

University reaccreditation process includes local participation

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The relationship between the University of South Dakota and the city of Vermillion was examined Monday as part of a comprehensive evaluation involving accreditation.

An open forum was held for the public at the Al Neuharth Media Center, as well as separate forums for students, staff and faculty at other locations, for a visit by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

After meeting with various members of the community and university, commission member Brad Bond said, "I think this institution has done a very good job working with the community, not only locally ... delivering all sorts of programs and opportunities."

Bond - who also serves as acting dean of the graduate school at Northern Illinois University - said community involvement, as well as

establishing new projects and innovations, plays an important role in accreditation.

"Those pressures are very real," Bond said. "I think they're stronger than they've ever been before. At the same time ... there are serious questions raised about the competency of students coming out with mortarboards on their heads, if they're graduating with the knowledge and skills and abilities to live productive lives."

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is one of six accrediting agencies in the United States that provide institutional accreditation - which evaluated an entire institution and accredits as a whole - on a regional basis.

USD has been accredited by the commission since 1913 and as most recently awarded reaccreditation in 2001.

"Regional accreditation is very important to institutes of higher learning because they are really the authorized agents of the department of education to do an approval process so that students here, for example, can

receive federal financial aid, and there are all sorts of good benefits," Bond said.

During the forum, various representatives of the community and the university came forward to speak about the relationship between the two.

Mayor Jack Powell said the presence of the university can be felt through the participation of USD faculty members on the Vermillion City Council.

Ted Muenster of the USD Foundation agreed, adding, "The university has an observer that sits with the planning commission and advises the city as to the university's priorities, as it might affect the planning process for the city."

City Manager John Prescott said students from the business school and political science program often do studies for the city. Prescott also discussed the working relationship between the police departments of the city and the university.

"We have a very good relationship with our police department working with the

university police department with respect to sometimes behaviors that are less than desirable. They have strong interactions," he said. "I'm very confident in saying there are at minimum weekly if not daily interactions between those two respective agencies."

Powell said the students are a presence in the community through their volunteer work, and through such events as Dance Marathon. He added that the city also has participated in projects at USD, such as helping to fund the construction of the Wellness Center.

Ann Thompson, workforce development director at Avera McKennan Hospital and University Healthcare, said USD has made an impact across the state, as well, having been

instrumental in expanding health care education in rural areas of the state through interactive video services.

Thompson said the university also took a major role in establishing colleges on several reservations in the state through making various educational programs there.

"They really helped to start the Indian colleges. Now they have federal money, of course, but if it hadn't been for the University of South Dakota and South Dakota State, much of it never could have gotten off the ground," she said.

Bond said diversity is one of the issues studied by the HLC, particularly the impact of diversity on education programs. "There are extraordinary services the

university provides, using the greatest asset the university has ... and that's the extraordinary intellectual capacity and entrepreneurial spirit of the students who are out there in the field doing great things - if not in Vermillion, in other places," he said.

At the conclusion of the committee's visit, the team will recommend to the HLC a continuing status for the college. Following a review process, the commission itself will take final action.

More information about USD's accreditation site visit is available at www.usd.edu/accreditation/index.cfm.

CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

Attorney general speaks to Rotarians

The Vermillion Rotary Club held its weekly luncheon meeting on Tuesday, April 5, at the Neuharth Media Center on the campus of USD. President John Prescott opened the meeting and led the invocation and recitation of the Rotary 4-Way Test. This was followed by a round of singing, introduction of guests, and announcements including the fitting of bike helmets to all second graders on April 15 at Jolley School.

President Prescott introduced Attorney General Marty Jackley as our speaker. Jackley was first elected as attorney general in 2009. He is a graduate of the School of Mines and has a law degree from USD.

The office of Attorney General of South Dakota is divided into various divisions. The first division he talked about was the Criminal Division. This division works primarily with states attorneys. There is also an Investigative Division, which assists local law enforcement officers and also trains and certifies police and fire officers. They have a state-of-the-art laboratory for criminal investigation and work with the FBI as well.

Another division is the Civil Division, which handles lawsuits, immigration cases, and others. Besides major criminal cases, they work on crime prevention. Jackley mentioned the 24/7 monitoring program as a case in point. Our own Art Mabry is the head of this program. This program is an alternative to incarceration for those convicted of DWI.

They have to report to a law enforcement office twice a day for sobriety testing. For those who live too far from a law enforcement office, there are ignition interlocks, which contain a sobriety tester, which has to be used before the automobile will start. This device will be pilot tested in Lincoln County. Jackley said that these and similar devices have reduced repeat offenses by 50 percent.

Another division deals with Internet Crimes Against Children. They conduct sting operations to catch the criminals in the act of contacting children, run a sex offender registration system and provide response teams to assist local authorities.

The office of attorney general also deals with political issues, which run the gamut. The attorney general has several "clients," including the governor, the legislature, and the state itself. One of the most publicized is the health care law, which requires everyone to purchase health insurance. This law has been declared unconstitutional by a Florida judge and oral arguments will be held on June 8 by the 11th Circuit Court. If this proves to be unsatisfactory to all parties, it may go to the Supreme Court. There are several other cases that the office is currently dealing with.

Jackley stated that if a statute has become law, then the attorney general has to defend that law despite what he may think of the law personally.

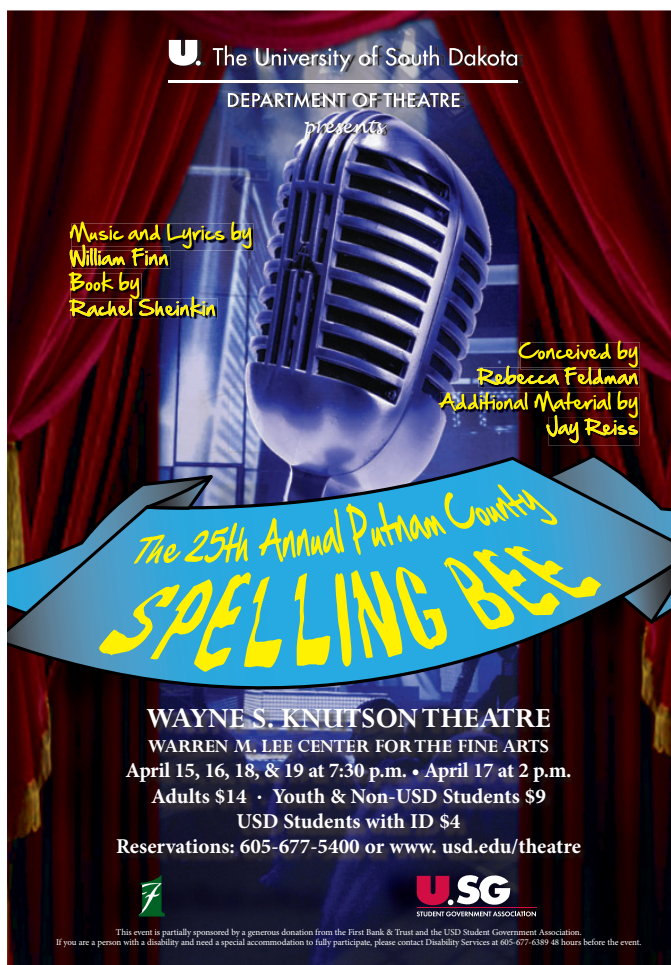
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