10% over fall 2007 (from 108 to 119), but the number of new transfers dropping significantly; 2) while the fall-to-fall comprehensive retention rate was within the 10-year range, at 77% it was three percentage points below the college’s five-year average and it too underperformed the budgeted rate; and, 3) financial aid discounting was higher than budgeted, partly due to performance awards exceeding the budgeted number, but also due to increased academic qualifications of matriculating students driving up the rate of academic scholarships.

Concurrent with projecting that revenue shortfall, the college recognized that erosion of available institutional funds (see page 74 of the self-study report) and the prospect of endowment losses during the national recession would present the college with serious budgetary challenges for both this current and the next fiscal year.

In November Barry Bartel submitted to the board of directors a President’s Report titled “Fiscal Analysis in Unprecedented Times,” which provided a comprehensive, integrated account of the efforts undertaken in recent months to meet these fiscal challenges. While this document was written originally for the board of directors as its primary audience, and to guide the administration’s and board’s decision-making as its primary purpose, both the November 22 version and the updated January 18 version have been sent to HLC/NCA evaluation team members to provide a direct, unmediated account of how the campus community, administration, and board have engaged these issues.

Preview of board of directors meetings

As is evident in the President’s Report above, particularly in the section titled “Recommendation and Process and Request for Board Action,” institutional work throughout the fall 2008 semester has prepared the stage for significant action by the
board of directors at their special meeting on January 23-24 and regular spring meeting on March 6-7.

Two documents currently in preparation for the January 23-24 meeting are: 1) A revised version of the President’s Report, with updated numbers and analysis; and 2) A “Positioning Bethel for the Future” document, which will provide greater detail on plans for the college to reshape its operating model to ensure greater flexibility and strength in the face of fiscal challenges. Both of those January documents will be available in the Resource Room.

It is anticipated that decisions made by the board of directors on January 23-24 and March 6-7 will represent critical progress on the challenges reported above. While the period between the January 23-24 meetings and the HLC/NCA site visit on February 16-18 is brief, the college expects that in that interim it will be taking significant action prompted by those board decisions. Reports and documents emerging from those January 23-24 meetings and the subsequent three weeks of institutional work to implement those decisions will be available in the Resource Room.