Strategic Positioning
Culture Task Force
Focus Group Report -
Final Draft
June 2, 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The PEL Team wishes to thank the Culture Task Force for their contributions to and encouragement of our Focus Group work. We extend a special thank you to Linda Thrane, Wokie Grigsby, and Sandy Kornlath for the support they provided throughout the Focus Group process.
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Executive Summary

"Trying to define culture is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall"
- Juan Moreno

In response to the charge received from the Culture Task Force, the President’s Emerging Leaders (PEL) group set out to gather student, faculty, and student perceptions of University of Minnesota culture within the context of the Strategic Positioning goal to become a top three public research university. The Culture Task Force determined the key focus group questions would center on:

- What are people’s perceptions of the University’s current culture?
- How do people envision the culture of a top three public research university?
- What changes would the University need to make including strengths to emphasize and obstacles to overcome to maintain a culture for a top three public research university?

This work captures a snapshot in time of University culture from key campus audiences while those groups and the University are in the midst of the Strategic Positioning process. The data are unique in providing perceptions, questions, and ideas about University culture that have not been gathered through other aspects of the Strategic Positioning process thus far.

The PEL group facilitated 11 focus groups between January and March 2006, with a total of 82 participants. Focus groups included undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students; faculty; and P&A, Civil Service, and Bargaining Unit staff. The sessions were held on the Twin Cities, Crookston, Duluth, and Morris campuses.

The following report explores the main themes regarding perspectives on the current University of Minnesota culture that surfaced from an analysis of the aggregate focus group data. These themes are further explored as they each relate to University culture and within the context of alignment with the focus group questions asked.

The overarching themes that emerge from the focus group data are:

- **Lack of definition for/confusion around the goal to become a top three public research university**
  The common theme among all focus groups is confusion, discomfort, and in some cases, resistance to the Strategic Positioning goal of becoming a top three public research university. Participants are often so mired in dissecting the top three goal that they are unable to focus on or assess the existing University culture.

- **Research at the expense of teaching**
  Participants say that while teaching is just as important as research, teaching gets short shrift. The tension between research and teaching leads to a fear, particularly in light of the Strategic Positioning goal, that resources are or will be diverted to research at the expense of teaching.

- **University role as a land grant university**
  One consistently surfacing theme is the University’s role, and therefore responsibility, as a land grant university. Participants (faculty, staff, and students) see the mission and responsibility of a
land grant university as assisting all of its citizens with potential to gain access to the University, as well as opportunities for civic engagement and service learning.

- **Lack of collaboration**
  A recurring theme is the isolation of University units and departments, often referred to as the “silo effect,” leading to a lack of collaboration among the segments of the University community.

- **Isolation and lack of community**
  Participants explain that they often do not feel connected to the University as a whole, with faculty, staff, and students professing their loyalty to their particular units or departments rather than the University as a whole.

- **Exclusionary decision-making process**
  A number of participants take issue with the University’s leadership style, both as an aspect of our culture and a barrier to change. There is a perception that the University utilizes a top-down decision-making process with little or no consultation with other members of the University community and a lack of input.

- **Sense of stewardship toward the University**
  Among staff and faculty, another theme centers on stewardship. Participants express a feeling of stewardship or responsibility for the University and its resources, whether those resources are physical space, public funding, time, or employees.

- **Pride in the University**
  Many faculty and staff participants express pride in the University, the work they do, and the role of the University within the general Minnesota community.

In addition, important themes distinct to the coordinate campuses (Crookston, Duluth, and Morris) are also identified:

- **Not a university, but a system of universities**
  Nowhere is the lack of one culture for the University more evident than in the recurring theme that the University is a system of institutions, rather than one university. Focus group participants, and in particular those from coordinate campuses, view each individual campus as having a separate identity and culture, which is reinforced by different logos, mascots, policies and procedures.

- **Lack of understanding of coordinate campus character and mission**
  Participants on all three coordinate campuses describe their frustration that members of the Twin Cities campus, particularly Central Administration and those directing Strategic Positioning, lack an understanding of the character and mission of their particular campuses.

- **Lack of interaction and collaboration with Twin Cities campus**
  Coordinate campus participants express frustration at the lack of interaction and collaboration with their Twin Cities colleagues and the lack of knowledge their Twin Cities colleagues have of what is occurring on the coordinate campuses.

- **Lack of consultation and input**
  Echoing their Twin Cities campus colleagues, coordinate campus participants raise as an obstacle the lack of input and/or consultation in the future or major decisions pertaining to their respective campuses. Morris and Crookston participants cite upheavals in leadership and a resulting leadership void as well as a lack of clear messages from Central Administration regarding the future of their campuses.
• **Strong sense of community within each coordinate campus**

Unlike the Twin Cities focus groups, coordinate campus participants recognize that a singular identity or culture transcends their particular units and departments and embraces their entire campus.

To assist in developing a forum for gathering action and implementation steps for the Culture Task Force, a section on Future Considerations is included, highlighting ideas and undertones the PEL group heard that do not fit neatly into the core focus group questions. These considerations include ideas around future engagement with the focus group participants; communications ideas for defining the goal of becoming a top three and putting a personal and meaningful face on the University; embracing the diversity and cultural competence needed to be a top three; using the power of listening to engage the University community in Strategic Positioning; and leveraging the University’s vision and mission as an authentic way to connect with students, faculty, and staff as the University moves to embrace the culture of a top three public research university.

When viewed collectively, the tone of the focus groups is critical but hopeful. While the themes reflect a dissatisfaction with the University in certain areas, focus group participants also share a sense of pride and stewardship in the University. The data reveal that although there is no one culture at the University, there is an overarching attitude (and the closest the PEL group observed to a unifying thread for faculty and staff focus groups) that the people who work at the University are working toward the future. They have an impact on the lives of students and on the citizens of Minnesota. Students did express connections to their programs or colleges, but they see their connections to the University as more fleeting than those of faculty and staff. The University vision is to improve the human condition through the advancement of knowledge, and through indirect ways and language, participants (faculty, staff, and students) articulate this vision.

**Background & Methodology**

Eleven focus groups were facilitated by the PEL group between January and March 2006. Data from the University Relations Faculty Focus Groups held April 6 and 21, 2006 were also used in the analysis. (See Appendix A for the faculty focus group protocol and questions related to University culture.) These data are included because several attempts at holding Culture Task Force faculty focus groups (both for tenure and tenure track and for other faculty [lecturers, instructors, adjuncts, etc.]) as part of the Culture Task Force work were not successful. Focus groups included:

**Twin Cities Campus:**
- Undergraduate Students
- Graduate Students
- Professional School Students
- Bargaining Unit Staff
- Civil Service Staff
- P&A Staff
- Heterogeneous group that included P&A staff, Civil Service staff, faculty, graduate students
Duluth Campus
- Two heterogeneous groups that included faculty and staff

Morris Campus
- One heterogeneous group that included faculty and staff

Crookston Campus
- One heterogeneous group that included faculty and staff

(See Appendix B for the Focus Group Schedule.)

All focus groups were 90 minutes long and were facilitated by members of the President’s Emerging Leaders (PEL) team assigned to the Culture Task Force (Kari Branjord, Erin George, Twila Jensen, Emily Johnston, Shelly Carthen Watson). Duties for facilitating and note-taking were rotated among group members. Also members of the Culture Task Force observed all Twin Cities focus groups and provided supplementary notes for analysis.

In consultation with the University’s Office of Institutional Research and Reporting, potential focus group participants were identified with an oversampling to ensure diversity. The Office of Multicultural Affairs; Office of Disability Services; and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Programs Office were consulted on appropriate methods for oversampling for diversity. Invitations to participate were made through personal emails from Linda Thrane, Vice President for University Relations, with follow-up email and phone call contact through Linda’s office. Following each focus group, a personal note of appreciation was sent (via email) from Linda to each participant. (See Appendix C for samples of all correspondence sent to focus group invitees and participants.)

The Culture Task Force determined the data would be gathered through the focus groups centering on the following inquiries:

- What are people’s perceptions of the University’s current culture?
- How do people envision the culture of a top three public research university?
- What changes would the University need to make including strengths to emphasize and obstacles to overcome to maintain a culture for a top three public research university?

In formulating the focus group questions, the Culture Task Force first explored using the nine identified values (as adapted from *The University of Minnesota: Advancing The Public Good*, a report of the Strategic Positioning Work Group February 2005) as a guide. These values include:

1. Excellence
2. Innovation
3. Respect for People
4. Integrity
5. Team Orientation
6. Outcome Orientation
7. Diversity
8. University Orientation
9. Organizational Adaptability/Tolerance for Change

After holding a mock focus group at the Task Force’s November 16, 2005 meeting and discussing strategies for developing effective and informative questions, it was determined that a sharper focus around a small number of questions would yield the most useful results and help participants share their ideas, perceptions, and questions in the context of the Strategic Positioning goal.

The focus group script was developed around the following questions:

1. **Introduction** – What led you to work (or come to study) at the University of Minnesota?
2. **Describe Culture** – How would you describe the current culture at the University of Minnesota? What would be three words or phrases that best describe the culture at the University?
3. **Envision Changed Culture/What Can We Create** – What behaviors would you see/feel/hear/experience with respect to faculty, students, and staff at the University of Minnesota as a top three public research university?
4. **Keep Doing/Culture Strong Points** – What are some things that we are doing quite well at the University of Minnesota?
5. **Stop Doing/Culture Obstacles** – What do you see as obstacles to attaining the culture of a top three public research university?
6. **Personal Visioning** – In your job (or role as a student), how might you change your behavior to help the University become a top three public research university? Or how would you see your role changing when the University attains its goal of becoming a top three public university?

(See Appendix D for a copy of the Focus Group script and protocol.)

**Demographics**

312 University faculty, staff, and students were invited to participate in the Culture Task Force focus groups, and 82 attended. Participants were given a two-page demographic survey and the option to skip any questions they chose. All participants answered all or some of the questions, and 20 did not answer any of the questions on the back of the survey form, which included questions on gender, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability status, and level of education. The following is a sampling of focus group participant demographics:

- The majority of participants were full-time employees.
- Of all participants, 41% were female, 30% were male, 28% chose not to or did not answer.
- The average reported age was 41.
- The top three ethnic backgrounds were white, European, or European American; Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; Black, African, or African American.
Over 65% of the participants were heterosexual, and 32% chose not to or did not answer.  
35% have received a graduate or professional degree, 20% have some college, and 12% are college graduates.  
Among faculty and staff participants, the top three job classifications included Civil Service, Academic Professional and Administrative (P&A), and Tenured Faculty.  
Faculty and staff participants have worked an average of nine years at the University and an average of six years in their current position.

31 Academic College or Administrative Unit/Departments were represented from the Twin Cities campus, 7 from the Crookston campus, 4 from the Morris campus, and 12 from the Duluth campus.

(Appendix E is the Demographic Survey used, Appendix F is a full breakdown of the demographic results, and Appendix G is a copy of the Confidentiality Statement shared and signed by all participants.)

**Common Themes**

*“Trying to define culture is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall”*  
- Juan Moreno

The PEL group was not surprised to learn from the focus groups that there is no universal sense or definition of the “culture” at the University of Minnesota. Focus group participant responses do not fit neatly into the boxes of the core focus group questions, but emerge as a series of themes in the form of questions, concerns, obstacles and/or needed strengths, each of which provides some indicia of the University’s culture.

**Lack of Definition of the Goal to Become a Top Three Public Research University**

The principal theme among all focus groups is confusion, discomfort, and in some cases, resistance to the Strategic Positioning goal of becoming a top three public research university. Participants are often so mired in dissecting the top three goal that they are unable to focus on or assess the existing University culture, let alone imagine what the culture of such an institution would be. A great deal of this stems from the feeling that the top three goal is ill-defined.

Participants repeatedly question what it means to be a top three public research university and how the University would know when the goal is achieved. The goal itself is often questioned by faculty, staff, and student participants, wondering why we would want to be a top three public research university, whether the pursuit of rankings is a worthy goal, and more importantly, whether or not pursuit of the goal is inconsistent and/or a sacrifice of our mission as a land grant university. Many participants equate pursuit of being a top three as elitism and an “ivory tower mentality” that would damage the sense of community.

*“The tension created between wanting to be number one kills the sense of community.”*  
*Graduate Student Focus Group*
Other participants wonder if the goal is unrealistic, questioning the availability of funds and pointing out that the University’s strengths are not University-wide. They believe it is impossible for the University to be good at everything. There is an overwhelming sense that the University should not try to emulate others or “chase after other schools, especially private ones,” but set its own path. With minimal roles in research, undergraduate students question their role in the Strategic Positioning process. When asked how they can help the University achieve its top three goal, one Undergraduate Student participant states:

“I don’t know how to help because I am not a researcher.”

Confusion and a lack of alignment with the goal are strongly felt on the coordinate campuses (Crookston, Duluth, Morris), where participants feel research is not a core function of their campuses, they do not have the resources to attain it, and any resources used would be at the expense of teaching.

A vocal minority embraces the top three goal. They emphasize that research is not just clinical and, in fact, touches lives. Some Crookston Focus Group participants feel that while Crookston is not a research university, its mission as an undergraduate institution could fit within the overall Strategic Positioning plan and goal of being a top three public research university.

“Research is not doing a disservice to your students; it contributes to the success of your students.”

_Crookston Focus Group_

Some participants stress that such a goal will equal more collaboration, more faculty, more Nobel Prize winners, and more care and pride in the work being done at the University.

“My experience at the U has made me a better person, so I’ll probably be even better (when the University is a top three).”

_Bargaining Unit Focus Group_

In contrast to those who perceive the top three goal as elitist, some participants note the top three goal means more money generated from research, which in turn could be used to make tuition more affordable and, correspondingly, the University more accessible.

The lack of definition of the top three goal creates misconceptions as to what this goal will mean to the University, making it hard for participants to embrace it.

“We can agree there is room for improvement, but it is unfortunate we chose this lofty language.”

_P&A Focus Group_

Participants suggest that the University stop and define who we are: a research university with a land grant mission.
Research At The Expense Of Teaching

Another predominant theme is the notion that the University is research-focused at the expense of teaching and outreach. Participants say that while teaching is just as important as research, teaching gets short shrift. The tension between research, teaching and outreach leads to a fear, particularly in light of the Strategic Positioning goal, that resources are or will be diverted to research at the expense of teaching. Student and staff focus group participants perceive faculty to be at the University to do research only rather than teach, with several participants pointing out that good researchers are not necessarily good teachers. Staff and student participants also believe the University lacks incentives for faculty to improve their teaching skills.

“It’s not educating; it’s teaching to get the burden off your shoulders so you can get back to your research.”

P&A Focus Group

The faculty teaching load is frequently cited as an obstacle to research, while at the same time acknowledging increased research requires a decreased teaching load. The declining emphasis on community outreach is also of concern, with participants feeling they receive no clear message from administration regarding outreach and a need to reexamine how we go about it.

The above data points are both an aspect of our culture and a barrier to being a top three public research university. Participants repeatedly stress the need, and possible solution, to integrate the University’s mission of research, teaching and outreach, a mission they feel is compromised by the University’s current promotion of research over teaching and the Strategic Positioning goal of becoming a top three public research university.

“Without education and research, there is no future for humanity.”

University Relations Faculty Focus Group

We Are A Land Grant University

One consistently surfacing theme is the University’s role, and therefore responsibility, as a land grant university. Faculty, staff, and student participants see the mission and responsibility of a land grant university as assisting all of its citizens with potential to gain access to the University, as well as opportunities for civic engagement and service learning. The concept of outreach arises in this context as well, as participants view outreach as directly linked to access. Some faculty feel the University tries to be all things to all people, thereby disconnecting with our mission. P&A employees, on the other hand, express concern that we may not be meeting the needs of Minnesotans now, and with the Strategic Positioning goal, may do it less in the future. For many participants, General College represents the idea of who we serve and our mission as a land grant university, and the College’s reorganization is perceived as a lack of commitment to access. Suggested solutions to this perceived threat to our land grant mission include a return to our mission of integrating teaching, research, and outreach, as well as civic engagement.
Lack Of Collaboration

A recurring theme is the isolation of University units and departments, often referred to as the “silo effect,” leading to a lack of collaboration among the segments of the University community.

“It’s 100 different departments doing their own thing.”
Undergraduate Student Focus Group

Participants cite an uneven distribution of resources as well as the manner in which funds are generated that encourages competition instead of collaboration. One example highlighted by The Undergraduate Student Focus Group is the career services system at the Carlson School that is well known and envied by non-Carlson students as a resource that could be shared and replicated in other colleges. The distribution of resources results in turf wars, an inability or refusal to share resources, and “trust issues” making it difficult to get things done.

“We all work together, but we are sometimes viewed as being on opposite sides of the fence.”
Bargaining Unit Focus Group

The silo effect also leads to inefficiency, creating layers of bureaucracy that hamper University progress. In another twist on this cultural aspect, participants cite the social stratification of the University community, with faculty on one side and staff on the other, and faculty views and needs dominating the University’s policies and priorities.

“It’s the faculty that makes the ‘U’ tick.”
Faculty Member - Twin Cities Heterogeneous Focus Group

The silo effect and lack collaboration generates a feeling of disconnection among members of the University community, which poses a significant obstacle to becoming a top three public research university. Participants suggest that this aspect of our culture could be addressed by a more interdisciplinary approach to programs, as well as coursework, advising, and scheduling.

“Boundaries need to be taken down between colleges.”
Undergraduate Student Focus Group

“A top university would tear down barriers between disciplines to make a multidisciplinary approach possible.”
P&A Focus Group

Student focus group participants explain that an emphasis on the whole student body, rather than specific programs, would enhance their experience.
“If people feel they [are] a part of the ‘U’ they’ll feel connected.”

*Graduate Student Focus Group*

Although not expressed often, a few participants voice the idea that the way the University works would change once it is a top three and has learned how to collaborate, share resources, and perform more efficiently.

“Jobs like mine would go away; if different areas, like academic administration and the AHC, did work better together, then the University wouldn’t need some jobs.”

*Bargaining Unit Focus Group*

Coordinate campus participants raise an intriguing idea, suggesting that if the University is serious about collaboration, it should consider outsourcing enterprise functions such as information technology management to the coordinate campuses, where costs are much lower. Increased University-wide communication about the work, goals, and programs of various units and colleges, as well as creating incentives to collaborate and share knowledge and resources would assist the University in creating a more cohesive and efficient organization.

**Isolation And Lack Of Community**

Participants explain they often do not feel connected to the University as a whole, with faculty, staff, and students professing their loyalty to their particular units or departments rather than the University as a whole. Many participants feel isolated, insulated within their own particular departments, units, or employee groups. Civil service, undergraduate, and graduate students express loyalty to their department or to their college before the University. Students view themselves as temporary residents, here to get a degree today and gone tomorrow. Professional students report feelings of disconnection, concern regarding competitiveness in admissions and the environment, and a lack of commitment to their particular needs. Graduate students feel workload is a barrier to feeling connected, and that the lack of physical student community space decreases the sense of community. They also describe a concern regarding the undergraduate experience and what the future as a top three might mean for undergraduates at the University. Many students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional school) feel they have no part in the University’s overall future.

Once again, increased collaboration and a more interdisciplinary approach by the University is suggested. Evaluation of graduate student workload and student community space could lead to more work-life balance, thereby fostering more interaction and a sense of ownership.

**Exclusionary Decision-Making Process**

A number of participants take issue with the University’s leadership style, both as an aspect of our culture and a barrier to change. There is a perception that the University utilizes a top-down decision-making process with little or no consultation with other members of the University community and a lack of input. Participants, particularly on the coordinate campuses, express
frustration with the lack of explanation of how decisions are reached and, at times, the lack of definitive communication that a final decision has been reached. Both the process used and the decision itself are often not communicated.

“I’d love to toe the line if I knew where the line was.”
Coordinate Campus Focus Group

Other participants approach it from the standpoint of social stratification. In other words, the University hierarchy consists of administration, followed by faculty, with little or no consideration or input from staff. At times this manifests itself in micromanagement, with employees having responsibility for certain matters, but no authority to actually carry them out. Bargaining Unit and Civil Services staff participants say they are frustrated with being given responsibility for the work with no authority to make decisions.

Nevertheless, participants offer that among staff and students there exists ideas, views, knowledge, and skills that could be helpful in the decision-making process, but that expertise is ignored by the University. Inclusion of these ideas, views, knowledge, and skills could be coupled with the employee pride in the University to provide a strong point toward a collaborative and creative organization.

Stewardship

Despite the criticisms above, a theme of stewardship emerges. Participants express a feeling of stewardship or responsibility for the University and its resources, whether those resources are physical space, public funding, time, or employees.

“When you make a mistake, they don’t see it as you made a mistake, but the U of M made a mistake.”
Civil Service Focus Group

The University is repeatedly encouraged to invest in people, with the Regents Scholarship cited as an example by staff and faculty.

“In order to have the best University, you need the best people.”
Civil Service Focus Group

Physical surroundings are also important as they “reflect who we are.” Stressing that first impressions are critical, participants urge the University to “look the part of what you want to be.” The importance of quality facilities is also noted, advising the University to invest in upgrading equipment and facilities. Participants worry that if the University allows equipment to become obsolete, it will lose good employees as a result.

Pride In The University

Many faculty and staff participants express pride in the University, the work they do, and the role of the University within the general Minnesota community. However, it is this role and the
general well-being of the state of Minnesota that leads to concern by some participants that the University will not be as accessible or provide the resources needed to Minnesota citizens if it becomes too research oriented. They are frustrated that they do not hear enough about all the ways the University is working to advance research and knowledge along with the impact it is having on the community. “We don’t know how good we are” or the feeling that “good things are not being communicated enough” are common refrains. Other participants talk about their pride in their work, but they direct it to their particular units or departments. Participants recommend the University to show itself more, “putting a face on the U,” as the Academic Health Center does in its recent marketing campaign.

**Coordinate Campus Themes**

In interviewing the focus group participants on the coordinate campuses (Crookston, Duluth, Morris), several significant themes emerge that are particular to their campuses.

**We Are Not A University, But Rather A System Of Universities**

Nowhere is the lack of one culture for the University more evident than in the recurring theme that we are a system of institutions, rather than one university. Focus group participants, and in particular those from coordinate campuses, view each individual campus as having a separate identity and culture, which is reinforced by different logos, mascots, policies and procedures. When asked to describe University culture, the first response was more often than not specific to their particular campus. The University is viewed by participants not as a singular institution, but as a system of universities similar to the University of California.

**Lack Of Understanding Of Character And Mission**

Participants on all three coordinate campuses feel strongly that members of the Twin Cities campus, particularly Central Administration and those directing Strategic Positioning, lack an understanding of the character and mission of their particular campuses.

“[We are] not important enough to visit.”

*Coordinate Campus Focus Group*

Many feel Strategic Positioning does not take into account the character, needs, or resources of the coordinate campuses. Participants assert that research is not the primary focus of their particular campus, raising the question of what, if any, role they may play in Strategic Positioning. Others regard the top three goal as unrealistic, contending a lack of resources hampers the type of research necessary to become a top three public research university. Some participants worry that teaching loads on coordinate campuses are an obstacle to research, with the Strategic Positioning goal being achieved at the expense of teaching. Others are more hopeful, with Crookston participants explaining that while they are not currently positioned to do “top three” research, they could do so if given the resources.
Lack Of Interaction And Collaboration With The Twin Cities

Coordinate campus participants express frustration at the lack of interaction and collaboration with their Twin Cities colleagues and the lack of knowledge their Twin Cities colleagues have of what is occurring on the coordinate campuses.

“We feel at times we don’t exist.”
Coordinate Campus Focus Group

Some are offended by the perceived unwillingness of Central Administration and Twin Cities colleagues to even visit their campuses, with participants at Crookston, Duluth, and Morris noting that “the road into town goes both ways.” Others view the Twin Cities as their number one competitor, explaining the inability of their campus to offer certain degrees because that role has been reserved for or by the Twin Cities.

Lack Of Consultation And Input

Echoing their Twin Cities colleagues, coordinate campuses participants raise as an obstacle the lack of input and/or consultation in the future or major decisions pertaining to their respective campuses. Morris and Crookston participants cite upheavals in leadership and a resulting leadership void as well as a lack of clear messages from Central Administration regarding the future of their campuses. Crookston participants in particular explain their dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation and the perception that administrators are imposed on their campus without the consideration or input of the Crookston community. Participants frequently cited the lack of consultation and inability to give input on issues directly affecting their campuses, whether for the selection of a chancellor, development of degree programs, or other matters.

“Give us the autonomy and time to define our future.”
Coordinate Campus Focus Group

Coordinate campuses view Strategic Positioning as indicative of the lack of consultation and input, asserting that the goal of becoming a top three public research university does not take into account the fact that their campuses are not research oriented, and that faculty workloads on these campuses do not permit the type of research participants feel the Strategic Positioning goal requires.

Sense Of Community

Unlike the Twin Cities focus groups, coordinate campus participants recognize that a singular identity or culture transcends their particular units and departments and embraces their entire campus. They stress their close ties to the communities in which their campuses are located, and in contrast to the Twin Cities campus, they emphasize and take pride in the collaborative nature of their communities, in which no silos exist, and members wear different hats, assume different roles, and work together.
Common Themes Alignment with Questions

An additional analysis of the Common Themes is given here with each theme identified under the core focus group questions. Many themes serve multiple roles as examples of current culture and either strong point or obstacles.

1) Introduction – What led you to work (or come to study) at the University of Minnesota?

Undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students note motivations for coming to the University from knowing someone who attended the University (often siblings or friends for undergraduates) to wanting to be in an urban area to knowing the reputation and opportunities at the University for their particular field or program. Faculty and staff speak in both practical and philosophical terms about their motivations for working at the University. Civil Service participants stress the importance of working somewhere that makes a difference and contributes to a better future, while many P&A staff cite the benefits and professional opportunities that are available. For faculty, the connection to their academic fields and the opportunities at the University as well as the inspiration of seeing a new group of students each year are drivers in their career as faculty members.

2) Describe Culture – How would you describe the current culture at the University of Minnesota? What would be three words or phrases that best describe the culture at the University?

Words often shared by Twin Cities focus group participants include: large; diversity in programs but not in community; fragmented; silo-oriented and not much collaboration or interaction; classism among faculty, staff, and students; isolated on a personal level; inefficient; improving; supportive of and committed to students; hierarchical or top-down; elite.

Words often shared in coordinate campus focus groups include: dedicated; perseverance; lack of stability; “culture of survival;” ignored; isolated; clear understanding of campus vision and mission; positive; working toward student success; sense of community on campus.

3) Envision Changed Culture/What Can We Create – What behaviors would you see/feel/hear/experience with respect to faculty, students, and staff at the University of Minnesota as a top three public research university?

Across the focus groups, common ideas are expressed about the culture of a top three public research university. As listed below, these ideas at times contradict each other, which speaks to the confusion participants see around understanding the significance and benefit of being a top three public research university. Perceived characteristics of a top three public research university include:

- Accessible in terms of affordable tuition and diverse, quality academic programs
- Diverse population of students, faculty, and staff who embrace and understand cultural competency and support cross-cultural interactions
• Welcoming environment where the largeness of the University is given a personal face that students, faculty, and staff can feel connected to
• Efficient and creative in making things happen and getting work done
• Elitist and competitive
• Top three goal counter to responsibility as a land grant university
• Teaching and outreach suffer as resources are committed to research with good researchers rewarded and good teachers ignored or not supported appropriately
• Integrated mission of research, teaching, and outreach

4) Keep Doing/Culture Strong Points – What are some things that we are doing quite well at the University of Minnesota?

Many staff and faculty participants express pride in the University, the work they do, and the role of the University within the community of Minnesota. This pride has tremendous potential for the future success of the University’s mission, vision, and goals. Participants understand the need to capitalize on that pride and suggest that the University leverage this pride by telling its own story in consistent, frequent, and personal ways. The University needs to articulate why its work and mission (research, teaching, and outreach) are important to the citizens of the Minnesota and the world.

A feeling of stewardship or responsibility for the University and its resources (physical space, public funding, time, employees, etc.) is discussed by faculty and staff participants. A Civil Service focus group participant explains, “When you make a mistake, they don’t see it as you made a mistake, but the U of M made a mistake.” This stewardship also has tremendous potential for the University’s future.

The sense of community on the coordinate campuses could provide a useful model for making the Twin Cities campus more welcoming and collaborative. Taking into account the difference in size, scope, and setting of each campus, practical models and lessons could be shared among all the campuses to build a feeling of community and leverage on every campus the pride staff and faculty feel and the commitment they have to student success and the mission of research, teaching, and outreach.

5) Stop Doing/Culture Obstacles – What do you see as obstacles to attaining the culture of a top three public research university?

The lack of definition around the goal to be a top three public research university creates misconceptions as to just what this goal will mean to the University, making it hard for participants to embrace it. The elusive nature of the goal is seen in participant questions that range from why do we want to be a top three (grants, money, prestige) to what does it mean to be a top three (endowment, grants, publications) to who gets to decide when we get there. A P&A focus group participant captures this perfectly stating, “We can agree there is room for improvement, but it is unfortunate that we chose this lofty language.” In the words of coordinate campus participants, communication is needed so that people on all campuses can hear what is meant when the University talks about being a top three public research university. The confusion participants express is an obstacle, but it also could provide a guide in planning.
effective communication for employee and student groups on the Twin Cities and coordinate campuses.

A related obstacle is the perception by coordinate campus participants that Twin Cities Central Administration, faculty, and staff have a lack of understanding of coordinate campus missions, programs, and communities. These audiences have the added confusion of trying to align their mission and work with the goal of becoming a top three public research university. Engagement of the coordinate campuses in the implementation stages of Strategic Positioning will be key to their understanding and embracing not just the goal, but their unique and valuable roles in the goal and the University’s vision and mission.

Another related obstacle involves the perception that research is and will be done at the expense of teaching and outreach and participants in all groups express concerns that research will receive resources and other support while teaching will not be supported and celebrated as it should. The University’s role in outreach throughout the state also will be ignored. A Coordinate Campus Focus Group participant says, “The roles of teaching, research, and outreach need to be integrated.”

Students, staff, and faculty place a great deal of importance in the role the University must fulfill as a land grant university. A key piece of the land grant mission for participants is the accessibility Minnesotans have to an education at the University. This element of the University’s mission must be addressed in telling its story and its importance for the state and the world.

Twin Cities participants express a feeling of isolation in their departments and units, referring to it as a silo effect that leads to a lack of collaboration among the various segments of the University. An Undergraduate Student participant says, “(The University) is 100 different departments doing their own thing.” Students, faculty, and staff participants saw the potential of fewer silos and more collaboration as a way for creative and efficient work.

Participants perceive the University using a top-down decision-making process that provides little to no consultation with people from across the University. Participants explain that among staff and students ideas, view, and knowledge exist that could be helpful in the decision-making process, but that expertise is thought to be ignored by the University.

6) Personal Visioning – In your job (or role as a student), how might you change your behavior to help the University become a top three public research university? Or how would you see your role changing when the University attains its goal of becoming a top three public university?

The confusion around the goal of becoming a top three public research university makes answering this question difficult for many participants, whether faculty, staff, or students. Some embrace the goal, such as the Bargaining Unit participant who states that working here “has made me a better person, so I’ll probably be even better” when it is a top three. Others could not envision how their role would change because they could not see the value or meaning behind becoming a top three. Staff participants could envision better collaboration and useful
interaction among departments and colleges. They could see work becoming more efficient, with fewer bureaucratic layers and micromanagement, and more creativity and risk taking being used in how they do their work. The coordinate campus focus groups want clear and practical explanations on how their campuses and programs could work with the goal. Students are skeptical of how it would make a difference for them. A Professional Student participant says, “(The goal) doesn’t make me want to come here (more) by being a top research institution.” And undergraduate participants see the potential for elitism and “snottiness” when the University is a top three.

**Future Considerations**

One outcome of the focus group process is that the Culture Task Force has a view into a cross section of the University community. This work captures a snapshot of University culture from key campus audiences while those groups and the University are in the midst of the Strategic Positioning process. The data are unique in providing perceptions, questions, and ideas about University culture that have not been gathered through other aspects of the Strategic Positioning process thus far. The PEL group heard ideas and undertones that do not fit neatly into the focus group questions, yet need to be included in this report.

When viewed collectively, the tone of the focus groups was both concerned and optimistic. There is no one culture at the University, but an overarching attitude and the closest we observed to a unifying thread for the employee (faculty and staff) focus groups is the idea that the people who work at the University are working toward the future. They have an impact on the lives of students and on the citizens of Minnesota. Students did express connections to their programs or colleges, but they see their connections to the University as more fleeting than those of faculty and staff. The University vision is to improve the human condition through the advancement of knowledge, and through indirect ways and language, participants (faculty, staff, and students) support this vision.

The focus groups could not move to defining the current University culture or envisioning the culture for the future without first working through the confusion participants have around the goal of becoming a top three public research university. Participants’ reactions to the goal range from negative, perceiving the goal as being elitist and lacking substance, to positive, envisioning themselves as a part of the goal. As previously noted, frequent questions include:

- What does this goal mean?
- Why do we want to become a research university?
- Who are we now?
- How was this goal chosen?

These themes are examined elsewhere in the report, but all the focus groups needed to have this discussion. This would indicate that a similar process of seeking answers around the goal needs to take place across the institution. Folks are stuck. A conversation with the nearly 100,000 individuals who will feel the impact in some way would be impossible, but there must be a clear, efficient way to manage this change. Please consider a series of short emails and communications in which the University explains:
What does it mean to be a top three public research university?
What is the University of Minnesota now as a public research university?
What will it take to be a top three (what will we do more of and less of)?
How does research include the liberal and fine arts?
How do research opportunities actually enhance education rather than competing with it?
How will this goal enable the University to fully embrace its mission of teaching, research, and outreach?

Across all focus groups, skepticism and cynicism are expressed around the goal, the anticipated results, and the process. Going forward, it will be important to consider how the rest of the University community will react to the changes that are coming and prepare strong communication plans that will answer key questions.

Several participants say that the AHC’s current media strategy is effective, putting a personal face on the organization, communicating how research has a positive impact on people’s every day lives, and telling AHC’s story in an accessible way. The PEL group heard that there should be more of this type of campaign across the University.

Many participants feel the University should tell its own story, not compare itself to other public research universities. This speaks to both the question about the goal and the recommendation that the University starts to tell its story more effectively and in a way that reaches and touches the public. The PEL team heard from several focus groups that the University is not the University of Michigan or UC Berkeley, nor should it try to be. The University has its own story to tell, and the University community should be proud of it. Perhaps in telling the University’s story and including all campuses in that story, the differences among and strengths within each campus can be better understood and taken advantage of in terms of interaction, collaboration, and engagement.

Participants also suggest that the University community needs to know the University’s own history so that everyone can talk about accomplishments in a meaningful and personal way. This strategy could be helpful in finding new ways to connect with communities and provide meaningful outreach and public engagement.

The 82 individuals who participated in the focus groups are a valuable resource, and one that the Culture Task Force should continue to engage. They have expressed commitment to the University’s effort by showing up to share their opinions. The focus groups include good diversity in terms of units represented. The overall timbre of the conversation was constructively concerned and encouraged; these are people who are engaged and who want to participate in the betterment of the University. It is important that they receive follow-up attention. They need to hear the ways in which their input was heard, translated, interpreted, and put into action. Suggestions include an open forum or email follow up.

The act of listening was strikingly effective. At each focus group, participants appeared prepared to debate, to hear a party line, or to hear a justification of Strategic Positioning. Once it became clear that the PEL group was there to listen to the feedback, we started to hear feedback.
The technique was quite disarming in terms of side-stepping the emotional debate that participants were ready for and moving right into the logical assessment of what we do well and what we need to change to become a top three public research university. The PEL group believes this was an effective way to obtain information and recommends that subsequent focus groups be facilitated by independent parties with similar listening and data-gathering techniques.

All focus groups, but particularly student groups, express concern that **more personal connections are not formed by Central Administration with constituents around the University.** If a more human face were put on “Central” there would be less skepticism and more alignment between the rest of the University and Morrill Hall. One undergraduate participant suggests that President Bruininks regularly visit classes. The idea was developed that the President could stop by two or three large enrollment lectures each semester, spending five or ten minutes listening to and talking with students. Students speculate that this kind of interaction would be more meaningful and far-reaching within the student body than a series of emails or news articles or official publications.

**Communications** were a common topic, with many ways to tease it apart. Some participants (students, staff, and faculty) feel the Strategic Positioning update emails were too long, so they did not read them. Others believe there was not enough communication in general on Strategic Positioning. Some feel the emails were not specific enough or were too polished, again not giving a personal face to the process and the University. The net result is that participants do not want to stop receiving the emails and other communications; they do not want the messages filtered for them. However, they would like more informal tones and shorter content delivered more frequently. As previously mentioned, discussing just one question at a time in a short email about what it means to be a Top Three—Public—Research—University would be one place to start. The PEL group heard a great deal about the questions that people have; we would recommend that the answers be delivered in a more personal, less formal way.

Many participants have ideas about how to **integrate research with teaching and the student experience.** This is more fully explored in the Taskforce on Undergraduate Reform: Student Support report. The ideas are rich, and the very conversation between those who could envision the future with students involved in research and those who thought research was just for the sciences advanced the thinking of that particular focus group. This is an area in which people of all backgrounds are willing to engage, and may be a useful lever in working toward a commitment to the goal.

Another idea intended to integrate the student experience into the University overall is to **engage students in the real-life business of the University.** One idea from the Undergraduate Student Focus Group is to engage architecture students in the plethora of building and remodeling projects on campus. It may be the case that this already occurs, which means that the University has another story-telling opportunity.

In several focus groups, the topic turns to **diversity.** Several participants give compelling arguments that in order to compete at the level of a top three, the University must attract talent from a larger pool. This may mean women in the sciences, it may be a more racially or ethnically diverse pool in all disciplines, it may mean finding ways to be more accessible in our buildings.
and our systems to individuals with different physical abilities. Ideas include structural changes to incentives, such as family-friendly schedules and benefits. One person speaks at length about the gender inequality in the tenure tracks of science disciplines, while the inequality evaporates in the P&A post-doctoral research pools. The contention is that if processes and attitudes were to change, these very bright women would be attracted to tenure-track faculty roles rather than finding the lab to be the only palatable option.

A similar argument is made with respect to cultural diversity. Suggestions include cultural competence training for faculty and staff, events and mechanisms to foster cross-cultural interactions, and creating hospitable environments into which persons with diverse backgrounds will come. While, the Academic Taskforce on Diversity report spells this out more fully, it should be noted that similar themes and ideas for the future emerged during our focus groups.

Conclusion

The focus groups successfully achieved the objective to obtain a sample of University perceptions of culture within the context of the Strategic Positioning goal to become a top three public research university.

These insights were gathered in the context of people’s perceptions of current culture, envisioning the culture of a top three public research university, and obstacles to overcome in achieving this goal. Several overarching themes arose from these discussions, and they differed between the Twin Cities and coordinate campus groups. When viewed collectively, the tone of these perceptions was critical but hopeful.

Participants perceive a lack of definition around the goal of becoming a top three public research university. As Strategic Positioning progresses, strong communications plans will be essential to answer key questions around what it means to be a top three, why the goal is important, and how it fits into the University’s mission of teaching, research, and outreach.

The Twin Cities focus group results also reflect that special consideration should be given to the University’s role as a land grant university while integrating teaching, research, and outreach. Specifically, accessibility and resources diverted from teaching to research were of concern for focus group participants.

Isolation, exclusionary decision-making processes, and a lack of collaboration are obstacles that could hinder supporting a top three culture. Twin Cities campus participants note a “silo effect” among units and colleges as well as feelings of isolation for students and staff. Perceptions of a top-down decision-making process that excludes the University community add to the feeling of isolation.

For faculty and staff participants, a sense of stewardship and pride in the University emerges from the Twin Cities focus groups. The Culture Task Force should consider how to capitalize on these strengths. As President Bruininks has said, “This is a commitment to excellence worthy of our heritage, worthy of our future.”
On the coordinate campuses, there is an overall feeling of being on the sidelines. While the campuses have a strong sense of community, they do not feel a part of the overall University within Strategic Positioning and in decision-making processes. They express frustration in not being understood or being taken seriously in the decision-making process. Soliciting their participation and incorporating coordinate campus input will be key to bringing them on board as the Culture Task Force moves forward. Learning from their strong sense of community could be beneficial to supporting a culture of a top three.

Looking at future considerations, a communications strategy is needed that puts a personal face on the University and uses a more informal tone when reaching out to faculty, staff, and student audiences. The University should set the pace for success in research rather than following benchmarks established by other universities. Finally, developing and encouraging cultural diversity is seen as an important aspect of the envisioned culture. A diverse community of students, faculty, and staff will give the University an authentic international and cross-cultural outlook, adaptability and diversity of thought.

On a final note, the PEL group recommends follow-up with the 82 focus group participants. They invested their time and their energy in sharing their opinions, perceptions, and ideas, so the Culture Task Force would be well served by sharing recommendations, soliciting their feedback, and engaging them in future Strategic Positioning work.
Appendices

Appendix A: University Relations Faculty Focus Groups Protocol and Questions Related to University Culture – Focus groups held April 6 and 21, 2006

Appendix B: Focus group schedule

Appendix C: Communication to participants

Appendix D: Focus group script and protocol

Appendix E: Demographic survey

Appendix F: Demographic survey results

Appendix G: Confidentiality statement
Appendix A

University Relations Faculty Focus Groups
Protocol and Questions Related to University Culture

Introduction
- Tell me your name, what college, department or unit you work in?
- How long have you worked at the U of M?

University of Minnesota General Identity
- Name one thing the University is best at? (If research or education is not mentioned, please probe)
- What is the U of M’s greatest weakness?
- What does becoming one of the top research institutions mean to you? What does it mean for your role at the university?
- Give three descriptors of the U of M TODAY. Discuss.
- Give three descriptors of the IDEAL U of M. Discuss.
- What is the one thing that “stakeholders” would say the U of M is best at?

University Relations conducted these faculty focus groups on April 6 and April 21, 2006.
### Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>PEL Members</th>
<th>Task Force Observer</th>
<th>Invite Sent</th>
<th>RSVP Deadline</th>
<th>Follow-Up</th>
<th>Confirmation Sent</th>
<th># of RSVPs Received</th>
<th># Attended</th>
<th>Thank You Sent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>3-4:30</td>
<td>Civil service</td>
<td>Erin &amp; Emily</td>
<td>Linda, Chuck, Theresa, Scott</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>1/23</td>
<td>1/24</td>
<td>1/27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>12 to 1:30</td>
<td>Undergraduate Students</td>
<td>Emily &amp; Twila</td>
<td>Tom, Erin</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2/13</td>
</tr>
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<td>12 to 1:30</td>
<td>Graduate students</td>
<td>John, Regina</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>10:30 to 12</td>
<td>TC Heterogeneous</td>
<td>Emily &amp; Erin &amp; Kari</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>2/23</td>
<td>3 to 4:30</td>
<td>P/A Staff</td>
<td>Twila &amp; Erin</td>
<td>John, Dana</td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td>2/17</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>2/21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>12-1:30</td>
<td>Professional students</td>
<td>Kari, Twila &amp; Shelley</td>
<td>Wokie</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>2/21</td>
<td>2/22</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/16</td>
<td>10-11:30 Minnesota Room, Student Center; room is reserved 9:30-12</td>
<td>Crookston train evening of 3/15; return evening of 3/16</td>
<td>Erin &amp; Emily</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3/13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11 (1 uninvited attendee)</td>
<td>3/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>12-1:30 Moccasin Flower room, Student Center; reserved 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.</td>
<td>Morris up &amp; back same day</td>
<td>Erin &amp; Twila</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3/13</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3/28</td>
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</table>
Appendix C

I. Invitation

To: [first name last name]

From: Linda Thrane, Vice President, University Relations, and Chair, Culture Task Force

You have been selected to participate in a focus group being held to assist the University of Minnesota Culture Task Force in its work to transform the culture of the University. This effort is part of the University’s strategic positioning process to become one of the top three public research universities in the world.

The focus group is intended to capture the thoughts and perceptions of members of the University community about the culture at the University of Minnesota. Culture means different things to different people, but we are interested in the underlying shared pattern of values, themes, behaviors and norms that add up to the culture of the organization. We will be asking you to share your thoughts and perceptions about ….

the current culture at the University,
the desired culture at the University,
how do we achieve the desired culture.

This is an opportunity for you to contribute to this important endeavor and make your voice heard.

To capture input from a broad cross-section of the University community, we are holding small focus groups with invited participants who represent a specific University employee, student or community group. These focus groups are an important part of our work to help transform the University. Your name was chosen at random to participate in a focus group of [specify group] on the [location] campus. Please understand that your comments at the focus group will be completely private and confidential. Following the focus group session, no information will be shared that would make it possible to identify a participant.

The focus group will be held on [day], [date], [time-time], on the [location] campus. The focus group will be limited to 12 people and refreshments [lunch] will be provided. Please confirm your attendance by responding to this e-mail no later than [day], [date].

Upon receiving your RSVP, we will confirm the location and other details of the focus group or if the session capacity has been reached. If you have questions, feel free to contact the Culture Task Force at 612-626-1785. Additional information about the Strategic Positioning Process can be found at: http://www1.umn.edu/systemwide/strategic_positioning/

We look forward to hearing from you and the opportunity to capture your thoughts.
II. Confirmation to Twin Cities participants

On behalf of Vice President Linda Thrane, thank you for agreeing to attend the culture focus group on [day], [date]. The session will be held in room 314 Murphy Hall, located on Church Street just north of Washington Avenue. Please arrive by [time] to enjoy the refreshments [lunch] and complete some paperwork. The session will begin at [time] and conclude by [time].

Murphy Hall is located at 206 Church Street SE, just north of Washington Avenue. Directions to Murphy Hall can be accessed on-line at the Parking and Transportation website: www.umn.edu/pts. Please refer to the Maps and Directions section. If you need to drive your vehicle to the focus group, please bring your parking receipt to the session for validation.

The closest parking is available at:

Washington Avenue Ramp located on Washington Avenue between Union and Harvard Streets (next to the Radisson Metrodome Hotel)

or

Church Street Garage located on Church Street, behind Northrop Auditorium

As Vice President Thrane stated in her invitation to join this group, you will be asked to share your thoughts and perceptions about:

- the current culture at the University,
- the desired culture at the University,
- how do we achieve the desired culture.

The purpose of the focus group is to listen to diverse views to learn what elements of the University's culture contribute to or hinder the goal of becoming one of the top three public research universities. Your input will be used to help draft recommendations to transform the culture of the University of Minnesota.

Thank you again for your participation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

III. Confirmation to Coordinate Campus participants

On behalf of Vice President Linda Thrane, thank you for agreeing to attend the culture focus group on [day], [date]. The session will be held in room [identify]. Please arrive by [time-15 minutes before start] to enjoy the refreshments [lunch] and complete some paperwork. The session will begin at [time] and conclude by [time].

As Vice President Thrane stated in her invitation to join this group, you will be asked to share your thoughts and perceptions about:
the current culture at the University,
the desired culture at the University,
how do we achieve the desired culture.

The purpose of the focus group is to listen to diverse views to learn what elements of the
University's culture contribute to or hinder the goal of becoming one of the top three public
research universities. Your input will be used to help draft recommendations to transform the
culture of the University of Minnesota.

Thank you again for your participation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

IV. Appreciation E-mail

Dear (first name) (last name):

On behalf of the Culture Task Force, thank you for taking time out of your schedule to
participate in the focus group session on [date]. Your contribution to our work is highly valued
and appreciated.

The information gathered will be used to draft recommendations regarding the culture of the
University of Minnesota as we aspire to become one of the best public research universities in
the world. We will inform you as soon as these recommendations are made public.

Let me remind you to respect the confidentiality of the focus group, as provided in the
Confidentiality Statement you signed. Please do not share or attribute any comments made by
your fellow focus group members.

For additional information on the strategic positioning process, please visit the “Transforming
the U” Web site: http://www1.umn.edu/systemwide/strategic_positioning/ Should you wish to
provide additional feedback to the task force, please visit the Strategic Positioning Feedback
Web site at https://www.myu.umn.edu/metadot/index.pl?id=546389

Thank you again.

Regards,

Linda Thrane
Vice President, University Relations, and
Chair, Culture Task Force
Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Culture Task Force

Welcome people as they arrive. Invite them to have something to eat and drink and choose a spot to sit. Offer to validate parking if they need it. Encourage them to review and sign the confidentiality statement, and review and complete the demographic survey – they are welcome to skip any questions they choose.

Housekeeping:
- Parking validation?
- Please turn off your cell phone ringers

Introduction:
- Thank participants for attending
- Introduce self and discuss your role as a neutral guide of the discussion. Participant in this year’s President’s Emerging Leaders program working with the Culture Task Force.
- Introduce note taker as fellow PEL member – capturing themes, key points of the discussion, and ideas to help guide the Task Force’s recommendations. The session will also be tape recorded. We won’t transcribe but will use the tape to capture non-attributable quotes.
- Introduce observers behind two-way mirror (First and Last names only as Culture Task Force members interested in seeing the process and watching the PEL members’ work in facilitating – no need to indicate position and department within University)
- Explain overall goal of the Culture Task Force: To define and communicate a culture that supports a top 3 public research university as part of the Strategic Positioning process.
- With the focus groups, the task force hopes to obtain valuable information about (1) current culture (2) behaviors required to move to desired culture (3) areas or practices that are currently in place that move us toward desired culture (4) obstacles that prevent us from moving toward desired culture (5) behavior changes needed to move to desired culture
- Discuss ground rules:
  - expectation that we will hear from everyone, there are no right answers, we want to hear diverse opinions including both negative and positive comments
  - sharing opinions on culture and hope that everything shared will be expressed in a respectful way – we don’t have to agree
we want to be respectful of everyone’s time so we may need to move on if one issue or question is receiving too much attention,

- Talk about confidentiality statement and demographic form:
  - sign confidentiality statement because your individual responses will be anonymous and we will respect not attributing specific comments in an individual focus group member.
  - The Diversity Task Force recommends that any climate survey data should include diversity related inquiries, and should also include demographic measures that capture meaningful data by an inclusive cross section of the University's population.

- During this conversation, you can share as little about yourself as you like – name, major, etc. You can decide how you want to frame your responses based on your experience at the University – saying “in my major or college” instead of naming the area. We have nametags for everyone but won’t be doing introductions.

- To get started, I’m going to ask that everyone answer this first question. But after this, feel free to respond when you want.

(1) DESCRIBE CULTURE.
How would you describe the current culture at the University of Minnesota?
Culture means different things to different people, but the Task Force is interested in patterns of values, themes, behaviors and norms that add up to the culture of the University.
I would like you all to think of three words or phrases that you feel best describe the culture at the University of Minnesota.

(2) ENVISION CHANGED CULTURE/WHAT CAN WE CREATE. The University is doing Strategic Positioning work. The goal is to become one of the top 3 public research universities.
Take a moment to envision the culture of a top 3 public research university. What would that look like?
  PROBE: What behaviors would you see, feel, hear and experience?

(3) KEEP DOING/CULTURE STRONGPOINTS. There are probably things that the University is doing well. What might some of those things be?
  PROBE: What things would the University need to do more of to work toward that desired culture we were just talking about?
  PROBE: If you could do more of one thing that would change the culture at the University of Minnesota, what would it be?
  PROBE: Complete this statement: To improve the culture at the University of Minnesota, I would like more….
(4) STOP DOING/CULTURE OBSTACLES. Now let’s turn to those things that might be problems or obstacles in attaining the desired culture. What do you see as the obstacles to attaining the desired culture of a top three public research university? When compared to the culture of the present U, what behaviors & actions do you think we need to stop doing or need “less of” to work toward the desired culture?

PROBE: If you could stop doing one thing that would change the culture at the University of Minnesota, what would be?

PROBE: Complete this statement: To improve the culture at the University of Minnesota, I would like less….

PROBE: What programs/practices/policies at the University might you implement to improve the culture at the University of Minnesota?

(5) BEHAVIOR CHANGE. Think about your role as a student at the University. How do you think your role at the U would change if we were a top 3 public research University?

Possible probes/other items to draw from:

- Try to think of specific behaviors you might do differently. What might those be?
- How do you think your role as a student at the U would change if we were a top undergraduate university? (non-TC)
- How would your experience or education change if we were a top public research university? (students)

(6) CLOSE SESSION:

- I want to be respectful of your time, so I want to ask if there is anything else you would like to share with us
- Thank you for participating, we really value your comments
- The information we’re gathering through these focus groups will be used by the task force to develop recommendations about transforming the culture of the University of Minnesota.
- Do you have any suggestions for improving the focus group process [enough info in invitation, follow-up emails, etc]?
- Additional feedback:
  - You will have a chance to provide additional information or feedback when you receive our thank you note
There is an electronic feedback mechanism on the Strategic Positioning Process Web site for the Culture Task Force:
www.umn.edu/systemwide/strategic_positioning/
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
We would like to ask you to provide some background information about yourself. Please remember that your responses are confidential. You may choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

University of Minnesota Employment Commitment
- Full-time
- Part-time
If part-time, what is the percent of time of your appointment? _____
- Temporary or visiting appointment
- Choose not to answer

Academic College or Administrative Unit/Department: ________________________________

Job classification:
- Faculty-Tenured
- Faculty-Tenure Track
- Faculty-Not tenure track
- Academic Professional and Administrative (P&A)
- Civil Service
- Bargaining Unit

Time at the University and your current job

How long have you worked at the University of Minnesota? _____ year(s), _____ month(s)

How long have you worked at your current job? _____ year(s), _____ month(s)

How many hours do you work during a typical week? _____

Supervision/Management
In your present position, do you supervise or manage other employees?
- Yes
- No
- Choose not to answer

Student Status
- Full-time student
- Part-time student
- Not currently a student
- Choose not to answer
Student Classification
- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Professional (i.e., Business Administration, Law, Dentistry)

Gender
- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Other
- Choose not to answer

Age (in years): ___ ___
- Choose not to answer

Ethnic Background (check all that apply)
- Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- Black, African, or African American
- Hispanic, Chicano, Latino, or Hispanic American
- Middle Eastern, Arab, or Arab American
- Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native
- White, European, or European American
- Other
- Choose not to answer

Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Transgender
- Choose not to answer

Are you currently disabled under state or federal laws?
- Yes
- No
- Choose not to answer

What is the highest level of education you have currently completed?
- Less than a high school diploma
- High school diploma or GED
- High school plus technical training or apprenticeship
- Some college
- College graduate
- Some graduate school
- Graduate or professional degree (MBA, M.A., M.D., PhD., law degree, etc.)
- Choose not to answer
Appendix F

CULTURE TASK FORCE
FOCUS GROUP
Total Tallies

Total number attended:  82
Total number invited:  312

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

We would like to ask you to provide some background information about yourself. Please remember that your responses are confidential. You may choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

*University of Minnesota Employment Commitment*

55 Full-time
9 Part-time

If part-time, what is the percent of time of your appointment? 25-75
1 Temporary or visiting appointment
1 Choose not to/did not answer

*Academic College or Administrative Unit/Department: See page 3*

*Job classification:*

9 Faculty-Tenured
5 Faculty-Tenure Track
1 Faculty-Not tenure track
14 Academic Professional and Administrative (P&A)
19 Civil Service
8 Bargaining Unit

*Time at the University and your current job*

How long have you worked at the University of Minnesota?
.5 – 36 years
average: 9.2 years

How long have you worked at your current job?
.5 – 36 years
average: 6 years
How many hours do you work during a typical week?
10 – 65 hours/week
average: 37 hours/week

**Supervision/Management**
In your present position, do you supervise or manage other employees?

- 34 Yes
- 30 No
- 0 Choose not to answer
- 15 Did not answer

**Student Status**

- 24 Full-time student
- 7 Part-time student
- 14 Not currently a student
- 0 Choose not to answer
- 15 Did not answer

**Student Classification**

- 13 Undergraduate
- 13 Graduate
- 6 Professional (i.e., Business Administration, Law, Dentistry)

**Gender**

- 34 Female
- 25 Male
- 0 Transgender
- 0 Other
- 3 Choose not to answer
- 20 Did not answer

**Age (in years):**

- 19 – 63 -- Average: 41.3
- 3 Choose not to answer
- 20 Did not answer

**Ethnic Background (check all that apply)**

- 9 Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- 8 Black, African, or African American
- 2 Hispanic, Chicano, Latino, or Hispanic American
- 2 Middle Eastern, Arab, or Arab American
- 2 Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native
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<td>White, European, or European American</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Choose not to answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
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**Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity**

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<th>Number</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Gay</td>
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<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Choose not to answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
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</table>

Are you currently **disabled** under state or federal laws?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Choose not to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
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</table>

**What is the highest level of education you have currently completed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High school plus technical training or apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Graduate or professional degree (MBA, M.A., M.D., PhD., law degree, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Choose not to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic College or Administrative Unit/Department:

**Twin Cities Campuses:**
- AHC
- Building Services
- Cancer Center
- CBS
- CCE
- CCE/CPE
- CEHD
- CHE
- CLA
- CLA/School of Music
- COAFES
- Controllers Organiz/Disb Svcs
- CSOM
- CVM/VBS
- Disability Services
- Ed. Policy & Admin.

- EDPA
- Facilities Management
- General College
- IT
- Math
- Medical Foundation
- Medical School
- Medicine
- Minnesota Geological Survey
- Nursing
- Public Health
- Rheumatology
- Soil, Water & Climate
- Student Affairs
- University Services

**Coordinate Campuses:**
- UMC Business
- UMC Business Affairs
- UMC Career Counseling
- UMC Development
- UMC Diversity
- UMC Math, Science & Technology
- UMC Technology Support Services
- UMM Campus Police
- UMM Center for Small Towns
- UMM Finance
- UMM Social Work
- UMD American Indian Studies & Social Work
- UMD ASSL
- UMD CEHSP
- UMD CLA
- UMD CSE-Biology
- UMD Electrical & Computer Engineering
- UMD Facilities Management
- UMD Health Sciences
- UMD IT Systems & Services
- UMD Library
- UMD Psychology/CEHSP
- UMD SFA-Art & Design
Appendix G

UNIVERSITY CULTURE TASK FORCE FOCUS GROUPS

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

The purpose of this focus group is to listen to diverse views from a broad cross-section of the University community to learn what elements of the University’s culture contribute to the goal of becoming one of the best and what may be hindering excellence. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will help us to identify and promote the type of culture that will help the University achieve its strategic goals.

Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. The session will be taped for the purpose of data collection. Your individual responses will be anonymous and held in confidence. Your name and personal information will not be associated with your responses. We also ask that you respect the confidentiality of others in the focus group and that you not attribute any specific comments to your fellow focus group members.

Name: _____________________________________
Print First and Last Name

Signature: ______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________