

OVERVIEW

In fall 2013 the Faculty Senate Planning & Budget Committee was asked to coordinate discussions of the reports of the four 21st Century University committees and provide feedback from the Faculty Senate (FS) to the Provost. To represent the FS as a single perspective would be disingenuous. It is made up of faculty members from all disciplines at the University of Louisville and as such represents varied points of view. In this letter, however, we address the major issues that arose during these discussions. We understand that the plan is a work in progress and we thank the committees for their time and diligence in crafting their respective sections of the plan. We hope that our input will help shape their ongoing work. With that in mind please accept these critiques in the spirit they are meant, which is to craft a plan and to create a university in which we can all take pride.

The document as a whole fails to address education as a primary mission of the university. The primary foci appear to be research and revenue. While revenue is a necessity in order to meet the goals we have as a university, it should not overtake those goals in importance. We hope that future versions of this document will make a strong statement about the University of Louisville's commitment to providing quality education in all fields. While many Senators feel that students are the most important part of the equation, the document includes very little discussion about the student experience. In addition, the report fails to explicitly indicate a dedication to an inclusive agenda and practices in the core goals of the initiative. The final plan should indicate that our position of importance in a diverse community and society mandates that the institution values inclusion and diversity at all levels of our enterprise.

Another major issue that runs throughout the entire plan is the indistinct and abstract nature of the language. Part of the problem is unclear language, such as "mostly decentralized," and subjective terms, such as "excellence", which lack specificity and meaning. Senators expressed the opinion that many of the sections of the committee reports did not say anything substantive. On the more extreme end, this lack of clarity was interpreted by some as being deliberately vague with ill-intent. More clearly defined terms and greater specificity would help clarify the intent and meaning of committee statements and keep individuals from reading into the document notions that were never intended.

Academic and Research Priorities Committee Report

A number of concerns arose around the Academic and Research Priorities committee report. A major concern was the lack of attention to the student experience and academic priorities. The “buckets” listed seemed to focus on areas of research and, while these are potentially connected to academic disciplines, there was no obvious commitment made to undergraduate or graduate education. As an example, an area which the University utilizes frequently in marketing is the Honors program, which receives no attention in the committee report. There should be greater emphasis on how we attract, educate and graduate students, and discussion of what current and future students need from the University. Additionally, the report focuses on areas of strength or potential prominence, but does not address how we support the entire university. The questions the committee was charged with answering failed to ask the most important question, “How do we provide a quality education for all UofL students?” The questions all skewed toward improving external impressions of our reputation as a university. While it is important to understand the measures by which outside review sources grade universities the majority of the plan should focus on our goal of creating a learning environment that provides value to our students and community. The sentiment of the Senate is that creating an exceptional student experience and education is what will improve the reputation of the University.

Additionally, the focus on areas of strength caused some discomfort in the Faculty Senate. While most units could find some way to contribute to these areas some units felt that their specialties were excluded. There was also an assumption that the noted areas would receive funding and support from the university and areas that provide vital, but less glamorous, classes or services would wither from inattention and lack of funding. The challenge here is to create a document that goes beyond funding – delineating priorities without ignoring the core of what makes this a university. Perhaps it would help if the document indicated how all units would be supported while certain areas receive additional funding to make them areas of strength. While the report attempted to refrain from the notion of academic and research “winners” and “losers” which was the hallmark of previous planning, the concept that all can participate in the “rising boat” is conceptually flawed.

The section on metrics reinforced the idea that the committee report was more concerned with perception than educational excellence. While improving public opinion of the university is relevant to planning for the future, it should not be confused for measuring our actual success as an institution of higher learning. Metrics need to take quality into consideration. What are students

learning? How much interaction do students get with faculty and their research? What benefits are faculty research projects generating for the greater good of society? Granted these areas are harder to measure, but this is the experience we need to promote and the story we need to tell if we are to improve external perceptions of our performance as a university. Our focus in general needs to be on providing quality research and education and this is what the metrics need to measure. For example, higher SAT/ACT scores of incoming students may imply a better student body, but they reflect the education students received prior to entering the University rather than the quality of the students' learning experiences here.

Technology Committee Report

The beginning of the Technology sub-committee report is promising, indicating that technology includes "labs, simulators, computer servers and information technologies," but then focuses primarily on online/distance education. While this is an important and growing feature of the University's technology needs, it is not the only aspect of technology that needs to be addressed in this plan. Representation from Information Technology is notably absent from the subcommittee's membership roster. That should be remedied in the next round of discussions. Another major issue that needs to be addressed is how technology is funded. Frequently, upgrades to hardware and enterprise solution software has been relegated to end of year funding. It needs to be a priority rather than an afterthought. All areas of campus are impacted by the currency and efficacy of the technologies we employ – from students trying to register online to visiting scholars accessing our Wi-Fi. Failure to plan ahead and adequately fund technology negatively influences the experience of our university and its attractiveness to potential students and faculty. Planning technology for distance learning, classroom technology resources, and those programs that use a hybrid model is a necessity if we wish to stay competitive with other universities.

Engagement and Demographics Committee Report

In the report on Engagement and Demographics the Faculty Senate requested clarification on terms. We felt that engagement needed to be better defined. What elements need to be present for it to qualify as engagement? Must it include scholarship or can the community be engaged in other ways, such as coordinating curriculum and course development with community and business leaders? In the Demographics report the Faculty Senate, in general, supported targeted enrollment growth, but felt that it needed clarification. How many more students should the university admit? What are the ideal and maximum sizes of our student population? Should

enrollment growth be focused on undergraduates? How can we strive to implement increased productivity in our graduate programs? Many questions were left unanswered.

Financial Health Committee Report

The Financial Health report generated quite a few concerns among Senators, including serious concerns about the Responsibility Centered Management model. Concerns about this model included:

1. The model emphasizes revenue-generation over any other consideration, such as quality and diversity of programs;
2. The model will create friction between units, especially for support units who would then be forced to tax each academic unit for their services;
3. Division of revenue by units generating the most research and clinical money would leave less research intensive programs, particularly in the Humanities, or smaller Units, such as Music, without much support;
4. The model discourages multi-disciplinary research and cooperation;
5. The model would need a method to divide tuition revenues fairly with regards to:
 - General Education – Who would get the revenue – the school of the student’s major or the school providing the classes?
 - How are course revenues divided when a student takes 15 credits for the price of 12 credits?
6. The model does not address how we fund essential services and infrastructure, such as the libraries, student services, information technology, and many others; and
7. The model could require additional positions within units to handle the financial complexity of the system.

The Faculty Senate felt strongly that this was not an appropriate budget model for our university. Senators favored a more equitable model that includes rewards based on unit contributions to the University’s mission rather than solely based on their revenue-generating capacity. Whatever budget model is chosen should include more transparency than the current model. Though current system of budget review and the opportunity for input is greatly appreciated and valued, the Faculty Senate would like for budget reviews to be more inclusive. Currently, the faculty and staff senates are provided information on revenues and projected expenditures, but the revenues only include state appropriations (CAR) and tuition revenue. A

more appropriate and comprehensive approach would include monies from all sources, including but not limited to the state, tuition, grants, and philanthropy. In order to add value to the process, the Faculty Senate would like full transparency, i.e., to have the budget as currently presented, but also to have access to a three-year summary of revenue, projected expenditures, and the difference between the two. Additionally, it would be important to understand the overall impact of revenue sources, other than CAR and tuition, on the strategic and operational budget.

The Business Services Model described in the Financial Health report could have some effective applications, but was not embraced as a solution the way it was written. While some areas with similar functionality and physical proximity might benefit from shared specialists, such as Unit Business Managers, or web developers, there could be serious repercussions from too much consolidation. The further removed the specialist is from the units they serve, the less efficient and responsive they will be.

The Faculty Senate accepted the proposal on streamlining procurement with the caveat that the system must allow the use of external vendors for special needs without onerous extra paperwork.

Culture of Excellence Committee Report

The Culture of Excellence report made some good points about the barriers and attributes of an excellent workplace, but many felt that the report was too vague. One suggestion was that metrics be provided for each attribute to show what constitutes “hiring for excellence,” for example. Do we not hire for excellence currently? Like other areas of the plan, this report fell short on the student end. Most of the report’s sections had to do with providing an excellent work place. More emphasis needs to be placed on defining excellent educational practices, excellent student experience, and the relationship between students, staff, and faculty.

The Faculty Senate would like to thank the participants of the 21st Century University Planning committees. We appreciate the work they have done on this initial draft. We hope our input is taken as constructive and we hope that the Faculty Senate will continue to be included in this process and have a chance to review further iterations of the plan.