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# a LETTER from the PRESIDENT of moorhead state university

Moorhead State University has really gone through an interesting few days, a visit from an accrediting team from the North Central Association.

The country is divided into several accrediting regions, the largest of which is the North Central, reaching from Ohio to New Mexico and from Minnesota to Arkansas.

The colleges and universities in the region form the Association, the chief purpose of which is to examine institutions, both new and old, and to accredit them if they reach and maintain certain standards of education. The Association is divided into two commissions, one for post-secondary institutions and one for elementary and secondary schools, thus its name, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Not every high school seeks accreditation, but those who do find the periodic evaluations useful.

Colleges find accreditation much more essential, and institutions that are not accredited find themselves penalized in many ways.

Moorhead State was first accredited by North Central in 1916 when it was still a normal school. In 1922 our accreditation was dropped, for reasons lost in history, or in the fire that destroyed Old Main.

The next year accreditation was restored, but in 1929 the College resigned from the Association, probably because it believed that accreditation by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education was more valuable to a teachers college. In 1948 it rejoined the North Central and was once again accredited.

## Process

About every ten years a comprehensive evaluation is made. It was for this purpose that the accreditation team recently visited us. The process began last summer when we prepared a report entitled "Institutional Self-study, 1976."

In 1968 our report was 300 pages long; this year we managed with 90 pages. Teams were being inundated by paper, portraits of colleges were being obscured by tiny details. And so the Association requested reports that gave an over-all view of institutions and that stressed the important facts.

The second step was the three-day visit of a team of six people, from the University of Wisconsin, the University of Iowa, the University of Kansas, Wright State University, Oakland University, and the University of Northern Colorado.

We made available to them a high stack of materials: reports, handbooks, catalogues, regulations, and publications.

The six then moved through the campus, asking questions about programs and problems, talking to students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

At the end of the three days they had a pretty complete view of Moorhead State and had begun to turn their discoveries and conclusions into a report that will tell the Association what it has found and will tell us how we look to half-a-dozen experienced and knowledgeable outsiders.

## Results

In August some of us will go to Chicago to appear before a committee that has studied the team's report and that, after talking with us, will make a recommendation to the Commission as to whether our accreditation will be continued or will be withdrawn.

It has been said that not many colleges fail to retain accreditation. This is true, but even if the function of the North Central were only to hold institutions to very minimum standards it would be useful in pointing out even the very few colleges that are providing students with much less than they deserve.

But the usefulness of the accreditation process is far greater than that. The report can point out weaknesses, potential dangers, impending difficulties, and a variety of delusions. The sharp eye of the outsider saves us from the occasional blindness we turn to what we are so much involved in.

## As Others See

I have served on both visiting teams and, for several years, on evaluating committees. I don't think that I had any sudden access of wisdom as a result of those appointments. But one can become clear-eyed and clear-headed in looking at someone else's troubles. Or, for that matter, at someone else's achievements.

It is that capacity that we value in visiting evaluators, for it lets us see ourselves as others see us. And not only through their eyes. In preparing for the visit we forced ourselves to stand back a little, to look at ourselves with the care that merits the term "self-study."

I write as though only every ten years do we have people looking at us and making judgments about us. That is far from the truth.



When the legislature first established the normal schools, it directed the Board and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to have "competent persons of their appointment . . . visit and examine (each school) at least two days each session, for ascertaining the mode of instruction and the progress of the pupils." That was in the very first session of the Minnesota legislature, but life has grown a good deal more complicated since 1858.

There are times, especially at night, when I am checking out a report, when I long for simpler days. But they are gone forever, and so there are other times when I remind myself that there are a great many other states that envy Minnesota's educational enterprise and our clean and efficient system of government.

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**March 28 - April 8**  
 Art Exhibit: Pamela Swenson & Terry Erickson, Seniors - CA Art Gallery

**April 1, 9 p.m.-3 a.m.**  
 Caesar's Palace - CMU Ballroom

**April 8-11**  
 EASTER HOLIDAY—NO CLASSES

**April 11-22**  
 Art Exhibit: Sandra Jacobsen, Senior - CA Art Gallery

**April 13, 8:15 p.m.**  
 Series for Performing Arts: Demetrio Ballesteros, guitarist - Weld Auditorium

**April 14-16**  
 MSU Theatre Play - *Philemon* by Tom Jones - CA Auditorium

**April 15-17**  
 North Dakota Square Dancers Convention - Comstock Memorial Union

**April 20, 8:00 p.m.**  
 Special Lecturer: Dr. Gisela Knopka, Director Center Youth Development & Research of St. Paul - CA Recital Hall

**April 22-23, 8:00 p.m.**  
 Sig Tau Gamma Fraternity Presents: *Songfest* - CA Auditorium

**April 24, 3:00 p.m.**  
 MSU Choir Home Concert - Weld Auditorium

**April 26 - May 6**  
 Art Exhibit: Juror's Exhibit, Work by Juror of Annual Art Student Shows - CA Art Gallery

**April 28, 8:00 p.m.**  
 F-M Audubon Society: Ed Bry, Editor ND Magazine "Outdoors" - Hagen Auditorium

**April 29, 8:15 p.m.**  
 Series Performing Arts: *Vanities* by Milwaukee Repertory Theatre - CA Auditorium

**May 1, 8:15 p.m.**  
 Faculty Chamber Music Concert - CA Recital Hall

**May 6**  
 Series Performing Arts: New World Consort - Weld Auditorium

**May 8**  
 MSU Reader's Theatre - Second Stage - CA

**May 9-10, 8:15 p.m.**  
 MSU Opera Performance - Weld Auditorium

**May 15, 3:00 p.m.**  
 MSU Band & Symphonic Wind Ensemble Concert - CA Auditorium

**May 17, 8:15 p.m.**  
 MSU Spring Choir Concert - Weld Auditorium

**May 23, 24, 25**  
 Final Class Schedule

**May 26, 2:00 p.m.**  
*Commencement* - Nemzek Fieldhouse

**June 13-24**  
 Art Exhibit: Susan Bloom, MSU Senior - CA Art Gallery

**June 27 - July 8**  
 Art Exhibit: Pat Riopelle, MSU Senior - CA Art Gallery

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For one thing, the business of the state has vastly expanded. To control an enormous state budget and to assure that the determinations of elected officials are carried out by the many state agencies, a complex system has evolved. The Commissioner of Finance, the Commissioner of Personnel, the Commissioner of Administration, the Commissioner of Education, the Governor's Office, committees and staffs of the House and Senate, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the State University Board, the Chancellor of the State University System—all of these have responsibilities for making judgements about the way in which we carry out our task.

I could give another list of federal agencies that concern themselves with our expenditure of student aid funds, with the use of other grants, with our employment practices, with the way in which we deal with students.

But even if no state or federal agencies had ever been created we should long ago have grown used to being looked at and evaluated. By our neighbors, by prospective students, by the parents of students, and by our students themselves.

And we long ago learned that these last, the students, are the most important of all our judges. We have also learned that they can be as clear-eyed and analytical as any of the other judges. Like us, they do come, many of them, to be less than totally objective, to become involved with the University, to feel themselves a part of it. We judge our success by the extent to which this happens. To be admired for our virtues is a fine thing; to be loved despite our faults is even better.

## Findings

Oh, yes, about the North Central team. What did they find? Well, they talked to professors and examined curricula; they ate lunch with students and visited dormitories; they checked out our business practices, considered our administrative structure, and watched committees; they went through our library, stopped at our laboratories, read the college newspaper, and had coffee in the faculty lounge. They put in long hours, and, when they left, they looked happy and had many pleasant things to say: they talked about "an able and cosmopolitan faculty," about "fine facilities," about "good students."

They call that an exit interview, and its purpose is to give us fair warning about the report that they will write. And even though not a day goes by without our being aware of being watched, and being judged, we are all looking forward to the report of the North Central, and to finding out something about ourselves, good or bad, that we did not know, or did not know very well, before.

Post Script: Some judgments are made in very special circumstances. For instance, the one reflected in a citation we recently received from the Governor: "The faculty, staff, and students of Moorhead State University are hereby commended for their extensive conservation efforts during the present energy emergency, thereby setting an admirable example for all the citizens of the State of Minnesota."

So it was all worthwhile: the cold offices and classrooms, the closed-off rooms, the plastic-covered windows. It did work. We managed to achieve a 19% decrease in energy consumption during the emergency.

*Rolene Dille*

the BULLETIN  
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