In December 2009, as discussed in Chapter 8, NSU came up with a leadership succession plan for when Ray Ferrero Jr. retired. Effective January 1, 2010, Ferrero would become university chancellor and chief executive officer (CEO), and George Hanbury II would become president and chief operating officer (COO). On June 30, 2011, when Ferrero’s contract expired, Hanbury would then become president and CEO. Ferrero would retain his title as chancellor but would no longer be CEO. Hanbury would assume leadership of the university and would be the only person reporting to the board.

The NSU Board of Trustees designed the succession plan to create a smooth transition from Ferrero to Hanbury. Board of trustees chairman Ronald Assaf expressed enthusiasm “in knowing that the strategic direction and opportunity for transformational change will continue in good hands.” The NSU board had worked closely with Hanbury during the previous twelve years and felt he was “uniquely qualified to be the next CEO of NSU.” Once again, NSU declined to perform a national search and instead chose a known quantity. Hanbury responded to his selection: “I am humbled and honored to receive the confidence of the board to lead the university as President Ferrero’s successor.” He praised Ray Ferrero Jr. as a mentor over the previous twelve years and credited his leadership in guiding NSU to “educational preeminence.”

George Hanbury began his career at NSU in September 1998, after eleven years as city manager for the city of Fort Lauderdale. He had become friends with Ray Ferrero Jr., who approached him
Figure 9.1 George L. Hanbury II, PhD, president, 2010–present. (By permission of Office of Publications, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.)
about working at NSU. Ferrero needed an experienced hand to assist in planning the new infrastructure and other campus projects. Hanbury protested that he was not an educator, but Ferrero insisted that there were many similarities between running a city and a university. Hanbury finally agreed to come on board since he had accomplished much of what he wanted to do in the city and “thought it would be an interesting career change after thirty years of public service to go into another noble career working for a private . . . university.” Hanbury signed on as Ferrero’s partner and senior operating officer.²

Hanbury grew up in Virginia, the youngest of three children born to Adah and Emmette Hanbury. Early on, his mother encouraged him to attend college and inspired him to earn his doctorate. She said that education was the secret to freedom and would give George the power to undertake whatever he wished to do.

Hanbury earned his bachelor’s of science degree in business administration from Virginia Tech University and his master’s in public administration from Old Dominion University. He earned his PhD in public administration from Florida Atlantic University. During his thirty-year career, Hanbury worked as an assistant city manager in Norfolk, Virginia, and as city manager of the cities of Portsmouth, Virginia; Virginia Beach, Virginia; and Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

In 1974, as city manager in Virginia Beach, Hanbury urged police officers to earn a college degree and offered to pay for their books and tuition at a school called Nova University. He had heard of Nova but had no specific knowledge about what kind of school it was. After researching the school, he discovered that the faculty were highly credentialed and had practical experience. The concept of bringing the classroom to the student at a convenient time and place intrigued the young city manager. So when he arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Hanbury was already familiar with NSU’s purpose and philosophy.

Hanbury came to NSU committed to being active in the community. He had a deep-seated belief in working for the common good, serving on the boards of the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, the United Way of Broward County, the Library Foundation of Broward County, the finance committee of the First United Methodist Church of Fort Lauderdale, and the business development board of Palm Beach County. As COO and CEO of NSU, Hanbury devoted much of his time in continuing NSU’s outreach to the community that Ray Ferrero Jr. promoted so effectively.³

George Hanbury was formally installed as the sixth president of NSU on April 21, 2011, during a ceremony attended by students,
staff, faculty, alumni, and members of the community. Ronald Assaf, chair of the NSU Board of Trustees, lauded Hanbury as a man who had the “vision to take NSU to the next level of excellence.” Ray Ferrero Jr. called Hanbury “a proven leader at NSU for more than a decade.” Hanbury, in his acceptance speech, said he was honored to undertake the responsibility the board of trustees had entrusted to him. He told his audience that the occasion of his inauguration was an opportunity to refocus the university’s mission and unveil a new vision: NSU’s Vision 2020.

In his speech, Hanbury presented eight core values to guide the university into 2020 and beyond: academic excellence, student centered, integrity, innovation, opportunity, scholarship/research, diversity, and community. He called his agenda a “shared vision” and spoke about “one university” because he wanted NSU to grow as an institution, not just as individual colleges. Hanbury thought NSU’s major purpose should be to foster academic excellence, intellectual inquiry, leadership, research, and commitment to community through the engagement of students and faculty members in a dynamic, lifelong learning environment.

George Hanbury became the president and functioning CEO on July 1, 2011, and began his pursuit of a positive future for NSU. Hanbury had an advantage with future negotiations because of his long experience in city management and his previous work on behalf of NSU. He felt he could easily deal “with multiple cultures, multiple backgrounds, and multiple personalities.”

A typical day for the new president usually begins around 5 a.m., when he gets into the pool for a brisk swim. He arrives on campus between 8 and 9 a.m. and spends his day meeting with staff, administrators, faculty, and students. Hanbury has a regularly scheduled luncheon with students one day a month. At night his schedule is full of public functions. He wants to be seen at athletic and other student events on campus and must attend meetings of various community organizations. As was true for previous presidents, 30 percent of Hanbury’s time is spent building relationships with potential donors.

One of the first items on Hanbury’s agenda is to increase the law school’s national standing by correcting the weakest areas. Second, he recognizes that in today’s global economy, it is important for students to experience some form of education outside of the United States and wants to expand the school’s international programs. Another area of need is the centralization of some of the university functions. For too long each center had its own computer systems, registration, market-
ing, applications, and admission policies. Many of these services could be centralized, providing a huge savings with a single database and shared administrative expenses. The unification would only be service oriented, and each center would continue to control its academic decisions. Hanbury is aware that he has to be careful not to divert too much power to the central administration as that could destroy the innovative and independent tradition the centers have enjoyed over the years. Hanbury argues that NSU has too many different brands and wants one “single, clear vision of the university.” He emphasizes that there is but one NSU, not eighteen separate colleges.\(^5\)

High on the president’s list is to expand the university’s endowment, currently around $52 million. A larger endowment would enable NSU to set aside more money for scholarships, new faculty, and research. To increase the endowment, NSU has embarked on a $100 million capital campaign. Hanbury admits that the goal will be difficult to achieve, but he will be a “cheerleader for the university” and the point man in raising the money. Another goal is to build a public hospital for central Broward County. The proposed hospital would be located next to the Health Professions Division and integrated with the medical school, all of the health professions, and the university itself. Hanbury has put forward his single shared-vision “2010–2020 Business Plan,” which defines a new era at NSU. The plan includes specific performance measures, both quantitative and qualitative, and will be constantly monitored for necessary corrections and additions. While ambitious in scope, Hanbury believes NSU’s goals can be met by 2020.

Inspired by Thomas Jefferson’s plan for founding the University of Virginia, which he called his “academical village,” Hanbury has his own master plan for an academical village. The university owns half of the University Park Plaza Shopping Center in Davie as a limited partner and plans to develop a for-profit, mixed-use project that would be integrated into the campus. NSU would transform thirty acres of the shopping center into three million square feet that include multifamily residential units, the NSU bookstore, a hotel-conference center, residential units, offices, retail, space for research and biotechnology, the aforementioned hospital, and a medical office building. The concept would tie the for-profit shopping center into the not-for-profit university, combining academics, research, and business. The final product could have an economic impact of more than $1 billion. The academical village is representative of NSU’s focus on entrepreneurial success to bolster its academic programs.
The new president is satisfied with NSU’s status as a NCAA Division II athletic program, because the university has always emphasized the “student” part of student athlete. NSU athletes’ GPAs average above 3.0, and Hanbury is proud of that accomplishment. He wants NSU to concentrate on sports in which they can excel and where there is the possibility of gaining a national reputation, as with the women’s golf team. He revels in the scientific achievements at the new National Coral Reef Institute at the Oceanographic Center. He views it as a center of excellence for coral reef preservation and marine biology and believes that the new research center will attract students from all over the world who are interested in preserving the ecosystem for future generations.

Perhaps Hanbury’s major goal, and one that is advocated by Ferrero and just about everyone else at NSU, is a significant increase in the undergraduate enrollment. Only 20 percent of NSU’s students are undergraduate (a total of about 5,500: 2,500 traditional first-time college students and 3,000 career students), and only 2,500 of those students reside on campus. The NSU Board of Trustees has determined that any great university must have as its foundation a high-quality undergraduate program. Hanbury would like to double the number of undergraduates and to that end is planning more scholarships, better recruiting, and more advertising. Hanbury wants prospective students to understand the value of an NSU education and foresees more dorms, faculty, classrooms, and science and physics labs for undergraduates.

Hanbury believes it is essential that NSU upgrade the quality of its undergraduates. Currently, the average GPA of entering day students is 2.6; for some of the career students it is around 2.0. By 2014, Hanbury expects that all entering students will require a minimum GPA of 3.0 for admission. The current retention rate for undergrads from the first to the second year is 64 percent, and the graduation rate is 47 percent. Those numbers could be improved with higher entrance requirements. An increase in the number and amount of scholarships, better marketing, and a low tuition rate should also lead to improvement in those scores. NSU has also adopted a tutoring program for undergraduates and emphasizes learning critical skills such as analyzing material, writing effectively, and making cogent oral presentations.6

President Hanbury strongly believes that independent universities like NSU should shoulder more of the burden of educating Florida’s high school graduates. The Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF), an association of thirty-one private, not-for-profit
higher education institutions based in Florida, noted that independent colleges awarded 26 percent of the state’s bachelor degrees. Students who received the Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG) cost the state less than 1.5 percent of its higher education budget. A study by the Florida Council of 100 found that for each $1 million appropriation to ICUF institutions for undergraduate education, Florida gets 155 bachelor-degree graduates, whereas each $1 million appropriated to state universities produces only nineteen bachelor-degree graduates.7

To improve communication with students and the academic community, Hanbury has created a Facebook page called the President’s Fan Page. He has also organized his own presidential Web page. On both pages, the president responds to questions from students, faculty, and staff; promotes NSU events; and presents information about NSU’s vision and mission and the state of the university.8

President Hanbury wanted more interaction with the faculty, so he organized the President’s Faculty Symposium. It meets once a month, and Hanbury has ensured maximum attendance by offering beer, wine, and cheese. The goal of the symposium is to promote kinship, intellectual discussion, and camaraderie. The discussion topics must be academically rigorous, have wide appeal, and be of current interest. A recent presentation focused on the legal aspects of child abuse and led to a national symposium at NSU sponsored by the ABA.9

During his presidency, Hanbury has made it a special objective to recognize major contributors to NSU’s drive for excellence. He supports the Celebration of Excellence, NSU’s premier event, which acknowledges NSU’s accomplishments in the past year and praises those individuals whose leadership, generosity, and support provided the foundation for university growth.10

In October 2011, in an effort to increase giving, the university announced the Ambassadors Board, whose mission is to enlist widespread support for the university’s development efforts and to serve as ambassadors to NSU’s constituencies. Hanbury recognizes that NSU’s 143,000 alumni have been neglected in the past and learned that the alumni giving rate was less than 2 percent. After a survey found that 96 percent of NSU graduates were proud of their degrees, he is now sending more information about NSU activities to alumni and is traveling to alumni chapters around the country to encourage support.11

Like Ray Ferrero Jr., George Hanbury is supportive of community service. When Best Colleges Online rated NSU as one of the top twenty colleges in the nation committed to community service, Hanbury welcomed the accolade: “We participate in a myriad of
community service projects ranging from protecting local marine life to hosting health care assessments and nonprofit walks and runs on our main campus.” In addition, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classified NSU as one of 115 elite colleges and universities in the United States demonstrating outstanding community engagement.

In 2012, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) granted accreditation without qualifications to NSU’s Abraham S. Fischler School of Education. This accolade meant that in addition to regional accreditation by SACS, NSU’s program had been vetted at the highest level for quality and for the ability to produce effective, high-achieving educators. NCATE’s 2012 decision reversed the one in 1979 to deny accreditation to Nova’s school of education. This decision was additional evidence of the university’s significant progress. Furthermore, as Hanbury pointed out, NSU was the only private university that housed Special Olympics on its campus. More than 1,000 runners participated in the 2011 Sallarulo’s Race for Champions 5K run/walk and raised funds to benefit 800 local Special Olympics athletes.12

The Future of NSU

At the date of this writing, Nova Southeastern University has a very promising future. After all of its struggles to survive, the school has entered a lengthy period of stability and growth. The professional schools are filled to capacity and are forced to turn down many qualified applicants. The physical infrastructure has improved dramatically in the past twenty years and meets the university’s current needs. Financial prospects are good: the 2012 budget is close to $600 million, and the university’s economic impact on Broward County is some $1.5 billion. There are, however, some significant issues that need addressing.

First and foremost, NSU needs to develop a strong, highly qualified group of undergraduate students. The inverted pyramid of 80 percent graduate students and 20 percent undergraduates could be modified without reducing the number of graduate students. A total of 5,000 undergraduates on campus would provide the critical mass that provost and executive vice president for academic affairs Frank DePiano desires. The 5,000-student goal might not be reached unless the school can significantly increase scholarship money. That goal
might be difficult unless NSU increases its endowment above the current $52 million, a low figure for a university of NSU’s size. Raising the endowment to $150 million would elevate the university’s stature in the eyes of decision makers, policy makers, *U.S. News and World Report*, and other relevant analysts. The $100 million capital campaign is a step in the right direction, but for the most part, except for specific, individual gifts, NSU has not been as successful as it hopes to be in raising money from its alumni and supporters.

Many observers see George Hanbury as the right man to lead NSU into the future and describe him as the stable influence NSU needs during turbulent times and an economic downturn. His goal, as expressed in “Vision 2020,” is to elevate the school to a new level of recognition. Supporters applaud Hanbury’s desire to aim high and for his positive attitude about having NSU recognized by CEOs, educational leaders, accrediting agencies, and the mass media as a university of prominence and preeminence. NSU has the capacity, flexibility, and desire to move forward.

If Hanbury is to take NSU to the next level, he needs to resolve three ongoing problems. One is the lingering image of Nova as a diploma mill. Hanbury says the only way to overcome that view is through superior performance and good marketing. Another issue is the fact that NSU is simply not well known around the nation, within Florida, and even in Broward County. Ray Ferrero Jr. thinks that has significantly changed, especially since NSU has a wide outreach in the state and local community. The professional schools have been successful, and NSU is finally building up a large alumni base to spread the word. Nonetheless, NSU still needs to tell the story of its rise to success and promote its centers of excellence, such as the Oceanographic Center and the Jim and Jan Moran Family Center Village.

Another important issue noted by many people interviewed for this book is what they perceive to be NSU’s long-term identity crisis. As one observer noted, the university still does not quite know what it wants to be. NSU has tried to be all things to all people, but might be better served by concentrating on its strengths. According to several other interviewees, the school also needs to return to the old innovative, creative way of thinking that characterized its beginning. One person noted that there was a saying in the old days: “You can’t get through the word innovative without seeing Nova.” A few critics say that today the school is less innovative and is essentially doing what everybody else is doing. Others conclude that NSU is too entrepreneurial and should concentrate more on the quality of its education.
Astute observers pointed out that NSU’s success had never really been defined as achievements by the university; rather, the honors went to individual units. The very things that helped Nova succeed—the entrepreneurship and each tub on its own bottom—are now holding the school back. NSU is an institution of interdependent parts but without much of a unified core. NSU must understand how it defines success and find a common bond that binds the university community together. NSU has been on a long quest in searching for its identity, and this question needs to be answered: exactly what is this university about?13

On December 19, 2011, MIT announced a new academic program that allows anyone, anywhere to take MIT courses online. Students earn an official certificate of completion for demonstrating mastery of the subject. Things had now come full circle. Nova Southeastern University, which began with the goal of becoming the MIT of the South, now had the satisfaction of seeing one of the best institutions in the country adopt the format of off-campus, online education that it pioneered in 1974.14

George Hanbury seems to be on track to answer these questions about NSU’s identity and the school’s future. Although, as of this writing, he has been in office only eight months, his strong emphasis on centralization and “one university” has gained supporters. He has an upbeat and positive view of the university’s future—and why not? When one views the extraordinary story of Nova’s struggle from a storefront on East Las Olas Boulevard through numerous crises that would have destroyed just about any institution to its current success, why would one not predict a positive future? NSU’s history is much like a Horatio Alger story. Alger wrote “rags to riches” stories about young boys rising from humble backgrounds and their struggle against adversity to achieve success through moral fortitude, hard work, determination, and courage. Like one of Alger’s youthful protagonists, Jim Farquhar, the Forman brothers, and many of the early founders and leaders of Nova Southeastern University overcame adversity and hardship on numerous occasions and ultimately achieved success. The school has lived up to its founders’ promise of creating a cradle-to-the-grave educational system. NSU looks forward to its future, and its future is bright.