Northwest Missouri State University

Sustaining a Community of Learners:

A Proposal for a
University Human Resource Development Strategy

Background
This proposal has been under development since the fall of 1998. It has been reviewed in various drafts by the Council of Deans, the Faculty Senate and its Welfare Committee, the Department Chairs Council, and the Human Resources Advisory Team. Each of these bodies recommends that the human resource development tenets and practices outlined in this document be translated into University policy and practice at the earliest possible date. The vision and approaches outlined for achieving it are seen as applying to all University employees including faculty and administrative, professional, and support staff and as complementary to Northwest's focus on continuous quality improvement and the tenets of the Baldrige Criteria. The Council of Deans has also recommended that the document be reviewed and, if appropriate, adopted officially by the Cabinet and the Board of Regents. The goal of the proposal is to ensure that the University, through its human resource policies, processes, and initiatives, sustains a community of continuous learners, who can help it adapt to significant challenges in the future.

All involved in the development of this document see this as an advantageous time to undertake the development of such a policy. State support for higher education has been excellent in recent years and Northwest, in particular, has benefited from this increased assistance. The relationship between the University leadership and faculty and staff has steadily improved and trust is at an all time high. All parties to the development of this document also realize that such favorable conditions may not continue indefinitely. Indeed there are signs that higher education as we know it is about to enter a period of significant challenge and change. These challenges include demands from the public for greater responsiveness to its learning needs; the opportunities and threats presented by information technology for the improvement and distant delivery of learning; and a press for a reduction in operating costs, primarily to keep tuition down. With these challenges ahead of us, the parties to this document believe that all Northwest employees need to see the University’s human resource development policy as affirmative and demanding. In so doing, we hope that these same employees will see the University as being dedicated to their personal and professional success as we move into more difficult and uncertain times. Indeed, if Northwest and its employees are to prosper in the future, they must adopt new approaches to their work and the basic role they play in the University.
Vision
To ensure that our students receive the very best education possible, Northwest should devise a human resource development system that supports and challenges faculty and staff throughout their careers at Northwest. This system should include:

- Search and selection processes that attract a diverse faculty and staff whose values, interests, capabilities and seniority match the University’s present and future needs;
- An orientation process that sets clear expectations and actively integrates new faculty and staff into the Northwest culture as well as into their particular responsibilities;
- A system that positively develops Northwest faculty and staff and celebrates their achievements including, as appropriate:
  - Promotion procedures that challenge faculty and staff in an environment of support and that have criteria that are appropriate, clear, fair and relevant to the mission of the department, unit, college and University; and tenure procedures for faculty that are perceived as appropriate, clear, fair and relevant;
  - Expectation that senior, tenured faculty and senior staff members will continue to grow professionally and personally and demonstrate their continual learning, leadership and collaboration in their annual and (for faculty) three-year reviews;
  - Expectation that senior faculty and staff (and where possible, those retired and semi-retired) will actively mentor their younger colleagues and associates through established University programs to provide continuity and perspective in times of rapid change as well as convey the role of traditions and core values in the Northwest culture;
  - Provisions for recognition and celebration of faculty and staff achievements both as team members and as individuals;
  - Provisions for faculty and administrative staff for a limited number of sabbatical leaves and educational leaves that (1) enable continual personal and professional growth and (2) contribute concretely to Northwest’s current and long-term human resource needs;
  - A compensation structure that is fact-based, fair and competitive;
  - Provisions for clear, two-way communication about needs, the directions of the University, and the positive role each member of the University community can play in the future of a University challenged by significant change.
- Expectations that the University’s human resources development strategy reflects an on-going commitment to a systemic human resources plan that is annually reviewed, appropriately funded, and continually improved.
- Expectations that all University faculty and staff will take personal responsibility for fulfilling the role assigned to them for achieving the University’s mission and in developing personally and professionally so that they can grow with the University as this mission evolves.

Approaches for Achieving the Vision
In this section, approaches for achieving the vision outlined above are defined.

Search and selection processes. Northwest departments and work units are critical in the identification and recruitment of new faculty and staff colleagues and must have a strong hand in the search and selection processes. They need to be supported in their efforts to
search aggressively for colleagues and associates who hold great promise for success at
Northwest. Specific items needed for assistance in this area include:

- The development of search and selection processes that genuinely assist search
  committees in their quest for the highest quality, most diverse possible pools of
  candidates. This would include codifying and streamlining the current search and
  selection processes in specific ways, beginning with the approval and interview
  protocols for academic appointments. In addition, the University’s search and screen
  manual should be strengthened so that it provides academic departments with greater
  capabilities to do searches, and, during national searches, allow them to bring more
  than one candidate to campus before a hiring decision is made, if the situation merits
  it. Moreover, established guidelines for interviewing and screening such as the
  AAHE and CUPA interview guides might be adopted and chairs and unit leaders
  should be trained in the use of those guides to ensure fairness and professionalism in
  our hiring practices.

- Selection processes that are rigorous and that ensure that both the candidate and the
  department or unit are both well informed when a hiring decision is made.

- The essence of this philosophy should be incorporated into the Faculty and Staff
  Handbooks and the University’s search process manuals.

Orientation processes. To fully maximize new faculty and staff talents, orientation
should be viewed as an on-going process, not a single event. In essence, orientation and
dialogue about progress toward goals should occur systematically in the first eighteen
months of employment. Initial, new faculty orientation should be extended and
strengthened and be coordinated between the University, college and department,
providing the new faculty member with a clear overview of their department, college and
University cultures and the important roles they are expected to play in them. For
example, orientation to teaching and meeting the needs of students in the classroom
should be the focus of the first year's orientation activities with new faculty, and
orientation to committee and team service should focus the next six months' activities. In
the initial orientation activities, mentors and HR personnel should inform new faculty of
the contents of the Faculty Handbook and get them started on a plan for achieving their
career goals, appropriate promotions, and tenure at Northwest. Faculty should also
receive a clear overview of the criteria for promotion and tenure during these activities.
The process should be responsive to the needs of all new faculty members and the
departments in which they work. It should be challenging and supportive. The essence
of this philosophy and approach should be incorporated into the Faculty Handbook.

- New staff orientation should be available for new employees close to the time they
  are employed. It should be coordinated among the University, the work unit, and an
  identified mentor so that new colleagues have a clear overview of their unit and
  function as well as the University cultures and the important roles they are expected
  to play in them. During the half-day, initial orientation staff members also should be
  informed of the contents of appropriate handbooks (Support, Professional and
  Administrative Staff) and begin development of an on-going, systematic plan for
  achieving their career goals and appropriate promotions at Northwest.
**University development process.** Once new faculty and staff members are launched into the system, it must support them by providing annual progress reviews, carrying out periodic reviews of personal and professional growth, and providing for mentoring from unit leadership as well as senior faculty and staff where appropriate. In addition, the Human Resources Management Office should ensure that the development process supplies or identifies internal training and development opportunities needed for success at Northwest and in each position. The colleges and the units as well as the University need to make sure that these processes provide support to all employees throughout their careers. In the case of faculty, for example, these processes must ensure that the same clarity and fairness in the application of promotion and tenure criteria exists across all departments. These approaches should be incorporated in the **Faculty and Staff, Professional and Administrative Handbooks.**

**Celebration.** Through regular recognition and celebration activities the University signals the value of growth and development to our culture and indicates what behaviors and activities are desirable. Northwest's future gains in continuous quality improvement depend on the learning and depth of participation of its employees, and employee attitudes and performance influence the climate of the campus. Consequently, the University must acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of all of its employees by recognizing their accomplishments and milestones in their professional and personal lives in a timely and positive fashion. Career paths should note milestones and key events for recognition, which should be recognized by the unit leader and brought to the attention of others appropriately.

**Compensation structure.** The University has committed itself to paying competitive salaries and benefits. In the case of faculty and academic administrative staff, for example, Northwest refers to national data for Masters I institutions to determine compensation levels. For all employees, we need to continue our annual review of salaries and administer salary increases so we remain as competitive as possible so that we can continue to recruit and maintain an employee base of highly motivated, highly productive faculty and staff. We need to communicate our progress in this area to the faculty and staff regularly in some detail through the Faculty Senate Welfare committee and the Support Staff Council.

**Fostering strong university leadership.** Leadership is crucial to the professional and personal development of the faculty and staff in their units. Thus, they need to be supported, challenged, and valued for the important roles they play. To build its cadre of department chairs and administrative and staff leadership, Northwest needs to strengthen leadership at all levels so that the most capable and trusted faculty and staff aspire to leadership tasks and leadership roles. In addition, the University should establish a program through Human Resources Management to enhance the leadership skills of the chairs, unit leaders, and administrative leaders.

**Planning for retirements.** It is clear that the University should develop a plan for addressing the retirements of key faculty and staff in the next few years. This plan should include elements for attracting new colleagues that meet Northwest’s future needs.
It should also provide opportunities for retirees, who are desirous and qualified, to serve the University in part-time mentoring and teaching roles.

**Improved communication.** A concerted effort should be made to communicate annually about the University’s directions with attention given to the broad themes within the directions so the University family understands the purposes of and connections between activities. In general, more opportunities for interactive two-way communications should be sought. The annual surveys should be continued under the auspices of Human Resources Management and the Faculty Senate Welfare Committee, and the results should be reported promptly to the University community. To give credibility to the surveys, they should be distributed annually with a memorandum discussing the steps taken and progress made in addressing concerns identified in previous surveys. In addition, efforts should be made to increase survey response rates. The President, Provost and Deans, and Cabinet members should increase efforts to communicate with faculty and staff in a two-way fashion on key issues that might affect them throughout the year, using a variety of communications channels. Special attention should be given to moving communication from faculty and staff to administration.

**Continuous improvement and organizational learning.** It is clear that Northwest has in place a Culture of Quality and a University family of learners capable and desirous of continuous improvement. To capitalize on these advantages, the President and Provost should ensure that, through the Strategic Planning Council and formal presentations, the University community understands why Northwest is directing its improvement efforts as it is. This understanding would be based on having clear goals for improvement. Our decisions would be based on facts, building on measures and indicators appropriate to the issue. It means, in addition, that our improvement efforts would be systematic, based on clear and published cycles of planning, activity, and evaluation. Finally, it means that we would continue to focus on what is key to the University’s future success.