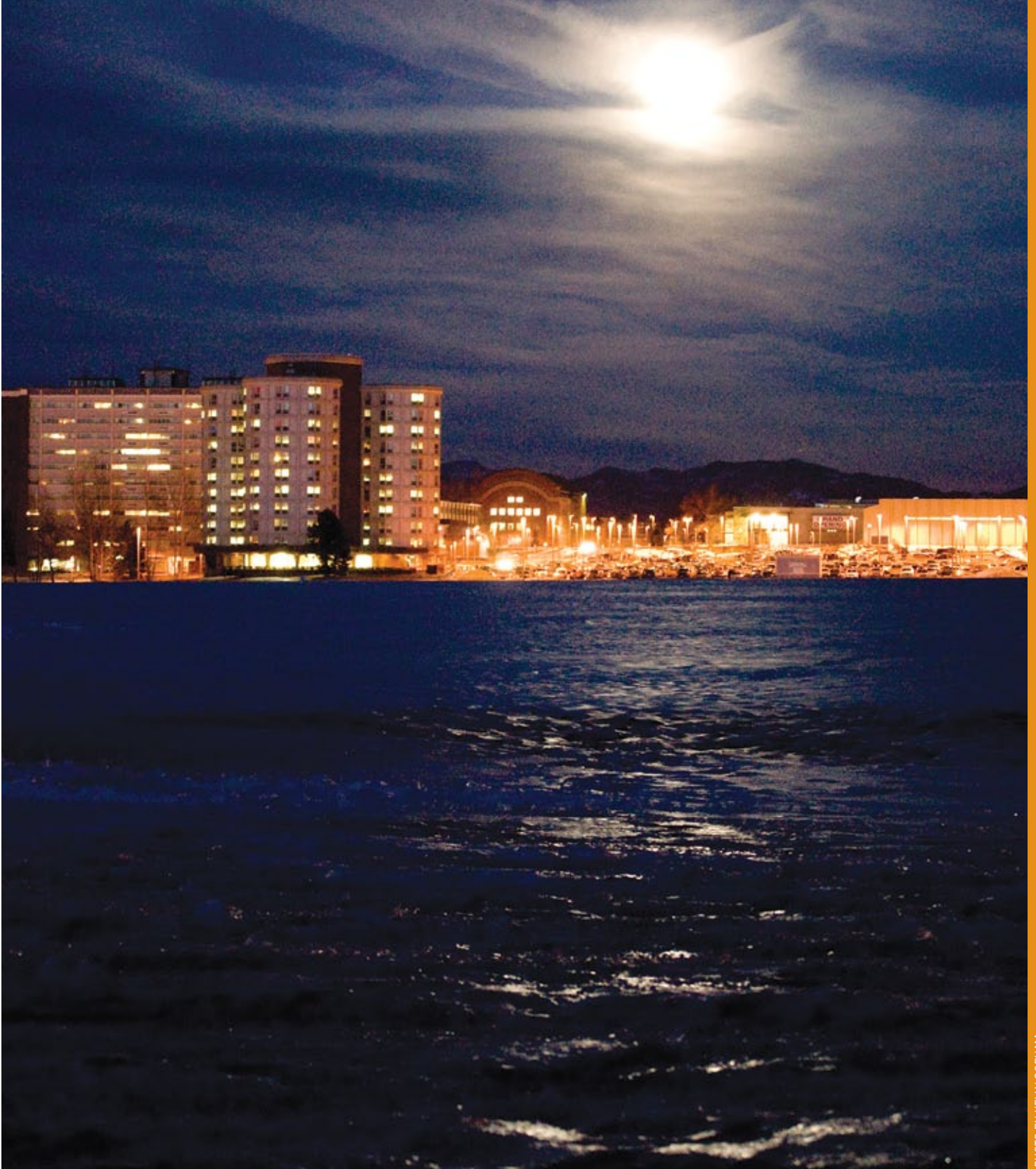


Summary and Conclusions



Summary and Conclusions



PHOTO BY STEPHEN HUNTS

Evolution and growth at any university provides an opportunity to re-examine long-standing practices and explore new relationships and avenues for institutional advancement. At Montana State University that dynamic is on-going and will likely continue indefinitely. This self-study process has greatly assisted MSU in examining those elements of evolution and growth since its last comprehensive review in a manner that is both conscientious and thorough. A major outcome of this endeavor for Montana State is a broad-based perspective of strengths, challenges, and opportunities that will well-serve the university and its constituencies for years to come.

One conclusion that comes to the fore in this self-analysis is the breadth and depth of

the accomplishments that MSU has achieved over the past ten years. A key ingredient of these accomplishments has been the efficacy of the planning and analysis efforts of the university, as exemplified by the work of the University Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (UPBAC) and by a maturation of the shared governance process at MSU. Additionally, the stability of institutional leadership over recent years has helped assure that strategic initiatives have been implemented and monitored so that they will result in long term benefits for Montana State University.

Some specific examples of notable achievements over the past decade include the attainment of the highest classification for research universities by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Associated with this designation has been the substantial increase in faculty research productivity as measured by grants and contracts activity and other indices. Furthermore, MSU has enhanced its campus infrastructure, with newly constructed buildings such as the Chemistry/Biochemistry Research Building, the Animal Bioscience Building, and major renovations to Gaines Hall, the Hosseaus Health and Physical Education Complex, and the Strand Union Building.

Less obvious, but equally important, evolutionary changes include the focus on student success, and the development of programs and services to improve recruitment, retention and graduation of students. Those efforts reflect, in part, the reality that MSU is becoming more dependent upon tuition revenues and extramural support to fulfill its mission. Academic programs continue to be reviewed and revised, with new programs established and others eliminated, to help address the changing aspirations of students, and to be responsive to the economic needs of the state and nation. MSU has also devoted significant effort to the enhancement of its business practices with notable improvements in web-based services now available for students, faculty and staff.

Despite an extended period during which Montana State University has experienced positive growth and steadiness of purpose, the challenges facing MSU are many, multi-faceted and serious in scope and impact. Given the current economic environment that the university and the state presently face, those challenges will need to be addressed with even more emphasis upon fiscal prudence and focus on financial sustainability.

The University Core Values and General Principles for Resource Allocation decisions that were adopted by MSU in 2002 are considered by all constituencies to be cornerstones of our future plans and actions. Those values and principles include the following:

Core Values

- Creating a community of discovery, learning and service
- Integrating teaching, research and outreach
- Fostering multi-disciplinary instruction and research
- Creating partnerships for economic impact and workforce development in the global marketplace

Resource Allocation Principles

- Our budget must reflect that higher education is an investment for the state
- We must be accountable to the university community, the state and our constituencies
- Our budget must reflect strategic planning, institutional priorities, and productivity
- Our budget decisions must be based upon relevant data

MSU remains confident that these values and principles will provide appropriate guidance towards fulfillment of our mission and goals.

The continuing challenge of recruitment and retention of quality MSU employees, at all levels of the institution, remains a significant issue. Given the relatively low level of general operation funds available to support its mission and goals, MSU faces ongoing difficulties in remaining nationally competitive for compensation of employees, especially for administrative, professional and faculty personnel. Although recent economic conditions may help minimize the urgency of this situation, it will likely remain a significant issue for the foreseeable future.

Financial constraints have also adversely affected the ability of MSU to address deferred maintenance issues and space limitations appear to be growing in importance. Operations budgets in most units are arguably inadequate to meet the expectations for performance of the unit. Despite the level of investment in information technology that MSU has made in recent years, the university

remains significantly challenged to keep up with the needs of the institution in this area to support its goals and vision.

Although progress has been made in the scope and sophistication of its assessment activities, MSU recognizes that additional efforts will be necessary to reap the full benefits from an integrated, comprehensive assessment and evaluation program. While this need certainly exists with respect to some of its educational programs, Montana State also acknowledges that further work at the institutional level is appropriate to support the goal of public accountability and a *modus operandi* of continuous quality improvement.

Whatever the assessed strengths and challenges of Montana State University may be,

almost assuredly there is unanimity that there are tremendous opportunities for making MSU a better institution in the future. This self-study report has provided the university with an extremely valuable tool that will serve as a guide for subsequent visioning and planning activities. This process has reaffirmed the inherent positive attributes of MSU and brought to sharper focus those areas where improvements can be made. In conclusion, the net result of this overall endeavor has been an increased sense of satisfaction among all participants in recognizing what has been achieved over the past ten years and a true sense of optimism as to how much might be accomplished for the future.



PHOTO BY SUSAN KELLY

EXCEL

DISCOVER

CONNECT



CREATE

EXPLORE

SERVE

