**CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE REPORT**

**June, 2014**

The culture in which students learn, staff work, and faculty teach, do research and provide service is crucial to the success of an institution of higher learning. Universities thrive in cultures that prize challenge, achievement, critical inquiry, engagement in society, diversity, and fairness. In short, a university thrives in a culture of excellence. When a culture of excellence permeates an institution, those studying, living and working within it take pride in their association with it and know they are contributing to its success, just as it contributes to theirs. The university with a culture of excellence is proud of and recognizes the accomplishments of its members. In a culture of excellence, each person working within it knows the university’s mission and can state how he or she contributes to it. Culture is the glue that holds us together at the University of Louisville. For this reason, a culture of excellence lies at the heart of meeting the challenges of a 21st century public metropolitan university.

This report proposes a roadmap for achieving and sustaining a culture of excellence. A culture of excellence requires constant nurturing and attention; therefore, achieving the goal involves a process of continuous improvement with well-defined signposts to ensure progress. The Culture of Excellence Committee began with comments from more than 700 staff and faculty who identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges at the university. Strengths recognized were our accomplishments in research, health care, athletics, teaching and academics; however, many noted problems in our culture. Although multiple subcultures exist in a community as broad and diverse as ours, several responses noted three major cultures: that of the Belknap campus, the health sciences campus, and athletics. Perceived differences in salary, resource allocation, and recognition were noted. Each campus seemed to see the “grass is greener” at the other. While all took pride in the accomplishments of intercollegiate athletics, some felt the success came at the expense of academic excellence. Other responses indicated a culture of “haves” and “have nots.” Some felt that certain faculty and staff enjoyed a privileged status by virtue of the campus, the school, or the administrative unit in which they worked; or the specific supervisor they had. Finally, some responses suggested the university has a “culture of no”; they experienced bureaucratic red tape as burdening efforts to be nimble and responsive to opportunities as they arose. Thus, while we can all take pride in what the University of Louisville has accomplished in the last decade and more, much work lies ahead. To accomplish this work, the roadmap proposed by the Culture of Excellence Committee includes five major signposts. Each is described below, followed by specific recommendations.

1. **Work Environment**
2. **Trust and Fairness**

A culture of excellence depends on a foundation of trust among students, staff, faculty and administrators. Trust means knowing that all will be treated fairly, regardless of one’s role at the university, where one works, or on one’s status in regard to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, language, religion, or socio-economic background. A culture of excellence embraces these differences, just as diversity of thought and perspective is embraced in the classroom. The committee recognizes that trust must be earned and reinforced everyday through the role modeling of leaders throughout the institution. It further recognizes that fairness requires the establishment of and adherence to policies and practices that are clear, easily understood, and applied consistently across the university. The committee offers the following recommendations to build and maintain trust and fairness:

1. A culture of excellence rests on a culture of transparency. A commitment should be made at all leadership levels of the university to share information with students, staff and faculty so they may participate meaningfully in decision making affecting their work at the university. Transparency builds trust, confidence in leadership, and a sense of fairness;
2. Ensure high levels of performance and accountability through consistent performance evaluation processes and expanded professional development and training;
3. Create a robust diversity and inclusion strategy that is incorporated into professional development, performance criteria, mentoring, recruitment/hiring processes, orientation, and faculty and staff recognition initiatives. Improve communication of formal and informal programs to appropriate audiences, and benchmark how departments across all campuses embrace professional development;
4. Ensure streamlined, fair and consistent administration and application of policies. Review the Redbook and the human resources website for inconsistencies and unclear language; simplify and reorganize to ensure access to information;
5. Consider establishing a review panel to assess concerns regarding promotion decisions.
6. **Recognition and Reward**

Recognizing and rewarding achievement is imperative in a culture of excellence. Informal and formal activities should support this effort; and they must be authentic and pervasive throughout the institution. Informal activities should occur daily in the workplace, for example, with verbal or written expressions of appreciation; formal celebrations of achievement and milestones should occur regularly throughout the year. Individual recognition should be linked to institutional goals. All leaders, supervisors and managers must be equipped with the skills to reward and recognize faculty, staff and students. Incentives and rewards for excellence must be built into evaluation processes, including merit pay. The Culture of Excellence Committee recommends:

1. Re-imagining, renaming and recharging the Great Place to Work initiative so its efforts extend to every member of the campus community: not only staff and faculty, but students as well. Provide necessary marketing and communication expertise, investment, and support from the highest level of the university to ensure that well-defined metrics are achieved;
2. Developing and implementing formal and informal programs with specific mechanisms to recognize contributions of faculty, staff and students toward the university’s mission, e.g., employment anniversaries, milestones achieved, projects completed, jobs well done;
3. Ensure equitable compensation relative to external and internal benchmarks. Conduct salary surveys annually to assess the fairness and competitiveness of staff and faculty compensation. Revise the metrics used to audit position compensation. Value positions in relation to impact on a culture of teaching, learning, and student success rather than by external business criteria;
4. Develop and implement a strategy to address salary compression to ensure equitable pay to those with many years of service to the University, while also considering merit;
5. Incorporate success in recognition and reward efforts into performance expectations, as well as training and development efforts;
6. Review promotion criteria to ensure clarity, transparency and consistency; redouble efforts to communicate promotion criteria to faculty and staff;
7. Provide perks and benefits consistently to all staff and faculty; Increase awareness of and ease of access to these benefits;
8. Hire a 3rd party to conduct exit interviews of staff and faculty, providing incentives to participate, and apply findings to training and management practices.

**III. Continuous Improvement**

Building a sustainable culture of excellence requires adaptation to a constantly changing environment in order to be nimble and responsive to the demands of students, faculty and staff. While we must always act in concert with our mission, core values and traditions we should develop a culture in which we continuously improve ourselves. We must invest resources to enhance and enrich the competencies, knowledge and skills of our people. Professional and personal development efforts need to be enhanced to keep pace with the environmental, societal, technological, pedagogical, financial, and other changes that affect our institution, our interests and our activities. The Culture of Excellence Committee recommends:

1. Enhanced training and professional development efforts and make broadly accessible to leaders, faculty and staff;
2. Recruit and retain excellent faculty
3. Increased focus on management and leadership competencies;
4. More streamlined, efficient and user-friendly policies and procedures across business functions;
5. Reducing bureaucracy in processes and services and build a service-oriented culture across units;
6. Developing guidelines for effective leadership and followership, including the identification of training opportunities leading to promotion and increased responsibilities;
7. Developing training on how to find the right fit when hiring and how to conduct an effective interview;
8. Develop expectations and measures of accountability for every level at the institution;
9. When hiring new faculty and staff and admitting students, fill vacancies with better qualified, trained, and/or accomplished candidates than the person being replaced;
10. In staff performance reviews, consider offering the person who is being evaluated the option of a review by their “supervisor-once-removed”, i.e., the supervisor’s supervisor;
11. Consider broader implementation of 360 reviews;
12. Annual or biennial retreats should occur for reflection on how well each unit (school, department, administrative unit) is contributing to a culture of excellence.
13. Continue to set explicit goals in a variety of arenas including graduation rates, research, USNWR rankings, awards, doctoral agrees awarded; assess annually with major review every five years.

**B. Communication and Collaboration**

Communication and collaboration are challenging in a large and diverse university community; but they are nevertheless essential in creating and advancing a culture of excellence. Efforts to improve both should be redoubled; the effectiveness of these efforts should be assessed and adjustments should be made based on feedback. More two-way communication using multiple forms of media is needed. Leaders at all levels should be accessible to students, staff, and faculty. Not only should faculty, staff and students be provided campus information on a consistent and regular basis, but frequent opportunities are needed for the campus to give input, provide feedback and express opinions on university affairs. Communication and collaboration loops need closure to avoid a perception of nonresponsiveness. To support enhanced communication and collaboration, Culture of Excellence Committee recommends:

1. Using multiple tools and strategies to share information and collect input and feedback from faculty, staff, and students;
2. Create a dynamic marketing and branding strategy that highlights the compelling stories and accomplishments of U of L’s faculty, staff and students;
3. Increased collaboration in scholarship, research, and creative activity to advance academic priorities. Departments need to be empowered and incentivized to collaborate through within-unit and cross-unit organizational structures;
4. Increase opportunities for the campus community to come together in positive ways, with encouragement and expectations of attendance made clear by leaders who serve as role models of attendance;
5. Develop a university messaging and marketing campaign to communicate an aspirational message about future goals;
6. Challenge the faculty and staff senates to propose improvements in communication and collaboration among their respective constituencies and with others at the university;
7. Existing committee structures, particularly faculty and staff meetings, should be assessed for how effectively and accurately they serve as conduits of information and as opportunities for discourse. Meeting formats should be revised consistent with assessment results; training should be required for chairs of committees to ensure that all attending have an opportunity to contribute;
8. University leadership should consider recharging its “one university” message to address the perception of good-bad cultures on different campuses and the perception of 13 siloed schools/colleges, each operating alone. The committee suggests that the silo-mindset adversely affects students, and may contribute to disengagement some may feel;
9. Strategically involve alumni in the academic mission of the University;
10. Reimagine the role of alumni;
11. Utilize retirees and alumni to support the University.

**C. Student Engagement**

An engaged student body is critical to a vibrant campus life and culture. Without diminishing the importance of students learning from each other and other forms of learning, the student-faculty compact is fundamental to students’ discovering themselves and preparing for life’s challenges. Education is why the university exists, and why staff and faculty choose to work here. This faculty-student compact must be enhanced and celebrated. Doing so is essential to our mission and indispensable in achieving a culture of excellence at the University of Louisville. The University must connect to all its students from day one, and stay connected. We are all responsible for student engagement and success.

A culture of excellence is more than just feeling good about the university. It is pride built on success, including student success. Without continuing to increase graduation rates, improve retention, and increase opportunities for student international involvement and research, a culture of excellence is not achieved. To become more student-faculty centered, the Culture of Excellence Committee recommends:

1. While the Student Government Association (SGA) serves as the formal student voice to university officials, it may not represent all student perspectives. The SGA is therefore challenged to enhance its outreach to the larger student body.
2. Other student organizations are similarly challenged to expand their outreach.
3. More student leadership opportunities are needed, including efforts to involve freshmen.
4. Explore ways to engage our transfer, non-traditional aged, and commuter populations.
5. Appoint a task force of student and academic leaders and charge them with exploring models of student governance within the ACC and other benchmark institutions. The task force is encouraged to re-imagine the role, function, scope and objectives of student government at the U of L, for example, by considering longer terms of office in SGA.
6. Appoint a student engagement task force and charge them with:
   1. Assessing the status of student engagement at UofL;
   2. Identifying and addressing barriers to greater levels of student engagement;
   3. Reaching out to a broad section of students, particularly those who may feel disenfranchised and disengaged, to better understand the reasons, in order to develop efforts to elevate levels of student engagement;
   4. Exploring colleges and universities with “house”, “family”, or “team” models for student engagement and consider whether such models offer opportunities at the UofL to enhance student engagement;
   5. Use information gathered from the above efforts to develop a revised approach to student engagement at the UofL.
7. Assemble a group of academic affairs, student affairs, faculty, and staff leaders and charge them with:
   1. Evaluating, revising and enhancing the student orientation program;
   2. Evaluating, revising and enhancing the freshmen orientation course;
   3. Evaluating best practices for rewarding student success; then developing and implementing programs suitable to the UofL;
   4. Value and reward innovation teaching and student engagement initiatives;
   5. Ensure that faculty are accessible to students outside the classroom;
   6. Evaluate the strengths of the Athletic Academic Support services and consider replicating this model for other at-risk student populations;
   7. Creating common standards for academic advising that can be used across all programs, schools and departments by faculty and professional advisors;
   8. Exploring new opportunities for student sharing of information among ACC schools.
8. Student affairs should work with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and Academic affairs to survey students on matters of well-being and academic success.
9. Explore best tools and practices to communication with all students.
10. Establish a true Enrollment Management plan that encompasses student needs from orientation through graduation for a seamless college experience.
11. Increase efforts to involve undergraduate students in research.