Introduction

The School of Graduate Studies at Bemidji State University promotes and supports graduate programming throughout the University. The School provides central services and oversight of University policies and procedures designed and developed through recommendations from departments represented on the University Graduate Studies Committee, with approval of the Graduate Dean, the faculty senate, and the President.

The School of Graduate Studies:

- Promotes graduate education on campus.
- Provides services and opportunities for graduate students.
- Works with departments to develop new graduate programs.
- Reviews research projects that contain human subjects (Institutional review Board is housed in the School).
- Approves all theses, research papers, capstone projects.
- Approves all graduate program/curricular changes.
- Approves all proposed arranged courses and workshops.
- Helps develop new policies for graduate students with the BSU Graduate Studies Committee.
- Approves the status for all new and continuing graduate faculty.
- Monitors graduate students' progress from program to graduation.
- Provides evaluation of trends in higher education to promote programming for 21st century learning.

The School of Graduate Studies supports the pursuit of advanced study among students and faculty within disciplines and in interdisciplinary fields. The mission of the School of Graduate Studies is parallel to the new mission and vision of the University with a focus on advanced preparation in teaching, research, and service linked to the University's signature themes—multicultural and international understanding, environmental stewardship and civic engagement.

The School of Graduate Studies in the 21st Century Context

Graduate study is increasing in the US due to workforce demands and credentialing requirements (http://www.gradview.com/articles/graduateschool/study-trends.html). Generally, the BSU School of Graduate Studies is well positioned to meet the needs of 21st century learners with its program offerings (see for example NCES http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=37) and through its variety of delivery modes (see http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=80). National trends in the growth of graduate studies suggests that Bemidji State should continue and in fact grow its School of Graduate Studies (see Table 1).
Table 1 Projections of growth in graduate study in the US.

Bemidji State University grants Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS), and Master of Education (M.Ed.) degrees. In addition, several courses and workshops are offered at the graduate level that may be added to a master's program or, more commonly, used as credentialing or continuing education credits for salary changes.

Demand for master’s degrees is projected to rise (see Table 2) as are requests for graduate certificates, endorsements, and continuing graduate level credits. These trends appear to be true of Minnesota and our surrounding states. Since Bemidji State has a strong online component in its graduate education programs (one of the growing areas in graduate studies), national trends will clearly affect Bemidji State’s enrollment in these programs.
An analysis of learner needs for the next five to ten years suggests refinements should be explored for program offerings, delivery modes, and quality assurances:

- **Program Offerings.** Health sciences, education, science and mathematics, and business administration appear to be national areas of growth that are relevant to Bemidji State University’s current programming. New or enhanced programming in these areas and in graduate certificates, such as credentialing credits for community college faculty, should be considered.

- **Delivery Modes.** Graduate students are working adults. Many are not interested in traditional campus-based programming. Studies suggest that reduced seat-time models, online, and blended models (seat-time and online) are most desirable for this population.

- **Quality Assurances.** As with campus-based programming, quality in teaching, delivery mode, materials, and design are critical. There is a growing necessity for assessment of learning outcomes in all levels of education. This emphasis on program assessments often requires new measures at the graduate level since most institutions focused on undergraduate assessments.


A further consideration centers on the demographics of Northern rural Minnesota. The population of the state is concentrating in the Twin Cities Metro area, thus reducing the
traditional population who would otherwise attend a local university in a traditional face-to-face program.

Its articulation agreements and partnerships with community colleges throughout the state, its online graduate core courses, and its primarily online graduate program in Wyoming have ensured the School of Graduate Studies’ viability despite the shrinking local population. Bemidji State University continues its campus programs, but must also look to innovative methods of connecting with the urban and suburban populations of the state as well as other potential student groups outside of the state.

Changes Since 2001

The University has recently completed a comprehensive reorganization resulting in three newly configured colleges. The reorganization plans were effective July 1, 2008. Some key changes in the School of Graduate Studies include:

- 2005 The Office of Graduate Studies becomes the School of Graduate Studies
- 2005-2006: The dean of the College and School resigns and an interim dean from the business faculty is appointed.
- 2007: College reorganization is finalized and begins implementation. Interim deans are assigned to colleges. The former interim dean for the College of Professional Studies becomes the interim dean for the College of Business, Technology, and Communications (BTC). The former interim dean of the College of Social and Natural Sciences is named interim dean of Health Sciences and Human Ecology (HSHE) and the School of Graduate Studies.
- 2008. Health Sciences and Human Ecology (HSHE) and the School of Graduate Studies Dean is established.
- 2009. New half-time staff member added to School of Graduate Studies office.

History of the Situation and Need for Change

The School has undergone changes over the last ten years. In January of 2005 the Office of Graduate Studies became the School of Graduate Studies to increase its visibility and more accurately describe its span of influence due to an increase in graduate students and advanced programs on campus and online.

Though the number of graduate students has increased over the years on campus and online, regular staffing only recently changed with the addition of a half-time clerical assistant. The self study revealed the scarcity of staffing as a weakness in human resources and primarily as an artifact of reorganization. During the reorganization of the University, academic departments and several other areas were moved to better align functions and services. Staff positions are still in flux as work loads and assignments are examined to better align with the new university structure.
As with most state university’s Normal School heritage, offices of graduate studies are often linked to the teacher education department by placing education and graduate studies in the same college (with a few other related departments). At Bemidji State, this linkage was true in the former College of Professional Studies and remains in the current College of Health Sciences and Human Ecology, with six academic departments and the School of Graduate Studies under one dean. (Other Minnesota State Universities now typically have a dean for education and a separate dean for graduate studies with a staff of at least three.)

In the summer of 2009, the Deans and the Vice-President for Academic Affairs placed Graduate Studies on a list of major topics for discussion of future direction. Graduate Studies is currently being examined in the areas of:

- Relationship of programming to university mission and vision
- Recruiting and marketing
- Growth in selected programs
- Staffing
- Software and other admissions/retention tools
- Quality of programs
- Graduate studies learning outcomes and assessment
- Variety of program offerings

**Goals and Anticipated Outcomes**

College reorganization accomplished the first of several steps toward redefining the role of graduate studies at Bemidji State. Though well positioned to meet many 21st century learner demands, the question remains: what is appropriate and feasible programming for the future of graduate studies at Bemidji State University? How will we distinguish the programming in the areas of quality, availability, and data-driven decision-making? What programs could be developed, either through partnerships or exclusively by Bemidji State departments?

**Time Line**

*Past Actions*
- Becoming a School of Graduate Studies.
- Building programs in demand areas

*Current Actions*
- Revising policy on graduate faculty and graduate school representatives
- Defining and documenting practices and processes for advisors, committee members, and chairs
- Examining capstone policies
- Examining current data collection practices and forms

*Next Actions*
Generate a Graduate School Strategic Plan aligned with the University Master Academic Plan

- Develop a work plan (short range/long range 5-year)
- Formally integrate University mission, vision, and signature theme into School of Graduate Studies
- Addressed in the work plan should be an assessment plan for measuring effectiveness in graduate student development. This should include to continue to advocate parity of graduate student stipends with other MnSCU institutions.
- Identify and document the changing role of the Graduate Committee within a growing graduate environment.
  - Role of Graduate Committee regarding academic independence of departments. How can we encourage excellence?

Generate a Graduate Work Plan of steps toward achieving the goals in the Graduate School Strategic Plan

- Identify graduate education needs/programs, including non-degree programs, that our university is best situated to deliver.
- Investigate assessment strategies and ensure the quality of existing and new graduate programs, including quantitative, qualitative, and aesthetic work.
- Determine how we should we review proposals for new programs
- Develop Graduate Committee policies regarding its powers and limits of power.

In addition: Explore current financial resources and consider increasing those resources including financial support/incentives for faculty within the existing framework, i.e. MnSCU, IFO contract, allocation model. What can we do? How can we change external environment?

- How do we grow within our setting/means (remoteness, adequate resources for research advising workload, etc.)
- Dissemination of growth areas/possibilities, and support programs. Who’s job is it? How should it be done?

Summary
Most university’s of our size and demographic mix are experiencing changes in their over-all program offerings, moving more programming to online and off-site locations or providing reduced seat-time models to address the concerns of both new enrollments and retention of students in programs. With this document, we may summarize our current status by asking the following questions:

- How do we transition from a predominately undergrad institution to a thriving, growing resource for professional development in our region, the state and beyond?
- How do we manage change and encourage an understanding that the growth rate of undergraduate programs is likely to be reduced over the coming years, especially for our rural region?
From the perspective of the Graduate Committee and based on trends in higher education, how do we propose that a formula for a healthy future lies in the development of strong, relevant graduate and professional programs and certificates?