
Can the University of Minnesota Become Truly “World Class”?

Responses

In the spring issue of American Experiment Quarterly, Mitch Pearlstein, president of Center of the American Experiment, asked this question: Can the University of Minnesota become truly “world class”? The following are responses from people who are or have been associated with the university, along with a view from the Citizens League.

Synergies, Legacies, and Rankings in the Health Sciences

Frank B. Cerra, M.D.

As mad-cow disease threatened in the early 1990s, the British government asked one American—Will Hueston—to join its confidential scientific advisory committee. Hueston now works at the University of Minnesota.

What brought him here? In part it was the fact that the U of M is one of the few American universities to offer veterinary medicine, agriculture, and public health along with a medical school, a conjunction that allows Hueston to

pursue his often-stated goal: making the world a safer place to eat.

The university's Academic Health Center has a wide array of disciplines, specialists, and scientists in the School of Dentistry, the College of Veterinary Medicine, the School of Public Health, the School of Nursing, the College of Pharmacy, the School of Medicine at Duluth, and the Medical School in the Twin Cities. Among Big Ten universities, only Ohio State offers as comprehensive a health sciences program.

As you read about our accomplishments, ask yourself: Are they provincial—or world class—given that our sights remain largely on our state and region?

Faculty members from the School of Dentistry and the Medical School together identified and disabled the cell that is chiefly responsible for causing bone pain from cancer. They've tested the work in animals and are now in human clinical trials; the promise for relief from pain is immense.

In other cancer research, a team of doctors—an oncologist, an immunologist, and a skin and kidney cancer specialist—is seeking a “vaccine” to prevent recurrence of cancer.

Pharmacy students are learning about medications not just in traditional ways but also from people with chronic diseases who volunteer to work with them. In the interdisciplinary Rural Health School, students worked together to persuade local businesses to share the cost of placing a blood-pressure machine in a small-town grocery.

Building on a University of Minnesota legacy, surgeon Soon Park, who has successfully transplanted portions of lungs from living donors, transplanted a new heart into fifty-four-year-old Johnny Watson last year. In 1955 Watson was one of the first children to survive open-heart surgery performed by the U's groundbreaking heart surgeon C. Walton Lillehei. Our organ transplant program is one of the best anywhere.

The world's first successful bone marrow transplant was done at the University of Minnesota in 1968. Now a physician associated with our blood and marrow transplant program has treated a child with a rare disease with cord blood stem cells from a sibling. This same doctor, John Wagner, heads the clinical program at the Stem Cell

Institute. On the research side, the work of Stem Cell Institute head Catherine Verfaillie generates headlines nationwide.

Another continuing legacy: providing health care to rural and underserved communities in Minnesota and beyond. Since 1971 the Rural Physician Associate Program has given future doctors experience in small-town practice, encouraging them to settle in rural areas, where there are often too few health professionals; more than 60 percent of RPAP students have returned to rural areas to practice. The School of Dentistry just opened a clinic in Hibbing to train future dentists—and introduce them to life outside the big city.

Since 1990 the Center for American Indian and Minority Health has graduated forty-three American Indian/Alaska Native physicians, many of whom return to their home communities to serve their people. This fall the School of Nursing opens a branch in Rochester, in collaboration with the Mayo Clinic, in an effort to reverse the statewide shortage of nurses. The School of Public Health offers on-campus and distance-learning continuing education programs for professionals in the Midwest.

Our focus is local and regional for a reason. As part of a land-grant institution, we are dedicated to preparing the new health professionals who will work in and with our communities to improve health, to develop new therapies and devices to prevent and treat disease, and to support the state's health-care economy. But if we carry

out our local commitments well, we will provide models for other states that face similar challenges: providing health care in rural areas; training enough doctors, nurses, dentists, veterinarians, and other health care professionals to meet twenty-first-century needs; and providing health care for diverse cultures. I would argue that that is a world-class contribution.

For better or worse, it is more common to look at rankings than at results. Research dollar totals, as reflected in National Institutes of Health rankings, are the commonly used yardstick of research quality—and, by extension, the quality of the institution. Our School of Public Health, as measured by NIH research dollars, is the best among public institutions in the country, topped overall only by Harvard and Johns Hopkins.

Using those same NIH rankings, the School of Dentistry ranked twelfth in 2001, as it was in 2000; the School of Nursing ranked fourteenth, up from thirty-fourth in 2000; the College of Pharmacy dropped from twenty-second to thirty-second. The School of Nursing, says Dean Sandra Edwardson, has focused on research and is now reaping the fruits of its labor. Disciplines such as nursing and pharmacy have relatively smaller pools of funds to draw upon, it should be noted, so that gaining or losing one large grant can make a disproportionately large difference in the rankings.

Rankings can drop even as funds increase. The College of Veterinary Medicine ranking dropped from tenth to twelfth, even though its NIH awards

rose from \$2.8 million to \$4.2 million in 2001. Our Medical School was twenty-sixth in 2001—not where we want to be ultimately, but a step up from 2000—and eleventh among public universities.

Each school has a different story. Because the Medical School is looked upon as the foundation of our quality standings, let's look at its recent history.

In 1996 the Medical School ranked among the top twenty. In the five years following, we lost eighty-six faculty members while we were dealing with the repercussions of changing finances in medical education. Faculty members teach, conduct research, and treat patients; prior to the advent of managed care plans, payments for treatment were the financial foundation for medical education. The rise of managed care caused a drop in compensation, and the Medical School began to dig into its reserves at an alarming rate.

Under the leadership of President Mark Yudof and the Board of Regents, a group of alumni, medical students, and community constituents asked the people of the state and the legislature for support. In return, we promised to keep Minnesota healthy. The legislature was persuaded to help turn around this dire situation by setting up the tobacco-settlement endowment for education. While other schools around the country rely on tobacco-settlement funding designated for research, we know of no other public university with this commitment of tobacco funding to its educational goals.

Now we are positioned to deliver on our promise to Minnesota. It will take

years to recover the top national rankings that the Medical School once enjoyed, but we are starting on our ascent back toward the summit. Meanwhile, we strive to fulfill our promise that health care in Minnesota will continue to be among the best in the nation—and thus among the best in the world.

Frank Cerra is senior vice president for health sciences and head of the Academic Health Center at the University of Minnesota.

The Folly of the Thirty-Five-Mile Rule

David Lebedoff

Yes, the University of Minnesota can be truly “world class”—it already is in a number of fields, most notably at the graduate school level.

But the phrase “world class” is not perfectly appropriate for this question. The competition is not in fact worldwide, but national. The brightest students everywhere on this planet already journey (if they are permitted by their governments to do so) to the United States for their higher education. Yes, there’s Oxford and Cambridge and the Sorbonne, but the list of international rivals is pretty short. The offspring of foreign rulers flock to our campuses. When a Korean businessman wins out in a business competition with Americans, the first use of his profits may well be to pay Stanford tuition. In the global marketplace, American higher education dominates its field far more demonstrably than almost any other national product or endeavor.

So the real forum is national, and the real question is whether the University of Minnesota can be as good as the best public and private universities in this country.

The answer still is yes, but our excellence is seriously threatened. We cannot maintain what we have—let alone improve it (particularly at the undergraduate level)—without vastly more support, by which I mean our tax dollars.

Why should a strong and excellent University of Minnesota be at the very top of the list of public spending? Because the university is the economic motor of our state.

Do you doubt this? Look at Texas. If you had gone to the Texas legislature in 1950 and said, “Which would you rather have—oil or the University of Texas?” you would have been laughed out of the chamber. Of course, they would have chosen oil—and they would have been wrong. The University of Texas at Austin has spawned many dozens of thriving new businesses competing mightily in the global marketplace. Today, when the price of oil rises, it *hurts* the Texas economy, because all those new high tech companies consume vast quantities of fuel for power.

Our campuses are the oil fields, the gold mines, of today—and, more importantly, tomorrow. My view is that universities should be supported because they protect and expand our culture and freedom, but if the legislature wants an economic justification for spending tax dollars, then it should ask just how Medtronic happened to be born in our community. Whether there

will be future Medtronics—in microbiology or whatever—is in the hands of the Minnesota Legislature.

Those are not clean hands. They're dirty with the infamous ink of the "thirty-five-mile rule"—the rule that caused the construction of dozens of campuses with the goal (achieved!) of guaranteeing that no Minnesotan need live more than thirty-five miles from a seat of higher education.

This folly is costing billions of dollars each year to maintain partly empty and highly duplicative campuses. There are too many mouths for the tax spoon to feed—so none of them will get enough nutrition to thrive. There is only one answer: save the best and close the rest.

I wrote an article on this point to which Mitch Pearlstein refers in his article in the spring issue of this journal. He seems to agree with me but doubts the political will that would be needed to close or consolidate some of our many campuses.

O ye of little faith. The legislature has continued to support the thirty-five-mile rule because the public did not know about it. In fact, many of today's legislators didn't know about it either. They didn't know why there were so many campuses, but they assumed that there was some good reason for such proliferation, and so they kept funding everything.

Well, now they know. The cat is out of the bag. And the state has run out of money. So the choice is very, very simple: either keep funding all the campuses at levels low enough to make

them second-rate, or close some of them and help the remaining ones to achieve true excellence.

That's a pretty easy choice. If you're reading this and think the thirty-five-mile choice is indefensible and stupid, than call your legislator to say so.

Those of us who believe that market forces improve not only price but also quality should understand that the same happy result occurs in a marketplace of ideas. The thirty-five-mile rule is a very bad idea. As more people (especially legislators) learn about it, better ideas will prevail. Even politics is subject to market forces, if the voters get angry enough.

David Lebedoff is a former chair of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents and a former Center of the American Experiment board member.

The Quest to Become "World Class"

C. Peter Magrath

Even after a separation of nearly two decades, it is hard for me to think, much less write, objectively about "the U." There are at least two reasons. The first is that my years at the University of Minnesota were the most intense and defining of my professional life in American higher education. I still feel the emotional pull of the university and its state, and I care deeply about them. The second reason is this: I am too far removed from both the social and political juices—and the facts—of the state to comment knowledgeably about the excellent, provocative questions that Mitch Pearlstein has posed.

But I will comment on the larger issue of leading research-intensive public universities and the question of their ranking and stature. I learned in graduate school from one of my professors that, in making an argument, one should state one's thesis up front and then try to justify it. My thesis is this: it is far less important in an ultimate sense that the University of Minnesota be labeled as "world class," or as one of the ten best universities, than that it be a vital source for economic and social progress in Minnesota.

This means that the University of Minnesota deserves (because it contributes so much) as much financial support from all sources, including state appropriations, as is humanly and politically possible. I believe this as passionately today as I did in 1974 when I arrived in Minnesota. Any objective examination of the historical record will show that a state or region or country without a strong system of higher education (and, one hopes, also a strong system of elementary and secondary education) will be a backwater, also-ran state. I challenge anyone to identify a state or region that has economic vitality, opportunity for social improvement, and a decent life for its people without a high-quality system of higher education—including a major research-intensive university.

For me this remains the proverbial bottom line: you get what you pay for (what you invest in); an underinvestment in higher education is a prescription for mediocrity. Now, what does this argument have to do with the labeling of universities as aspiring to be

world class or in some top ten category?

Here I must reveal a deep bias. I have no objection to competition and striving—to reach beyond one's grasp is a good thing—but I am weary of labels and rankings. Newly minted university presidents, particularly in public universities, make grandiose announcements that they are going to move the institution to the "next level," or into the top ten in the nation. Since there are many universities in our country, and between one hundred and two hundred public research-intensive universities, this is statistically (as well as practically) impossible.

Our society is fixated with rankings and numbers, whether it is the inane shout that we are "number one" in basketball or football, or the quest to be named in the top categories of the college and university rankings exemplified by those in *U.S. News & World Report*. It is easier, of course, to rank in athletics than academics, the complex football bowl selection system notwithstanding. It cannot be done in academics, though I am not opposed to the self-study and evaluation of graduate programs done by the National Research Council. I suggest, however, that, ultimately, it is not of cosmic importance if the University of Minnesota is ranked sixteenth or twentieth or fifth in the next NRC rankings, which, by the way, will be as arcane and complex as the quest to find the two best football teams to play for the number one rankings in next year's Tostitos Fiesta Bowl.

Aspiration, being dissatisfied with one's current performance, wanting to

be appreciated and recognized, are important for universities as they are for individuals. Smug self-satisfaction and accepting the status quo is a prescription for mediocrity. A state that does not invest in higher education and its priceless research-intensive universities is going backward, not forward. With all their flaws and faults, America's universities are the envy of the world and a major reason the United States is an economically and socially strong nation.

I conclude by suggesting that it really does not matter how the University of Minnesota is ranked, that it is irrelevant if it is labeled "world class"—because it is already an extraordinary and vital university that deserves as much public and private support as Minnesota and the United States can provide. And that support—that investment—will continue to be richly repaid by the University of Minnesota. I note that there is an affiliation of hotels that call themselves "The Leading Hotels of the World." In my judgment, the University of Minnesota is among The Leading Universities of the World and will continue to be one of them—as long as Minnesota citizens want their state to be economically and socially progressive.

One final thought that has nothing to do with rankings and world-class labels. It is the issue of problems and flaws, including the issue of political correctness that so distresses my friend Mitch Pearlstein. One of my favorite quotations, which I used in my inauguration speech, is a couplet that was

popular in America in the eighteenth century: "Be to their virtues very kind; and to their faults a little blind." That is an appropriate attitude for Minnesotans to take toward their wonderful university.

C. Peter Magrath, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, was president of the University of Minnesota from 1974 to 1984.

A New and Different World-Class University of Minnesota

Harold Miller

Can the University of Minnesota become truly world class? On the wall of my office is a picture of a 1997 billboard that says "University of Minnesota, a World Class University—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." The question may already have been answered.

As someone who worked at the university for over thirty years, I may have looked at the place too closely and for too long—but, like Mitch Pearlstein, I still have opinions about it.

In some ways the University of Minnesota stands nearly alone in American higher education. As the state's research university, undergraduate university, and land-grant college all rolled up into one and placed in the center of the state's major urban area, it is unusual, if not unique. We add to that the state's relatively small population, one that is used to having its university serve research and service needs and teach most of the kids who want to attend. Out of that mix it would be

difficult, if not impossible, to derive an elitist University of Michigan or University of California, Berkeley.

So if “world class” means highly selective in its student body and committed to an upper division (junior and senior), graduate, and research focus, then certain programs are there, but, as a whole, the University of Minnesota is not. If “world class” can mean a university that excels in research and outreach and has top-tier teaching departments, then the University of Minnesota is world class now. Without adequate funding, however, it can’t maintain its global leadership in those multiple roles. As funding from the state diminishes in its budgetary proportions, the university must be allowed to phase out programs that can be done as well in other places so it can maintain excellence in those that remain.

But that was tried under Commitment to Focus. When President Ken Keller stepped down, as much from the charge that his plan was elitist as for any kitchen renovation, one of his aides was quoted as saying that “the populists won.” Keller’s plan was bold and courageous. The downtown business leaders supported it, as did other educators in the state. Everybody was excited about the change until it became clear that to achieve this measure of world-classness, some of the high school graduates who chose the easy way through school and graduated with a less than stellar record would be denied entrance into their U. The Campbell Committee, in approaching Commitment to Focus too vigorously, set off a statewide reaction to the plan

with their recommendations for program closures; the committee pounded the first nail into the coffin of the Keller presidency.

One wonders where we would be at the University of Minnesota if Keller and, after him, Nils Hasselmo had been successful in their efforts to give much of lower division (freshman and sophomore) and developmental education, along with much of the land-grant role, to the community and state colleges. It is quite possible that, with those changes and with the funding that the university had at that time, the university might now be more like the University of Michigan or some of the private elite institutions that people like to call “world class.”

It may be that the most intractable hindrance to this particular perception of greatness is the land-grant mission. Not much credit is given for county extension outreach, continuing education programs for adults, or health clinics in poverty-stricken neighborhoods by those who measure world-class qualities. I believe that university presidents Peter Magrath and, more recently, Mark Yudof analyzed the political realities in Minnesota correctly: find some areas of excellence, encourage their growth, and support them. Don’t call for radical change.

So, will the University of Minnesota ever be world class? It all hangs on how “world class” is defined. In some ways it already is the benchmark for that definition. But steady and persistent deterioration of support from the state may well force the U to drop its “many things for most Minnesotans”

role and to drift toward mediocrity no matter what benchmarks are used. To avoid that drift, university leaders will need to redefine the mission, identify new benchmarks, and secure wide-ranging support for a different U of M. Refocusing, whatever it is called, may be what is needed to give direction toward a new and different world-class University of Minnesota.

Harold Miller, vice president for academic affairs at Northwestern College in Roseville, Minnesota, was dean of Continuing Education and Extension at the University of Minnesota for twenty-seven years.

Higher Education and the Way Ahead

Lyle Wray

Let's begin with a few dates: 1784, 1862, 1945. These were the years, respectively, of the Northwest Ordinance, which provided land for elementary schools; the Morrill Act, which provided for land-grant public universities; and the GI Bill, which massively expanded access to higher education. These dates track the commitment of the United States for more than two hundred years to lead the world in broadening access to primary, secondary, and postsecondary education.

It is not much of a stretch to suggest that not only our democracy but also a vibrant and resilient economy have been a result of such farsighted investment in public education extending over several centuries. Yet, as China joins the World Trade Organization and 3M moves its photonics research and development from Austin, Texas,

to Singapore, there are signs that our historic advantage may be challenged. There are now several countries—Korea being one example—with a larger part of the college-age population in higher education than the United States. Are we about to undo a two-hundred-year competitive advantage in the world economy, to say nothing of the effects on other dimensions of our society?

Over my lifetime, the educational attainment required to generate an adequate wage to support a family has moved from the ninth grade to high school graduation plus at least a two-year technical certificate. At the same time, there has been a massive investment in higher education, an influx of resources after World War II, and, in the 1950s, an explosion in math, science, and technology education spurred by the launch of *Sputnik*. After the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s, higher education has stopped winning legislative battles around the country. Minnesota's general fund support for higher education has declined as a percentage of general fund expenditures steadily over the past fifteen years.

Are we in danger of undoing one of our most enduring competitive advantages in a highly educated citizenry and workforce? It is becoming clear across the world: the transition to a knowledge economy puts an ever greater premium on skills and knowledge. Prosperity is linked increasingly to developing, using, and commercializing new technologies faster than other firms or countries. Yet, in Minnesota,

we face many challenges in advancing a higher education agenda.

The Citizens League has long had an interest in the structure of, quality of, and access to Minnesota's system of postsecondary education. Numerous citizen-based committees have grappled with higher education issues over the past thirty years. In 1971 the league urged the creation of a new kind of urban college, which resulted in establishment of Metropolitan State University. Since that time, the league has produced seven additional reports dealing with various elements of higher education.

Tuition increases have exceeded per capita income during the past thirty years. Nearly 90 percent of the state funding has gone to the University of Minnesota and to Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, but only 10 percent of the funds have been in the form of direct student aid. The state's institutional subsidies that "write down" tuition across the board disproportionately favor students who are relatively well off, while fewer and fewer low-income and minority students can afford college. A recent report commissioned by the Minnesota Private College Council ("A Bigger Bang for the Public Buck: Achieving Efficiency and Equity in Higher Education," 2002) shows this in detail.

In addition, there is a mismatch in the location of institutions and the location of students. Forty-three, or 75 percent, of the state's fifty-seven public postsecondary institutions are outside

the metropolitan area, while more than half of likely students are in the metropolitan area. Daring to mention this has been a "third rail" of higher education politics. Perhaps the redistricted legislature in 2003 and beyond can take a clearer look at this issue.

The most recent Citizens League report on the University of Minnesota concluded that, in the emerging knowledge economy, the premium on a well-educated, high-skilled workforce is greater than ever before. The state and its residents need a well-coordinated higher education system that responds to today's conditions.

Research universities are vital in the economic health of regions and states. The University of Minnesota is an important asset for our region's competitiveness. While it remains generally well regarded, its reputation in some advanced-degree programs has declined. The university must establish clear priorities to improve its graduate and professional education and its research programs and to commit the necessary resources to support those priorities.

The Citizens League has made a number of recommendations in two major areas related to higher education: provide for systemic change and improve quality. The league believes that if these principles were put into action, higher education at the University of Minnesota, and all of public higher education in the state, would be better off.

Systemic Change for Higher Education

- Target subsidies directly to people who have financial need. That means reducing the share of support provided via appropriations to institutions and increasing the share provided directly to needy students. Give students more economic power, and more clearly put higher education institutions in the position of competitors for public funding.
- Make institutional appropriations for instruction, research, and other activities contingent on demonstrated performance, and consider long-term economic growth to be one of the objectives of state spending.
- For the flagship University of Minnesota system, allow prices to reflect instructional costs and offset possible increases through increased state grants and lifetime learning grants appropriated to students. This cost-based tuition, need-based aid model is not incompatible with broad postsecondary access.
- Create incentives that encourage people to save for college.
- Allow “chartered” higher education programs that encourage instructors and researchers to form alternative programs. Permit other private and public producers of noninstructional services to compete for the systems’ business.

Improving Quality at the U of M

- Eliminate low-quality and low-priority programs and reallocate resources to higher priorities and to meeting student and state needs through cooperative ventures. The state needs to decide if the university can be all things to all people.
- Develop a measurement system to evaluate the quality of advanced-degree programs, and then produce report cards to be used to reward program achievement.
- Strengthen advanced-degree programs by concentrating on areas that offer significant payoffs for improved quality, such as high admissions standards for advanced-degree programs and expansion of grant programs and fellowship commitments.
- Improve human resource training and management to unleash the university’s human capital resources. Faculty will drive quality improvements at the university. Therefore, faculty members must be properly involved, managed, and rewarded for improved quality and productivity.

Restructuring higher education along the lines of these principles will not be easy. In order to reverse the fifteen-year decline in higher education’s share of state spending and to target that money to achieve quality and access, a renewed discussion is required

in the community about higher education and what it is for. A reinigorated social contract on higher education and issues of access and quality is long overdue. Powerful public relations campaigns will not substitute for a candid and potentially prolonged conversation about higher education, and in particular about the role of the University of Minnesota. The current budget indicates that the state is on a path of declining quality and higher costs. The choice for Minnesota is clear. There is no option not to change. The state should choose major reform now and leave a legacy of better value for future generations.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League in Minneapolis.

Reflections on Today's University of Minnesota

Mark G. Yudof

The link between the success of the University of Minnesota and the success of the state—economically, culturally, or however one wishes to measure it—is one I believe in strongly. In my nearly five years at the U of M, I have spent a great deal of time extolling the virtues of having a first-class research university in Minnesota. Indeed, even beyond the obvious areas of technology transfer and contributions to economic growth, I often argue that places like the University of Minnesota create an aura that draws smart and creative people to this state and community. That's true whether those folks want to be electrical

engineers, ballet dancers, or Girl Scout troop leaders.

As many have heard me say, Minnesota has no alternative; there is no private institution like Harvard, the University of Chicago, or Johns Hopkins down the block to pick up the slack if the university should stumble. Whether you are talking about Renaissance Italy and the University of Bologna or twentieth-century Silicon Valley and Stanford, the flowering of intellectual and economic life in the West has usually been marked by the presence of a major university.

When I arrive at my office each day, I do not ask myself, "How can we improve the U's rankings today?" Rather, I ask, "How can we make the U a better place, for students, for faculty, for staff, and for the people of this state?" (Full disclosure: As a night owl, I sometimes start with the question, "Why did this meeting have to be scheduled before 8:00 a.m.?")

For me, making self-conscious improvements—that is, doing something beyond answering the mail and appearing on ceremonial occasions—is the only effective way to make changes in a complex organization. If you do the right thing each day, with an eye toward improved efficiency and a larger vision for the institution, the rankings will fall into place.

Indeed, the folly of chasing rankings is underscored by the fact that many of the rankings by which the U is evaluated change their criteria from year to year and decade to decade. So,

bolstering the qualities valued today by, say, *U.S. News & World Report* may not help us move up in the rankings five years from now.

The premise of many ranking systems, that more selective schools are superior to those that are not as selective, also runs smack into Minnesota's populism. For 150 years, the University of Minnesota—its regents, its faculty, and the elected officials and taxpayers who support it—has valued access more than many of the schools with which we are often compared. Unless we change our collective mind, we will always be penalized in the rankings for this egalitarian streak. To me, this kind of value-based choice underscores the idea that we need to be doing what's right for Minnesota rather than what impresses a magazine editor.

And what is it that we've done to move forward? There is a renaissance of the physical campus; we've cleaned up, remodeled, planted myriad shrubs and trees, and opened two new parks. The Minneapolis campus will soon open to the Mississippi River.

We've improved student services greatly. Registration for classes now consists of a few keystrokes on the computer rather than running around from office to office, from East Bank to West Bank, just to stand in line for a signature. We've doubled the amount of housing on and near the Twin Cities campus, creating a cohesive and exciting academic and social environment, particularly for our undergraduates. And we've realigned financial incentives to give our colleges inducements to offer more high-demand courses,

thereby allowing students to more easily get the classes they need to graduate on time.

This year, we have also introduced institutional reforms that I believe will have a long-term positive effect on graduation rates. Undergraduates at the Twin Cities campus will be required to carry a thirteen-credit minimum—unless there is some compelling reason for an exception—and their credits will be priced in a way that provides incentive for a heavier class load.

Our faculty is also more productive than ever. Last year, the university attracted a record level of research funding—nearly half a billion dollars, roughly double the level of fifteen years ago. We've also made strides in taking the university's innovations to market. This year, the University of Minnesota ranked fourth in the number of start-up companies it spun off. We were also seventh in licenses and options executed—ones that actually generated income—and within the top eleven in three other important measurements of technology transfer.

Surely, there are times when universities fall into the trap that President Lyndon Johnson identified as constantly putting second things first. I believe, however, that we have been quite successful in identifying where we should grow and advance, and then finding the resources to go ahead and do so. Over four years, we've reallocated and leveraged more than a quarter of a billion dollars for our five interdisciplinary academic initiatives—new biology, digital technology, new media,

design, and agriculture. That's meant more than eighty new faculty positions in areas that will build on our existing strengths and will create new synergy with Minnesota's private sector. Further, if you look at the biological and medical sciences, the state of Minnesota and the university have made over \$800 million in new investments in this area, including a nearly half-billion-dollar endowment for the tobacco litigation settlement.

Our Medical School has also focused. It has chosen ten medical specialties where it will focus its energies, continuing to maintain quality and high standards in all clinical areas, but recognizing that we cannot be world class in all fields. The school, which was a pioneer in transplants and other medical breakthroughs in its heyday, is on the rebound. Thanks to our elected leaders, a new medical education endowment will enable us to add forty new faculty positions over the next few years. As Dr. Frank Cerra mentions in an accompanying article, that means we'll continue to make important medical advances and produce a steady supply of well-trained physicians for our state.

Our other professional programs are also thriving, including our law school and the Carlson School of Management. We have made graduate and professional education a priority; we now grant more master's degrees than any peer institution, and the number of master of arts and master of science degrees we grant each year has gone up by nearly a third over the past decade. That's yet another indication of how we contribute to today's knowledge-

based economy, affording people the opportunity to advance their careers and learn advanced skills.

The U is also attracting record levels of private giving, suggesting that there's truth to the notion that people go with a winner. Our College of Liberal Arts, the biggest school on the Twin Cities campus, has had notable success in its fund-raising, which has been an integral part of creating a new arts district on the West Bank. CLA also boasts top-notch departments in such disciplines as economics, psychology, and geography. In our multiyear Campaign Minnesota, slated to end in 2003, we have raised more than 98 percent of our \$1.3 billion goal. We are now entering the last phase of this campaign, and we are emphasizing the need for scholarship funds. Donors' willingness to give to the university is a kind of seal of approval that is a testament not only to our generous donors, but also to their confidence in the university.

While the University of Minnesota is by no means perfect—our graduation rates have to improve dramatically—I do think that in many ways our successes have outgrown the public's perception of the U. We are no longer the overly bureaucratic commuter campus of prior decades—though as Robert Frost said, we have miles to go before we sleep.

Although we may never carry the aura of a Harvard or a Stanford, or even a Berkeley or a Michigan, we are still a powerful magnet for bringing intellectual talent to this state. Perhaps we should even consider getting rid of nonresident tuition to help encourage

the inflow of smart people from other states and other parts of the world.

I think we can safely regard ourselves as a world-class institution, but one that has to continue to improve or risk falling behind. I generally believe we will be among the top five public research universities in America as long as we are able to protect our current momentum from the three-headed dragon of inaction, inefficiency, and state funding rescissions.

In the end, however, I also think we could better use the considerable amount of energy our opinion leaders expend in worrying about our rankings. We should harness this angst and use it

to fuel our arts and humanities, engineering, business, social sciences, and all the rest. Let's redirect the worry toward more relevant issues such as whether the U attracts Minnesota's most talented and brightest sons and daughters, whether it is taking advantage of growing areas of sponsored research, and whether it has the physical infrastructure needed to bring the next generation of medical innovations from the lab to the bedside.

Mark G. Yudof, president of the University of Minnesota, wrote this piece before he announced that he is leaving this summer to become chancellor of the University of Texas system. ■