

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES STUDY SESSION MINUTES  
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Positioning  
March 17, 2015**

Trustees Present: Present: Jay Cowles, Elise Ristau, Erma Vizenor, Louise Sundin, Philip Krinkie, Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Dawn Erlandson, Duane Benson, Maleah Otterson, Robert Hoffman, and Michael Vekich. Trustee Alexander Cirillo, Jr. on the phone.

Trustees Absent: Thomas Renier, Kelly Charpentier-Berg, Ann Anaya

Leadership Council Representatives Present: Chancellor Steven Rosenstone, Chief Communications Officer, Kim Olson, and President Earl Potter

Guests from PadillaCRT: Lynn Casey, Kelly O'Keefe

**Convene**

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Board of Trustees convened in a study session on March 17, 2015, 4th Floor, McCormick Room, 30 East 7th Street in St. Paul. Vice Chair Anderson Kelliher called the study session to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Introduction**

Vice Chair Anderson Kelliher introduced Kim Olson, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Ms. Olson introduced PadillaCRT members, notably Lynn Casey, CEO, and Kelly O'Keefe, head of branding; and St. Cloud State University President Earl Potter.

Ms. Olson said that she, PadillaCRT, and campus representatives have been working on this project for the past year, and she is happy to bring the board to the end of the project and start of a new phase.

President Potter said the cornerstone of what the board was about to hear is an examination of MnSCU's stakeholders' and our customers' understandings of the value of MnSCU institutions. The board has been kept informed of the project along the way. One of the early findings of the work is that the MnSCU brand is not strong and people do not know what it means. Consistent with *Charting the Future*, we need to capture the value of being and working as a system, and the intent of this work was to do that. He was appreciative of PadillaCRT's sensitivity to the complexity of the MnSCU brand and their experience working with similar organizations with complicated brand identities. PadillaCRT's proposal today will balance the strength of being a system with the strengths of individual brands of MnSCU institutions.

Ms. Olson thanked President Potter and discussed the packet provided to the board, beginning with the history of the project: a steering committee was formed last year; an RFP was sent out, 18 responses were analyzed, and PadillaCRT was chosen. The work has been going on for about six months, in three phases:

1. Positioning Audit
2. Qualitative Research
3. Quantitative Research

Then a very preliminary positioning recommendation was made.

Ms. Olson came into the project in August, after the project was well underway.

Kim Olson viewed the project as a positioning or reputation reassessment project. The question we're trying to get to is, what type of positioning will drive enrollment at our colleges and universities, and what will facilitate legislative support? This led to a need to identify what our stakeholders value, figuring out whether or not we have these things, finding a balance of strength of system, but not hurting the individual brands of campuses, and finally getting a recommendation for moving forward.

The branding steering committee was comprised of six (6) college and university presidents (Earl Potter, St. Cloud State University; Peggy Kennedy, Minnesota State Community and Technical College; Ron Anderson, Century College; Sue Collins, Northeast Higher Education District; Richard Davenport, Minnesota State University, Mankato, and Richard Hanson, Bemidji State University), nine (9) campus-based marketing and communications professionals (Loren Boone, St. Cloud State University; Kent Clark, Minnesota State University, Mankato; Scott Faust, Bemidji State University; Trent Janezich, Northeast Higher Education District; Denise Laymon and Peter Wielinski, Minnesota State Community and Technical College; Bill Mulso, Southwest Minnesota State University; Jim Stumne, Century College; Rebekah Summer, Alexandria Technical and Community College) and four (4) members of the System Office Advancement division (Kim Olson, Carmen Shields, Doug Anderson, Andrea Steen).

Ms. Olson explained that the initial research results and the feedback from all Key Communicators on every campus was shared with Leadership Council, with the heads of each key stakeholder groups (student associations MSCSA and MSUSA; MnSCU staff and faculty bargaining units AFSCME, IFO, MSCF, and MSUAASF). She also previewed it with Trustees Erlandson, Sundin, and Anderson Kelliher. There was consensus around further interest in some of the key items received from PadillaCRT.

The presentation includes a recommendation for an endorser brand. For example, "we're part of General Mills, but we are Cheerios" or "we're part of Major League Baseball, but we are the Twins." There was a lot of interest in how to talk about the system in a way that unites us – a common descriptor. The research shows that MnSCU stakeholders value quality, access, and affordability, and this proposal found that MnSCU can deliver on those values.

The proposal includes a very preliminary brand position that Kelly O'Keefe elaborated on. Seventy percent of the work done was on research, audit, and identifying stakeholder values; 30 percent was looking at recommendations. The work in the next phase will determine if this is the right brand promise, and each stakeholder group will be engaged in these

discussions. The proposal did not include logos or graphic standards or the like, but the proposal does have a researched-based rationale for creating these items in the next phase.

Ms. Casey provided an overview of the project. The project included a very robust and inclusive process. PadillaCRT took a fact-based approach to the project, which is probably the most important work an organization will ever do, i.e., examining its brand and position. Much of the work PadillaCRT did was creating a fact-based approach rather than relying on assumptions. This way, they would be sure of their recommendation.

PadillaCRT started with a baseline assessment, a peer/competitor review. Next PadillaCRT conducted research – qualitative research with 72 MnSCU constituents (current and prospective students, their families, faculty, staff, leadership, and community members). It was broad-based and gave PadillaCRT what they needed to create a full-scale quantitative analysis that would be statistically verifiable and would stand behind the recommendations.

Ms. Casey gave credit to the MnSCU advancement team and to the steering committee for writing an RFP for the project that did not include any logo development or new name – that was clearly a phase 2 – which allowed PadillaCRT to approach the work as a neutral party and allowed the research to dictate whether there is a status quo situation or an opportunity for a new position.

The current assessment found that most of MnSCU's higher education peers fall under having an endorser brand, or some type of hybrid brand (i.e., an endorser brand that lost its way). The University of Wisconsin system is an example of an endorser brand, the visual of which registers quickly with a prospective student. SUNY (State University of New York) is an example of a hybrid brand, which takes a prospective student a bit longer to understand. It is a subtle difference, but when you only have a split second to recognize a brand, seconds matter.

The findings from the 72 qualitative interviews showed that there is very little awareness of MnSCU. PadillaCRT probed to see if MnSCU doesn't have name recognition, and the definition is pretty narrow currently. They found very strong affinity, affiliation, and strong brands with the individual institutions. This was a positive sign in this competitive education environment, because the system benefits that were recalled by the interviewees (accessibility, workforce development, meeting community needs – all pillars of *Charting the Future*) are resonating with the very people who are important to MnSCU. This finding led PadillaCRT to explore this more deeply in the quantitative research.

Mr. O'Keefe discussed the quantitative work. PadillaCRT did a lot of research, starting with secondary research in the marketplace, reviewing previous studies, etc., to prepare for the qualitative research Ms. Casey talked about, then they began the quantitative research.

Research was conducted both online and offline, including: an online survey of the general population (parents and families of perspective students and others around the state); an online survey distributed through MnSCU (current students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and high school guidance counselors); and an offline telephone survey of prospective

students aged 17 to 54 years old (defined as people considering college within in two years). PadillaCRT oversampled for people of color to ensure an adequate sample of all our demographics now and into the future. Mr. O’Keefe gave an overview of how to read the chart graphics in the packet, explaining the attributes that came up in the qualitative research that PadillaCRT tested against those attributes in the quantitative research. Attributes include: accessibility; affordability; career preparation (defined as “effectively educates people for careers and employment”); community needs; convenience (locations, access to online programs); develops/meets Minnesota workforce needs; credit transfer; efficient use of taxes; having programs to fit everyone’s needs; provides high quality education; and ability to build necessary skills for work, life, and citizenship (such as critical thinking and global perspective).

Responses were plotted on the bubble chart based on: how important they were to respondents; how much they describe MnSCU and whether the response is differentiating, i.e., being (or perceived as being) unique to MnSCU. Across all the responses, the most important characteristic was a high quality education, which was perceived as slightly descriptive of MnSCU, but there was room for improvement. Career preparation (defined as the ability to deliver/improve a career at the end of the educational path) was identified as very important and descriptive of MnSCU; but it wasn’t seen as differentiating, as respondents believe that most colleges probably offer it. Affordability (cost) was a very differentiating factor that it *does* describe MnSCU, and respondents felt that MnSCU is more affordable than other higher education options. However, respondents also believed that college in general is not affordable, likely because it is one of the more expensive investments they will make in their life.

There were slight differences when looking at the results of only prospective students, who credited MnSCU with affordability but slightly less so than other respondents. For perspective students, quality education and career preparedness were perceived as very high, and convenience (both location and online) was very important to them. PadillaCRT anticipates that this convenience factor will continue to grow with the changing demographics, and they count this as something that will be very significant to the future of the organization.

Taken together, PadillaCRT’s findings suggest that cost is an overwhelming barrier to college education, which is likely to be perceived as a growing barrier as dialog in the press continues to highlight this issue. The cost of education is being questioned, and MnSCU needs to make sure to provide an answer.

There are ownable attributes that include convenient locations, quality education, and accessibility. Accessibility is key. PadillaCRT believes many of these factors are under-communicated as it relates to MnSCU as a whole.

In terms of key implications, in order to create a stronger MnSCU reputation, the focus must be on accessibility and workforce development, and meeting community needs. What this means in terms of key shifts for the reputation, and one that is significant is a shift in perception of MnSCU from administration to collaboration. Internal audiences know the role

of MnSCU as administrative/oversight, but not as collaborative. MnSCU shouldn't be seen as principally enforcing rules but rather as an organization helping to float all the boats, to fight against demographic shifts, to continue to contribute to a state that is well educated, and to attract and retain students, and to ensure that students complete their education, throughout their life.

External audiences knew even less about MnSCU, having little knowledge of the role the organization plays. Recently, not enough of MnSCU's messaging has been promoted externally. MnSCU has the opportunity to become better known as a defender, supporter, promoter, and leader of accessible, quality education.

PadillaCRT believes that MnSCU's message must be one that unites institutions around the common passion for providing outstanding, accessible education. The common ground seen across alumni, students, faculty, and donors was this passion for accessible, quality education, and the important role it plays in society, and the sense that that wasn't being adequately defended in the marketplace today. Too many people are attacking education but educational organizations as a whole, are not defending themselves with important facts. For example, students who earn a bachelor's degree have almost twice the income of a student who doesn't. While that is an entirely economic benefit, there are social benefits as well, such as the fact that 78 percent more in taxes are paid by bachelor's degree holders and by a better educated workforce.

This led PadillaCRT to its recommended brand position and brand promise, at a strategic level:

Brand Position: The best path to individual accomplishment and community prosperity

Brand Promise: MnSCU is a system of colleges and universities united to provide the kind of outstanding, accessible education that makes the people and communities of Minnesota more purposeful and more prosperous [slide 21 of presentation packet].

Regarding the role of an endorser brand in relation to MnSCU, PadillaCRT feels that upon evaluating the MnSCU brand, both the MnSCU brand and the individual institution brands should be promoted. are incredibly important. It's important for students to have an affinity to the brand of the college or university they are attending, and it's important for individual brands to be strong – stronger than they are today – to give students a sense of pride. But it is equally important to create an endorsing brand for MnSCU that can be a leading voice with a statewide presence as an advocate for a quality and career-focused education, and for the institutions that provide it. There is not enough promotion of the overall benefits of higher education – both to those who approve and fund it and to those who benefit from it. For this reason, PadillaCRT's recommendation is either an endorsed or hybrid approach to brand identity.

Mr. O'Keefe then addressed the possibility of an alternate name. First, he explained how "Minnesota State Colleges and Universities" is a mouthful, and the acronym, MnSCU, is

nearly as awkward. In terms of an externally focused brand, the current name has limitations and it is not communicating anything to external audiences. There is low understanding of what MnSCU stands for, so it is the right time to explore an alternative to this name.

PadillaCRT's recommendation for an alternate name is to shorten the current *Minnesota State Colleges to Universities* to *Minnesota State*; that the whole would be called the *Minnesota State System*; and the central office would be called the *Minnesota State System Office*. There are alternatives to consider, for example, *alliance*, *network*, or *partnership*. This solution is simple, clear, straightforward, and doesn't tear down the institutional brands that have been in existence for years. Rather, it creates a common system identity shared by all, which provides significant benefits, such as the ability to cooperatively market through media in ways that are currently unavailable. It also provides the connection for an system of organizations that are committed to demonstrating the power of education and its importance to the state of Minnesota.

No great brand can thrive if it isn't connected to a deeper purpose – a purpose that is shared by those within the organization and inspires those outside of the organization. He then reviewed a few example messages in the presentation which PadillaCRT created for demonstration purposes, which are inspiring to the marketplace [slides 26-30 of presentation packet]. These examples give a quick peek at how MnSCU can message around the MnSCU brand and inspire others to believe in the value of that brand.

Mr. O'Keefe recapped the project objectives to strengthen the brand and positioning of each college and university: improving the ability of each college and university to serve students and communities; and increasing awareness among key audiences addressed in this presentation.

PadillaCRT's recommendation for moving forward, beyond the scope of this project, would be to consider an environmental inventory – to inventory all current MnSCU names, communications, etc., and examine individual recommendations for that transition; to explore a visual identity (logo, design, etc.); and to create a brand standards guide to demonstrate usage. **The recommendation was that all colleges and universities retain existing logos, so long as they have logos that they would like to retain, and that existing logos not be interfered with by an overall logo. MnSCU's institutional individualism is a strength. That strength should not be diminished by creating uniformity without a reason to do so.**

Trustee Anderson Kelliher asked the board for their initial feedback on these concepts.

Trustee Krinkie noted that PadillaCRT has recommended against changing individual logos, whereas it seems the world is going the other direction. For example, Target and 3M fiercely defend brand identity and promote that brand identity through a visual image. So why not move in the direction of commercial identities in the marketplace?

Mr. O'Keefe said that in this case PadillaCRT is actually recommending a move toward a collective identity that doesn't really exist today. Right now there is no uniform way for

MnSCU to be represented across the board. PadillaCRT is recommending a uniform movement to begin to introduce the name *Minnesota State*, or whatever the uniform brand will be, to be included as part of every identity, in a common place, across the network. This is an important step toward establishing continuity. But the research suggests that in many cases, the institutions have a stronger brand identity than MnSCU, so if we recommend them to forgo that identity and roll everyone into a MnSCU identity, it would result in reduced enrollment and significant internal confusion. We're looking to minimize any loss of current equity.

Trustee Anderson Kelliher offered a clarification: the concept is that if MnSCU were to go further with this process, the next step is to do more work on a naming decision for the system concept, and the development of an identity/logo look (known as a brand standard) that could be used when referring to the system and could be eventually adopted by others. We do not want to take apart what has been successfully built by individual universities and colleges in their own locations, who have done a good job building brand – but when doing more of the successful marketing together and thinking long term, thinking more as a group on this.

Trustee Krinkie asked about the differentiation here between two year colleges and universities, institutions which have been around longer and have more graduates, etc.

Kim Olson offered another explanation, stating that the goal is to find an option that offers MnSCU the most flexibility. In the case of the colleges and universities, she suggested thinking about the NCAA; all of the universities belong to the NCAA, but there's a Division 1, a Division 2, and a Division 3 – so you want a broad endorser brand that can encompass all, but still has the ability to be broken out into other groupings when necessary. An option with the most flexibility that still offers uniformity would be ideal.

Trustee Krinkie asked for further elaboration on the application of this recommendation as to the differentiation between the four-year universities and the two-year colleges.

Mr. O'Keefe said that they did see that there are weaker and stronger brands within the system, and they have seen this with other network brands that PadillaCRT has built. There is benefit to the weaker brands' adopting the overall brand when the overall brand is stronger. Therefore, PadillaCRT wanted to have the flexibility for weaker brands to migrate should they choose to do so. Since MnSCU is almost a new brand to the marketplace and there hasn't been much invested in the overall MnSCU brand, it may take a while for people to see just how strong that brand could be; but as they do, the weaker brands might migrate in that direction.

Trustee Anderson Kelliher suggested that the breakout research conducted might be valuable for Trustee Krinkie to see.

Trustee Sundin commented that it might have been some trustees' hope 17 years ago that those very strong institutional brands might want to help make the whole even stronger, that it would still be a nice thing to happen even though it may still take an unknown number of

years. Trustee Sundin asked if the display case just beyond room 3304 was an example of what may be expected of the future direction of this shift toward *Minnesota State*. She also suggested that future marketing material include more racial diversity. Mr. O’Keefe assured Trustee Sundin that nothing in the deck presented today was intended to be external messaging.

Ms. Olson clarified that the display across from room 3304 is a display based on the cover of current MnSCU view book, also representative of current usage in social media – the @minnesotastate twitter handle and Facebook page name, both of which use *Minnesota State*, to help simplify the current cumbersome state of the name.

Trustee Vekich thanked Ms. Casey and Mr. O’Keefe for their great work. He noted that the board looked at this same issue in 1998. He asked of President Potter whether presidents were open to this type of change, and if so why.

President Potter said that it’s hazardous to speak for all of his colleagues. They have discussed the question since they were presented with this work and there was some variance among the presidents, but what they have been trying to do is to get their disagreements out on the table and leave the room with a consensus that they could all support. In the spirit of *Charting the Future*, the presidents recognize that there is power in being a system, and that branding as a system is a good thing. There is also great attachment to the identities built over the years, and there is some fear of disruption to identity in the marketplace, particularly with regard to enrollment. But what Padilla CRT has presented feels to most of the presidents like a pretty good balance – it moves in the direction of a strong, visible commitment of the parties to the whole. That was one of the things Trustee Sundin was hoping to see. Some institutions will benefit statewide with closer affiliation with the system as a whole. For example, Rainy River has an identity that is known in its own market locally, but not in the Twin Cities, so there is potential for its statewide identity to improve by aligning with a system brand.

Trustee Benson asked if there are words that capture more of the business MnSCU does, e.g., educating *people*. He expressed concern about the word *system* adequately encompassing the whole of what MnSCU does. He gave the example of Target calling patrons “guests,” not customers. The distinction is a big deal to MnSCU as well. MnSCU is in the people business, and nobody does more people business than MnSCU. What term(s) can capture that best?

Mr. O’Keefe said that there is an opportunity to look into that, and it was left for the next phase in order to give this analysis adequate attention. The presentation today is not final copy ready to take to the marketplace. PadillaCRT wants the board to review this material at an early stage before copywriters are brought in. Trustee Benson’s question was very good input, and the next phase should make sure that the output of this work will relate to the audiences MnSCU serves.

Trustee Otterson said that she really enjoys the name *Minnesota State*, stating that every student she talks to knows the colleges and universities by name and location but are unclear about what the term *MnSCU* means. She also was in favor of continuing to use the terms



*system* and *system office*. She asked why Padilla would consider a hybrid brand, being weaker in terms of name recognition, instead of an endorsed brand, and asked for visual clarity on what the proposed co-branding representation might look like for a college or university with the not-yet-identified MnSCU brand going forward.

Mr. O’Keefe said that much of the clarity that Trustee Otterson was asking for was work that would occur in the next phase, but PadillaCRT wasn’t necessarily anticipating two logos together. Rather, the graphic logo would remain that of the college or university, and the system or alliance name would be handled more typographically. That doesn’t mean there won’t be a logo for the system or alliance brand identity to be used when it is the primary identity. Regarding the hybrid versus endorsed brand question, PadillaCRT is recommending an option that falls between the two. Because of the diversity of programs within MnSCU, there isn’t one easy way to encompass everything, so the recommendation is a brand that is customizable.

Ms. Olson reminded the trustees that the visual piece and how it will play out will be included in the next phase of work. It could be a symbol, or a logo lock up, or a line of type; these are all tactical decisions that will be made once the strategic recommendations of the current stage have been finalized, accepted and approved.

Ms. Casey offered to help clarify what the brand might look like visually going forward: there might be a logo and type, but no acronym.

Trustee Hoffman stated he was initially very skeptical, since he believes the value of MnSCU lies with the individual universities and colleges, but he also acknowledged there is value in the system, and he thought PadillaCRT did a great job with this research. The recommendation was simple yet consistent and still shows the value of the system. He said the presentation turned his opinion around and was well done.

Trustee Ristau appreciated the comparison to Major League Baseball. She asked if PadillaCRT had looked at how other state systems handle branding, outside of the two states (Wisconsin and New York) included in the presentation.

President Potter pointed out that PadillaCRT looked at other systems, and this was an area where having presidents on the steering committee was beneficial. He elaborated on the MnSCU system’s unique challenge, comparing it to Wisconsin with its flagship public university (UW Madison) included in the system. MnSCU does not have the flagship university (U of M) in its system. He went on to say how SUNY went in an opposite direction, recently deciding to go by the university name together with the tagline of the SUNY system. Another example: Proctor and Gamble are not doing what Target is doing – there are many endorser and hybrid brands across the country.

Trustee Anderson Kelliher said that Proctor and Gamble is trying to get you to buy things, not trying to get you to come to the store, the way Target is. She said we need people to come to our colleges and universities.

President Potter then referenced the University of California system. He said students are not accepted by the University of California, they are accepted by Berkeley or other UC campuses.

Chancellor Rosenstone concluded the meeting by thanking Lynn Casey, Kelly O'Keefe, their colleagues at PadillaCRT, Kim Olson and her team, and the steering committee members from multiple campuses. He said the task is simple – we must ask, Does it help our colleges and universities to have a system reputation that is collectively more powerful than any single brand? The strength and identity of MnSCU is in the colleges and universities, and we won't do anything to destroy that. Chancellor Rosenstone referenced the red and green chart illustrating tuition costs at Minnesota's higher education options (green indicating MnSCU institutions, red indicating all others), pointing out that no one understands that St. Cloud State University, Winona State University, and Century College are all part of the green team that offers value, prepares people for life and careers, and protects affordability. This branding work is an opportunity to show the people of Minnesota that these three colleges are part of that green team. We need to stop people from leaving Minnesota to go elsewhere, or going to the for-profit institutions where they won't receive the same education our faculty provide, with less debt. The input from the presidents of our institutions will matter most. Will the new branding help them in the recruitment and retention of students? Will it help at the legislature?

Chancellor Rosenstone closed by expressing his appreciation for the great work, great presentation, and the tremendous conversation that took place.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stephanie Waegener, Recorder