A STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

McNeese State University

Fall 2012

**The Importance of Asking Why**

Dr. Joe Gray Taylor undertook the project of writing his priceless history of McNeese State University—covering the years 1939 through 1987—at the request of then president Dr. Jack V. Doland and then vice-president Dr. Robert D. Hebert, who were looking ahead to McNeese’s 50th Anniversary celebration.[[1]](#footnote-1) University presidents do not commission works like that one—and excellent historians do not accept them—if the subject matter is not deemed worthy of the enormous exertion required. Clearly all parties at the time believed that completion of a history of the first fifty years of McNeese State University was worth the effort.

McNeese will celebrate its 75th Anniversary in 2014—midway through the five-year period of operations covered by this strategic blueprint.[[2]](#footnote-2) Future generations of historians will be interested in the answers we give to our “why” question: Why is the success of McNeese still so important—not only to its alumni, current students, faculty, staff, donors, and fans—but also to all the future residents of this region?

In motivational expert Simon Sinek’s video speech, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” Sinek draws three concentric circles, like the target used in an archery tournament. [[3]](#footnote-3) He labels the outermost ring “what,” the middle ring “how,” and the bull’s eye “why.” He describes the manner in which many unsuccessful organizations work from the outside in: attempting to market “what” they are selling merely by describing “how” it will better the customer’s life. Successful companies, on the other hand, move from the inside out: beginning the process by understanding why they are marketing products and services in the first place. These companies are successful because their integrity captures the hearts and minds of a loyal customer base. Referring to the life of Martin Luther King, Sinek observes that Dr. King’s most famous speech was not titled “I Have a Plan.” King’s followers were motivated so successfully because they were sharing a dream that was rooted deeply within his own spirit.

Those of us who care most deeply about the success of McNeese need more than a clinical plan establishing a five-year direction describing “what” we intend to do and “how” we intend to do it. We need an inspiring vision that begins with the inward “why,” and only then works outward to the “how” and “what.” In his speech, Sinek contrasts the failure of Samuel Pierpont Langley—whose research was fully funded by the United States government—to the success of the Wright brothers, whose research was undertaken on a financial shoestring, but whose inspiration came from within. As we continue to face challenges related to the funding of public higher education, we can learn from those—like Martin Luther King and the Wright brothers—who managed to succeed in the face of political and fiscal constraints.

McNeese will begin the 2012-13 fiscal year with a revenue budget $4.7 million below that of the fiscal year 2011-12, a year we mistakenly referred to as the “cliff year,” because we thought we had already reached the edge of the cliff.[[4]](#footnote-4) “Cliff year” reductions (i. e. those we experienced in last year’s budget) already necessitated a series of cost-saving measures at McNeese, including an early retirement incentive plan, substantial reductions in departmental budgets, hiring delays, salaries frozen at July 2008 levels, and the elimination of certain employee positions made possible through reorganization and an overall reduction in institutional services.

It would be nice if we could assume that the fiscal 2012-2013 budget finally represents a bottoming point for state appropriations allocated to McNeese; however, some commentators continue to refer to the national economy as suffering the longest jobs recession since the Great Depression.[[5]](#footnote-5) We must also ponder the realization that we were wrong when we assumed, prior to the adoption of the 2011-2012 budget, that we were facing a one-of-a-kind “cliff year,” since revenue reductions in the 2012-2013 budget represent a new, and even steeper, cliff. We cannot ignore the serious decline in the state’s collection of corporate income taxes—from $939.7 million in 2008 to $141 this past year.[[6]](#footnote-6) The importance of this number is twofold: (1) the obvious connection between a decline in corporate income tax revenues and the level of funds available to the state to fund appropriations; and (2) the fact that this decline is occurring notwithstanding overall improvements in the state and national economies. Given the latter factor, it would be unwise for McNeese to assume that a substantial increase in the level of state economic activity would automatically result in a flood of tax receipts into the state treasury to be spent on higher education. If McNeese is to continue its upward trajectory in the face of such daunting fiscal headwinds, it is clear that we must adopt the approach of the Wright brothers over that of Samuel Pierpont Langley, notwithstanding the series of exciting developments in the local and regional economy described below.

**The Regional Economic Environment**

As of this writing, McNeese finds itself near the epicenter of a major industrial transformation in Southwest Louisiana. The following list is only a sampling of the level of industrial and governmental investment announced within the past two years:

* Sasol North America, Inc., is planning to spend between $8 billion and $10 billion to build a gas-to-liquids (GTL) complex in Lake Charles. The project is expected to require the employment of 850 new workers, at salaries averaging approximately $89,000, and would produce liquid natural gas valued at approximately $1.5 billion annually at today’s prices.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* Cheniere Energy, Inc., is planning to spend approximately $6.5 billion to build a natural gas liquefaction facility at Cheniere’s Sabine Pass terminal in Cameron Parish. Officials expect the plant to employ 148 permanent workers.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* At Chennault International Airport, Northrop Grumman Corporation and Aeroframe Services LLC are investing in the construction of new aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities projected to add more than 500 new employees.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* The Port of Lake Charles—the 11th largest port in the United States in terms of tonnage—has announced the construction of the first new grain elevator in 40 years. It has also leased land to The Shaw Group, Inc., which has constructed a 400,000 square-foot facility on 300 acres to fabricate and assemble nuclear reactor modules.[[10]](#footnote-10) It has leased 242 acres to Ameristar Casinos, Inc., which has announced plans to invest approximately $500 million to construct a hotel/casino complex to include—among other features—approximately 1,600 slot machines, 700 guest rooms, and an 18-hole golf course.[[11]](#footnote-11)
* The City of Lake Charles has embarked upon an ambitious Downtown/Lakefront Development Plan.[[12]](#footnote-12) The new lakefront promenade was opened to the public last year, and a number of improvements along Ryan Street have already been completed.
* A press release recently issued by U. S. Senator Mary Landrieu’s office states that the recently signed RESTORE Act will dedicate 80% of penalties paid by BP Global PLC to local communities involved in coastal restoration.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* In Allen Parish, the new Roy O. Martin oriented strand board (OSB) plant in Oakdale is now the largest OSB plant in the United States.[[14]](#footnote-14)
* The expansion of Fort Polk, together with the success of existing employers like AmeriSafe, Boise Cascade, and Meadwestvaco, is driving revenue growth in Beauregard Parish to record levels.[[15]](#footnote-15)
* The Jeff Davis Parish Economic Development & Tourist Commission has announced the addition of a rice-loading facility at Lacassine, near McNeese’s new Center for Advancement of Meat Production and Processing (CAMPP). It has also announced the purchase by BP Global of a bio-fuels plant in Jeff Davis Parish to make ethanol using cellulosic technology.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The foregoing list does not include dozens of smaller—but no less exciting—initiatives throughout the five-parish Imperial Calcasieu region.

**Governmental and Administrative Context**

McNeese State University is one of nine universities comprising the University of Louisiana System (ULS).[[17]](#footnote-17) The ULS is governed by a 16-member Board of Supervisors, currently chaired by Mr. D. Wayne Parker. Combined operating budgets for ULS constituent institutions exceeded $800 million for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.[[18]](#footnote-18) It is the expectation of the McNeese administration that it will submit the strategic vision and goals described near the end of this document for review and approval by the ULS Board of Supervisors during the fall semester of 2012.

Over at least the past five years, the fundamental educational mission of McNeese State University, as stated in the McNeese 2011-2012 Academic Catalog, has been “to offer associate, baccalaureate, and specific graduate curricula distinguished by academic excellence. The University engages in collaborative ventures to benefit industry and to enhance economic development and cultural growth in this region and beyond.” The purpose and core values of the University were described as being a “selective admissions university” providing “education, research, and service that support . . . academic excellence, student success, fiscal responsibility, and university-community alliances.” Emphasis was also given to a “faculty commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and creative and scholarly activity” where “students cultivate skills for critical thinking and effective expression and gain an understanding of the global community. The learning and social environment integrates discipline-specific knowledge with the values of lifelong learning, ethical responsibility, and civic engagement.”

In January of 2012, in response to HCR 30 of the 2011 regular session of the Louisiana Legislature, the Board of Regents adopted role, scope, and mission guidelines for McNeese State University, as follows:

*“McNeese State University is primarily a teaching institution whose mission is successful education of undergraduate students and services to the employers and communities in its region. McNeese uses a traditional admission process based on courses completed, GPA, and standardized test scores.*

1. *Audiences*

*McNeese is responsible for serving:*

* 1. *Residents of Southwest Louisiana who have completed high school and are seeking either a college degree or continuing professional education;*
  2. *Two-year college transfer students, particularly those from Sowela Technical Community College;*
  3. *Employers in the region, both public and private, school districts, health care providers, local governments, and private businesses;*
  4. *Economic development interests and regional entrepreneurs; and*
  5. *The area community, by providing a broad range of academic and cultural activities and public events.*

1. *Array of Programs and Services*
2. *An array of liberal arts programs at the baccalaureate level – arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences – appropriate to a teaching institution with a predominantly undergraduate student body.*
3. *Baccalaureate programs in education, engineering, business, nursing, selected allied health fields, mass communication, and criminal justice.*
4. *Master’s programs primarily related to education, engineering, arts and sciences, nursing, and business.*
5. *Support for area K-12 schools seeking college general education courses for advanced students and assistance in ensuring that their graduates are college- and career-ready.*
6. *Services specifically designed to meet the needs of regional economic development (small business development, support for entrepreneurs, problem-solving).*
7. *Special Programs/Features*
8. *Programs in innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business development supported by the Southwest Entrepreneurial and Economic Development Center.*
9. *Agricultural and related sciences with opportunities for experiential learning at three working farms and the Center for Advancement of Meat Production and Processing.*
10. *Custom academic programs and professional certifications integrated with area business and industry.*
11. *Applied undergraduate research partnerships in engineering, sciences, allied health, and the Louisiana Environmental Research Center.*
12. *Cultural events are designed to connect McNeese with the regional arts community and K-12 education.”[[19]](#footnote-19)*

The primary purpose of the University’s new strategic plan will be to serve as a roadmap to guide administrative decision-making, including the setting of budget priorities, over the next five years in a manner consistent with the above-stated role, scope, and mission, parts of which have changed from the Academic Catalog version. For example, one obvious change in emphasis from the catalog language to the newer Board of Regents language is the reference to Sowela Technical Community College, especially with respect to the awarding of associate-level degrees, and the importance of clarifying and strengthening the relationship between McNeese and Sowela. It would therefore be useful for the strategic plan to offer guidance in that regard. Another change is the reference—in the Board of Regents’ language—to specific programs and features unique to McNeese, such as the SEED Center, the CAMPP facility, the Louisiana Environmental Research Center, the Banners Cultural Series, and other custom-designed academic programs and certifications. It is important that the University’s vision and goals for the next five years include specific reference to these initiatives.

**Finding Our Common Vision—Methodology**

At the August 2011 faculty-staff retreat, President Williams initiated McNeese State University’s strategic visioning process. The process involved a variation of a “Hoshin Kanri” technique based on concepts developed during the late 1950s by Professor Kaoru Ishikawa.[[20]](#footnote-20) The philosophy behind the use of this particular variation of Hoshin Kanri was to use electronic software to organize and leverage the collective brain power of as many McNeese constituents as practicable within a time frame of a single calendar year.

More than 5,000 ideas were gathered from participants via a series of 34 town-hall-style brainstorming sessions, mailed surveys, and an interactive Web link. Participants included groups of interested students, faculty, administrators, alumni, donors, community leaders, and friends. Each idea was indexed according to the date, time, and place of the brainstorming session, as well as the functional category of the idea, such as Facilities, Athletics, and Academic Affairs, much the way books and periodicals are organized in a modern library. Among other attributes, this organizational system allows interested participants, upon request, to receive input regarding the journey of a particular idea he or she contributed.

During each brainstorming session (and in each mailed or online survey) the following twelve questions were asked:

1. What is your first thought when you hear the name “McNeese”?

2. What do you love most about McNeese?

3. Whether you love it or not, what do you believe is McNeese’s greatest strength?

4. What is McNeese’s most glaring area for improvement?

5. What opportunities should McNeese seize within the next five years?

6. Is there anything about McNeese that is so fundamental that we should protect it against

change?

7. What threats should McNeese be guarding against over the next five years?

8. What could McNeese do to improve student learning?

9. What should McNeese be doing to increase enrollment and retention?

10. If you could identify one aspect of the McNeese experience that “brands” us as distinct

from other institutions, what would it be?

11. If McNeese could engage in just one activity that would excite you into wanting to

contribute more of your time and/or resources, what would that activity be?

12. What ideas do you have about improving McNeese that have not already been

mentioned?

Each response to these questions received multiple readings by President Williams and members of his administrative team. The first such reading occurred either during each brainstorming session itself, at which Dr. Williams presided and fielded responses, or upon receipt of a mailed or online survey by Dr. Tom Dvorske, Director of Institutional Effectiveness. Regardless of how the idea was received, it was tagged with a unique identifier. The impact of this initial reading and tagging process should not be underestimated, because a number of dominant themes became apparent immediately. For example, the first idea offered in response to questions 1, 2, 3, and 6 was often a reference to the McNeese motto: “Excellence with a Personal Touch.” The very fact that this phrase was offered so often, by such a variety of participants, and with such obvious passion made an impression on President Williams that should be evident in the discussion of the “hedgehog concept” below.

Ideas received a second reading when they were organized and classified by Dr. Dvorske along with Ms. Sarah Hogan, who serves as Executive Assistant to the President and Director of University Events. It was the task of Dr. Dvorske and Ms. Hogan to assure that no idea was lost, and that each continued along its appointed route.[[21]](#footnote-21)

A third reading was given to each idea by an *ad hoc* team comprised of Ms. Joyce Patterson, Director of Alumni Affairs; Ms. Ginny Karg, Director of Marketing and Licensing; and Ms. Candace Townsend, Director of Public Relations. It was the task of this group to match each idea to one or more administrative units, where each idea would receive its fourth reading. It was not unusual for an administrative unit to review more than a hundred ideas. After each idea had been reviewed and “digested” by the appropriate administrative department, the ideas were sent back to the President for a fifth reading, each with a line or more of feedback attached.

Meanwhile, Dr. Dvorske, using NVivo research software, prepared a series of analyses, including a word and concept frequency analysis, a SWOT analysis[[22]](#footnote-22), and a “hedgehog concept” requested by Dr. Williams following the suggestions of business writer Jim Collins.[[23]](#footnote-23) According to Collins, organizations succeed by identifying and focusing on a hedgehog concept found at the intersection of what the organization loves most, where its strength lies, and what drives its economic engine. The SWOT analysis was based on responses to questions 3, 4, 5, and 7. The hedgehog concept was identified by examining an overlay of McNeese revenue sources with responses to questions 2 and 3. After removing hundreds of duplications and reviewing the remaining unduplicated responses, Dr. Dvorske distilled these analyses into a 56-page summary of thematic nodes and references.[[24]](#footnote-24) After a careful review of Dr. Dvorske’s work, Dr. Williams was able to articulate the four broad themes—innovative teaching and learning, innovative regional partnerships, innovative branding, and a physical environment supportive of innovation—that constitute the primary goals of the McNeese strategic vision for the next five years.

**Word Frequency Analysis**

Responses to Question 1—*What is your first thought when you hear the name “McNeese?”*—clustered around the idea that McNeese is a home town university offering a quality education with a strong tradition of championship-level athletics.   
  
Responses to Question 2—*What do you love most about McNeese?*—indicated a love for McNeese’s small, community atmosphere—especially the accessibility to our faculty—providing a solid and affordable education for our students. The motto “Excellence with a Personal Touch” was frequently mentioned.

Responses to Question 3—*Whether you love it or not, what do you believe is McNeese’s greatest strength?*—were quite similar to the responses to Question 2, and often referred to specific athletics and academic programs. This similarity is a good thing, since, as noted above, the intersection of questions 2 and 3 assists us in identifying a “hedgehog concept.” (See discussion, below.)

Responses to Question 4—*What is McNeese’s most glaring area for improvement?*—varied widely, with a high focus on issues related to protecting the learning experience of our students and the quality of our faculty, both academically and professionally. Other concerns were related to improvements needed with respect to our internal and external communication and the condition of our physical plant and grounds.   
  
The most-frequent responses to Question 5—*What opportunities should McNeese seize within the next five years?*—also varied widely in range, and centered largely on the need to invest time and resources in students, programs, online classes, community involvement, and facility utilization and improvement.  
  
The answers to Question 6—***Is there anything about McNeese that is so fundamental that we should protect it against change?***—demonstrated the level to which the McNeese community considers some of our more unique traits to be worthy of protection. Some of these include the McNeese name and horse-and-rider logo, the personal interaction between students and faculty, our motto ("Excellence with a Personal Touch"), and our academic programs.   
  
The main threats that were mentioned in the answers to Question 7—***What threats should McNeese be guarding against over the next five years?*—**included reductions in state appropriations and the related loss of student enrollment and academic programs. Participants tended to view these three impacts as interrelated.  
  
Answers for Question 8—***What could McNeese do to improve student learning?*—**suggested specific training, preparation, and accountability for our students, as well as innovative approaches to learning, such as active learning, service-learning, and an increased number of online and hybrid classes.  
  
The most commonly used word in the answers for Question 9—***What should McNeese be doing to increase enrollment and retention?*—**was "students.” The context varied greatly from "providing greater resources for,” to "advising” and "preparing.” The general feeling gathered from participants was that personal programs designed for students throughout their college careers would result in an increase in enrollment and retention. There were also many answers that suggested an increase in advertising and recruitment efforts.  
  
The most popular answers for Question 10—***If you could identify one aspect of the McNeese experience that "brands" us as distinct from other institutions, what would it be?***—revolved around our small school size and family atmosphere directly leading to unique opportunities for our students. Almost every group referred to our motto: "Excellence with a Personal Touch."

The one-on-one interaction that students can experience at McNeese is a major factor in the eyes of the community that sets us apart from other universities.  
  
There was a wide range of answers for Question 11— ***If McNeese could engage in just one activity that would excite you into wanting to contribute more of your time and/or resources, what would that activity be?*** Many participants expressed an interest in getting directly involved with activities on campus such as community service, helping with recruitment efforts, and campus beautification projects. Others expressed interest in supporting faculty, alumni groups, and university events in various ways.   
  
Word frequency analysis was not very useful in the catch-all category of Question 12—***What ideas do you have about improving McNeese that have not already been mentioned?*** Analysis of these responses depended more heavily on the vetting that occurred at the administrative unit level.

**SWOT Analysis**

The letters S-W-O-T stand for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The first two factors—strengths and weaknesses—can be viewed as internal traits of an organization. Generally these are organizational features over which the organization has a measure of control. The remaining factors—opportunities and threats—can be viewed as external, and typically include events or circumstances over which the organization may have little or no control. Opportunities and threats may arise unexpectedly and without warning.  
  
The best managed organizations are constantly engaged in various forms of environmental scanning and other SWOT-related activities, even when these activities are called by other names. For example, the typical exercise of evaluating employees on an annual basis is one way in which an organization can assess internal strengths and weaknesses relating to its human resources. Similarly, in the world of higher education, the periodic reviews performed by regional and national accrediting agencies assist the University in assessing its internal strengths and weaknesses.   
  
A good SWOT analysis matches the organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses with potential opportunities and threats in a manner aimed at maximizing strategic effectiveness. For example, if our SWOT analysis tells us that we have an internal weakness in the same area where we expect a major external threat to occur, we are on notice that we have a vulnerability that needs to be addressed. Similarly, if our SWOT analysis tells us that we have an internal strength in the same area where we expect a major external opportunity to occur, we are on notice that we should be making specific plans to seize that opportunity when it occurs.  
  
Our Hoshin exercise used four of our brainstorming questions to assist us in our SWOT analysis:

S = Question 3-Whether you love it or not, what do you believe is McNeese's greatest strength?  
W = Question 4-What is McNeese's most glaring area for improvement?  
O = Question 5-What opportunities should McNeese seize within the next five years?  
T = Question 7-What threats should McNeese be guarding against over the next five years?  
  
Note the similarities that exist between this summary and the word-frequency analysis for those same four questions described above.  
  
McNeese's Strengths  
Participants in nearly every brainstorming session—regardless of whether the groups were predominantly made up of faculty, staff, students, alumni, community leaders, donors, or athletics stakeholders—mentioned the McNeese motto—“Excellence with a Personal Touch”—as a major strength. Other frequently mentioned strengths included a number of our academic programs, the availability of personal faculty-student interaction (a variation of "Excellence with a Personal Touch"), and a number of regional advantages, including strong relationships with local industry, the unique Southwest Louisiana culture, and the McNeese impact on K-12 education and local health care institutions.  
  
McNeese's Weaknesses  
When it came to a discussion of weaknesses, issues of facility maintenance and parking were usually mentioned first, followed closely by problems relating to the need to overcome a decades-old reputation of being merely a stepchild to Louisiana's flagship institution. Although participants pointed to facts that clearly establish McNeese's role as a regional leader in preparing students in such areas as pre-medicine (with extremely high acceptance rates of McNeese graduates to schools of medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry), nursing, teacher education, industrial engineering, accounting, and creative writing, responses reflected the concern that many taxpayers were unaware of McNeese's generational transformation in that regard. Another frequently mentioned set of weaknesses related to limitations in the physical boundaries of the campus. (“McNeese is landlocked.”)  
  
McNeese's Opportunities  
Participants identified a number of interesting opportunities likely to come our way over the next five years. Many of these related to enrollment and academic methodologies; for example, expanding online programs (especially graduate programs) and out-of-state recruiting, use of the SEED Center as a focal point to expand innovative teaching methods and industry partnerships, and increasing cooperative relationships with Sowela and other institutions of higher education. Some participants mentioned the potential for additional student services, such as child care, additional housing, and community service opportunities. Image-related possibilities were also mentioned. These related to the need for new marketing initiatives, image branding, and public relations.  
  
Threats likely to face McNeese  
The threats most often mentioned were related to reductions in state funding and potential effects these could have on our existing academic programs and standards. Competition from other institutions—including competition from other online programs—was also mentioned frequently as a threat that McNeese will need to address. Closely tied to these potential threats were potential declines in enrollment relating to increasing tuition and reduced student services.

Matching Strengths with Opportunities[[25]](#footnote-25)

One intersection between McNeese’s strengths and opportunities is located where the strong McNeese motto (“Excellence with a Personal Touch”) might be used to foster innovative academic methods; e. g. the new Innovation Engineering™ curriculum, clicker technology, custom-designed certificate training programs, and distance learning initiatives. A second intersection can be found where the establishment of the SEED Center and McNeese’s strong relationships with regional partners might be expanded through new collaborative ventures with the SWLA Alliance (including all of its business, civic, and governmental members), Sowela Technical Community College, the Fort Polk community, and K-12 schools in the five-parish region. A third intersection—again drawing upon the McNeese motto—occurs with regard to opportunities mentioned by participants in areas relating to student success; e. g. service-learning, undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad opportunities.

Matching Weaknesses with Threats[[26]](#footnote-26)

Two important vulnerabilities can be identified when looking for areas where the list of weaknesses and threats intersect. Both vulnerabilities occur as a result of the same threat: reduction of financial resources due to declining state appropriations and/or enrollment. The first vulnerability involves the fear of further damage to an aging physical plant in the face of declining public resources. The second involves the unhealthy prospect of McNeese attempting to use budget cutbacks as an excuse to reduce marketing efforts at the very moment when marketing needs to be expanded (to counter loss of enrollment). According to our constituents, McNeese should take steps to reduce or eliminate both vulnerabilities.

The Challenge of Facing Short-term Threats while Preparing for Longer Term Opportunities

McNeese finds itself—at the start of the Fall 2012 semester—at the cusp of a strategic paradox; namely, how to engage in the short term belt-tightening necessary to meet fiscal realities while also laying the foundations necessary to face the long term demands of a region entering a long term economic upsurge. In essence, while preparing for a bright economic regional future, McNeese cannot afford to spread itself too thin. Our strategy over the next five years must therefore involve careful focusing; hence the importance of formulating our “hedgehog concept.”

**Hedgehog Concept**

According to best-selling business author Jim Collins, organizations are more likely to succeed when they focus their strategic efforts at the intersection of what organization constituents are most passionate about, what the organization does best, and what drives the organization’s economic engine.[[27]](#footnote-27) To illustrate the concept, Collins draws three circles intersecting at a central point. He calls that point—where all three circles intersect—the “hedgehog concept.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The point is for an organization to avoid the loss of energy, morale, and focus that can occur when decision-makers become distracted by a never-ending series of opportunities lying outside the organization’s primary mission. The second and third brainstorming questions—*What do you love most about McNeese?*—and—*Whether you love it or not, what do you believe is McNeese’s greatest strength?*—address two of these three circles. [[29]](#footnote-29) The economic circle requires reference to the McNeese operating and capital outlay budgets.

Attributes relating to university culture and values, and their impact on the geographic region, were most commonly mentioned in response to the “love” question. Respondents love our size (“not too big, not too small”), the caring people, the family atmosphere, the University’s interaction with the community. These same attributes were also mentioned in response to the “strength” question; however, references to academic excellence were usually mentioned first. Note how the McNeese motto—“Excellence with a Personal Touch”—fits the great preponderance of responses we received with respect to both questions.

Over the past ten years, the source of revenues has shifted substantially. Student tuition dollars now constitute the majority of McNeese operating revenues, with projections indicating that receipts from tuition could approach 75% of the McNeese operating budget prior to the end of the five-year time horizon of this strategic plan. Over two-thirds of the McNeese operating budget is spent on its employees through salary and related benefits. In short, both the revenue and the expense side of the McNeese operating budget now focus on people; or, to use the language of Jim Collins, the “economic engine” driving the McNeese budget is the provision of academic services by an excellent faculty and staff to a paying clientele, including our students and an interesting base of regional constituents.

Our hedgehog concept can therefore be restated as follows: *McNeese should continue to use its unique “personal touch” to provide excellent university-related services to its students and regional constituents.* What products and services fall outside the McNeese hedgehog concept? We should avoid moving into areas that do not allow for the McNeese brand of “personal touch,” and we should avoid the temptation to lower the quality of our services in any area. For example, in the offering of online courses, we must ensure that each of our courses includes a “McNeese-style” personal connection between student and professor, and we must ensure that quality of instruction (i. e. excellence) is never sacrificed.

**Core Values**

The core values of McNeese State University, as stated in every Academic Catalog since the 2004-2005 academic year, are as follows:

* Academic Excellence
* Student Success
* Fiscal Responsibility
* University-Community Alliances

Although no specific reference to these existing core values was made by those hosting any of the brainstorming sessions, these four values were echoed repeatedly by participants in a variety of ways. For example, responses relating to the importance of academic excellence ranked high on the frequency list for questions 2, 6, and 10.[[30]](#footnote-30) Issues relating to student success ranked high on the frequency list for questions 3, 4, and 5.[[31]](#footnote-31) The case for retaining fiscal responsibility as a core value could be made from the many respondents who referred to threats to the McNeese budget in response to question 7.[[32]](#footnote-32) And finally, the core value of university-community alliances was mentioned frequently by participants as a strength (question 3) and an opportunity (question 4).[[33]](#footnote-33) In summary, it would appear that the McNeese community has reaffirmed the same core values for the next five years.

**Our Collective Vision and Goals**

Based upon all of the observations and analyses described above, the following statement is offered as a vision statement to guide McNeese operations for the five-year period beginning in January 2013:

*Through the promotion of innovative teaching and learning methodologies, regional partnerships, service-learning opportunities, applied research, cultural engagement, and athletic excellence, McNeese will play an active leadership role in the civic and economic renaissance likely to transform Southwest Louisiana over the next five years.*

This vision can be achieved through the application of the following goals, each followed by a set of specific objectives designed to achieve that particular goal. The objectives are written using broad, aspirational language, with the understanding that the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, in collaboration with Academic and Student Affairs administration, the Faculty Senate, and the Student Government Administration (SGA), will establish measurable outcome indicators and suggested timelines for each objective, for recommendation to the President no later than Fall Commencement in December of this year (2012). Final approval of the measurable outcome indicators and suggested timelines by the President would follow, with the expectation that operational decisions made after January 1, 2013, would be targeted toward achievement of all measurable outcome indicators in accordance with the timelines recommended.

**Goal #1: Cultivate Innovative Teaching and Learning[[34]](#footnote-34)**

Objective 1.a. Expand online offerings in line with the recommendations outlined in the report drafted by Tom Clay and Associates, Inc.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Objective 1.b. Steadily increase the number of McNeese graduates who have completed one or more courses in the new Innovation Engineering™ curriculum.

Objective 1.c. Significantly increase the extent to which courses taken by freshmen and sophomores are taught using data-driven methods proven to promote student learning and retention.

Objective 1.d. In partnership with regional business and industry, continue to increase the number of post-baccalaureate certificate training opportunities available at McNeese.

Objective 1.e. Significantly increase opportunities for faculty and students to engage in service-learning coursework designed to promote community service while also enhancing the quality of student learning.

Objective 1.f. Significantly increase opportunities for students to engage in undergraduate research in close cooperation with McNeese faculty mentors.

Objective 1.g. Significantly increase the percentage of McNeese students who are engaged in career-related internships prior to their graduation.

Objective 1.h. Significantly increase the percentage of McNeese students who engage in one or more experiences in universities located outside the United States.

**Goal #2: Cultivate Innovative Collaboration with an Expanding List of Regional Partners**[[36]](#footnote-36)

Objective 2.a. In partnership with the Southwest Louisiana Alliance and its civic, business and governmental constituents in the five-parish Imperial Calcasieu region, develop a leadership role as a facilitator of collaborative projects at the Southwest Louisiana Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (SEED) Center.

Objective 2.b. Significantly increase the number of mutually beneficial academic programs undertaken in collaboration with Sowela Technical Community College.

Objective 2.c. Expand the number of course offerings to, and student enrollment from, the greater Fort Polk community.

Objective 2.d. Significantly increase McNeese engagement with public and private K-12 partners in the five-parish Imperial Calcasieu region—including an increase in the number of K-12 students who visit McNeese and an increase in the number of events involving visits by McNeese to the K-12 institutions, including an expansion in dual enrollment and increasing the number of students who experience events offered by the Banners Cultural Series.

Objective 2.e. Significantly increase the number of opportunities for adult learners; including, but not necessarily limited to, leisure-learning opportunities.

**Goal #3: While Retaining the Current McNeese Logos, Cultivate a McNeese “Brand” that Embraces a Culture of Innovation**[[37]](#footnote-37)

Objective 3.a. Capitalize on the 75th Anniversary of McNeese as an occasion to promote McNeese to all constituents as a dynamic center of academic and economic innovation.

Objective 3.b. Promote a culture of marketing synergy—not only by generating ideas from the Department of Athletics, Department of Marketing and Licensing, the McNeese Bookstore, and the Department of Public Relations—but also soliciting input from faculty and students having expertise in academic disciplines relating to marketing and mass communications.

Objective 3.c. Develop innovative advertising strategies to maximize auxiliary and unconventional revenue sources.

Objective 3.d. Link the McNeese name more directly with the Banners Cultural Series and other cultural events sponsored by entities operating within the McNeese umbrella.

**Goal #4: Cultivate a Physical Environment that Promotes a Spirit of Innovation**[[38]](#footnote-38)

Objective 4.a. Initiate creative development projects that promote enrollment and retention, such as the restoration of Contraband Bayou and the development of a “one stop shop” to address the needs of prospective students.

Objective 4.b. Continue to expand the physical footprint of the McNeese campus to create space for innovative academic, cultural, and athletic initiatives and community partnerships.

Objective 4.c. Promote a culture of cleanliness and respect for the landscaping and grounds that comprise the McNeese campus.

Objective 4.d. Continue to reduce levels of deferred maintenance in existing facilities on campus.

1. See p. vii., Joe Gray Taylor, *A Chronicle: McNeese State University 1939-1987,* edited by Cheryl Ware and Thomas Fox. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. And it would be wonderful if a volunteer could be identified to carry forward the historical work that was begun by Dr. Taylor! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This $4.7 million estimated reduction occurred even after tuition increases of approximately $3.5 million. The direct appropriation reduction was actually closer to $8.2 million, but this steep reduction was partially offset by a 10% increase in tuition, which is expected to generate approximately $3.5 million; hence the net result of a $4.7 million decrease. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, e. g., Ed Carson, “Jobs Recession Now 49 Months: Longest Since WWII.” Investor’s Business Daily. Posted 03/09/2012. <http://news.investors.com/article/603791/201203090838/jobs-recession-is-longest-since-depression.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Louisiana Budget Project Director Jan Moller, “Revenue Estimating Conference: LPB Breaks Down the Numbers.” <http://www.labudget.org/lbp/2012/04/revenue-estimating-conference-lbp-breaks-down-the-numbers/#more-2528> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ron Starner, “The Game Changer: A Site Selection Investment Profile, Southwest Louisiana & Acadiana.” Site Selection Magazine, March 2012. <http://www.siteselection.com/issues/2012/mar/sw-louisiana-ip.cfm> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ron Starner, “A Region of Resilience: A Site Selection Investment Profile, Southwest Louisiana.” Site Selection Magazine, March 2011. <http://www.siteselection.com/issues/2011/mar/southwest-louisiana.cfm> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ameristar press release, June 21, 2012. <http://www.ameristar.com/Press_Release_Preview.aspx?PressId=1427> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [www.cityoflakecharles.com/department/?fDD=7-0](http://www.cityoflakecharles.com/department/?fDD=7-0) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <http://landrieu.senate.gov/mediacenter/pressreleases/06-29-2012-4.cfm> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Starner, March 2011, *supra.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The other eight universities are Grambling State University, Louisiana Tech University, Nicholls State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, University of Louisiana at Monroe, and the University of New Orleans. *See* <http://www.ulsystem.net/> . [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Louisiana Board of Regents, “Response to HCR 30 of the Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature.” January 2012. <http://www.regents.doa.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/Board/Agendas/2012/PRP_Agenda_ItemVB-HCR3_-_2012_0125.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoshin_Kanri> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. A list of all responses to the brainstorming questions can be found at the following two links: <http://www.mcneese.edu/president/strategic-planning-responses-part-1>

    <http://www.mcneese.edu/president/strategic-planning-responses-part-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The acronym SWOT refers to an analysis of an organization’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The hedgehog concept is discussed in Collins’ bestselling book, Good to Great, published by Harper Collins in 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Tom Dvorske, Ph.D., “McNeese State University Strategic Planning Process, AY 2011-2012 Response Analysis Report,” June 28, 2012. [http://www.mcneese.edu/files/president/Strategic%20Planning%20Final%20Analysis--June%2028,%202012.pdf](http://www.mcneese.edu/files/president/Strategic%20Planning%20Final%20Analysis--June%2028,%202012.pdf" \t "_blank) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Dvorske, *supra*, p. 38 for a useful charge comparing themes of strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The hedgehog concept is discussed in Collins’ bestselling book, Good to Great, published by Harper Collins in 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. A number of ancient fables can be found in support of the maxim of the Greek poet Archilochus: “The fox knows many things; the hedgehog one big thing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Dvorske, *supra.* Dr. Dvorske’s analysis of brainstorming responses to the “Love” and “Strength” questions can be found on page 53 of his report. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Dvorske, *supra,* p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibid.,* p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Ibid.*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Ibid.*, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Objectives 1.a. through 1.h. result from creative responses we received to question 8 (regarding how to improve student learning), particularly responses pertaining to “hands-on” and “experiential” learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Tom Clay and Associates, Inc., “Online Education Plan for McNeese State University.” June 1, 2012. Special attention should be given to the following principles, as described on page 26 of the plan:

    1. *We will build and manage our online degree programs in such a way that they will enhance McNeese’s institutional health and wellbeing, and advance its reputation for excellence. In so doing, we will ensure that their success will support McNeese’s onsite programs and other activities, rather than come at their expense.*
    2. *We will share the rewards of the programs’ success. This will include a revenue sharing model that will direct discretionary funds to participating departments and adjustments to McNeese’s reward system so that participation and excellence in McNeese’s online education programs are valued in annual performance reviews and merit level decisions.*
    3. *We will continue to adjust our administrative and technology-related policies, processes, systems, and infrastructure so that they will optimally serve the needs of McNeese students who may never set foot on campus.*

    A full copy of the plan is available at the following link: [http://www.mcneese.edu/files/president/TClayAssoc\_MSU\_oLEdStrategy\_060112\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.mcneese.edu/files/president/TClayAssoc_MSU_oLEdStrategy_060112_FINAL.pdf" \t "_blank) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Goal #2 is directly tied to the second most often mentioned opportunity. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Goal #3 and its objectives are derived through a synthesis of many of the ideas offered in response to questions 5 (opportunities), 6 (unchangeable fundamentals), and 10 (branding). It also reflects a theme Dr. Williams has often quoted from *Three Golden Ages: Discovering the Creative Secrets of Renaissance Florence, Elizabethan England, and America's Founding*by Dr. Alf J. Mapp, Jr. (Madison Books, 1999). In this theme, Dr. Mapp suggests that Golden Ages occur in societies where strong elements of cultural tradition are linked to a spirit of forward-looking exploration. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Dr. Dvorske has observed that the poet William Carlos Williams loved architecture because spaces could become, literally, inhabitable poems,--a poetics of space, in our case, to reflect and foster innovative thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)