

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

University Strategic Planning Steering Committee

Analytic Summary of September 25, 2015 Meeting

Participants: *University Strategic Planning Committee Members* – Michael Amiridis (*via telephone*), Rashid Bashir, Abbas Benmamoun, Michael Bohlmann, Ryan Croke, Jauwan Hall, Tom Hardy, Barbara Henley, Princess Imoukhuede, Tim Killeen, Jaylin McClinton, Gay Miller, Jim Moore, Mark Murphy, Christophe Pierre, Gene Robinson, Sara Rusch, Rob Rutenbar, Deon Thomas (*via telephone*), Jorge Villegas, Dee Dee Williams, and Dominique Wilson. *AKA/Strategy (AKA)* – Tony Knerr and John Braunstein.

Unable to attend: Antony Augoustakis, Catherine Vincent

Introduction

President Tim Killeen opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for serving on the University Strategic Planning Committee. The participants then introduced themselves.

President Killeen then noted that although he had discussed the strategic planning process at a June retreat and announced its official “launch” at the July meeting of the Board of Trustees, this first meeting of the Steering Committee represents the actual “getting down to business” with respect to developing a strategic plan.

He further commented that, prior to taking office in May, he had anticipated waiting perhaps a year before embarking on a strategic planning process. However, he had come to feel that the University and the State of Illinois are at a crossroads that demands UI define its priorities and role more clearly, both as an institution of higher education and as a public university in service to the State. Among the questions and challenges that he believes the University is facing are the following.

- “The existential question”: There is confusion about the roles of the University and its component campuses as well as the relationships among the campuses and between the campuses and the University. It is not presently clear what it means to be a “university system” or what being a system implies about how the University and campuses operate.
- Illinois is in difficult financial circumstances and “cannot tax its way out of its financial problems.” It needs a strong, nimble public university that can lead the way to economic growth and prosperity, help retain Illinois’ human capital, and create world-class impact that will benefit both the state and the nation.

- The University must create greater pride among students, alumni, and the citizens of Illinois. It can do this by articulating clear messages about the impact UI has had as well by creating a shared vision and goals for its future.
- The salaries of UI graduates are, on average, 20 percent higher than the national norm, and the loan default rate of these student is approximately one-third that of the national average. UI graduates represent a significant human-capital asset to the state; however, too many leave the State and the Midwest upon graduation.
- It is not presently clear what the role of a land-grant university is – or should be – today. This represents an opportunity for UI to rearticulate the goals of the Morrill Act in ways that are relevant to the demands of 21st century society.
- As an institution of higher education, UI must re-emphasize its student-centeredness, examining everything it does through the eyes of the students it serves.

President Killeen then listed numerous potential themes that he hoped the Steering Committee would grapple with during the planning process, including:

- Building “horizontal” connections among the UI campuses and other public colleges and universities in the State;
- Connecting “vertically” with the State’s community-colleges and K-12 school systems;
- Developing a strategic enrollment plan;
- Defining what University “extension services” should be by 2020;
- Establishing effective technology-enabled learning;
- Defining what it means to be a professor today, in a learning environment different from that of even a decade ago and changing rapidly.
- Strengthening faculty development;
- Building strong civic engagement among students, faculty, and staff of the University as well as the citizens of Illinois; and
- The plan should position the University of Illinois to take on and solve some of the most pressing socio-technical challenges of our time with deeply interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches – also reflecting the need for enhanced public-private partnering to provide for public good.
- Defining an “Illinois model” for a university system that unleashes synergy among its disparate parts.

The President ended by encouraging the Steering Committee to do its very best thinking, collaborate with colleagues on the Committee and their campuses, and become comfortable that everything and anything should be on the table for discussion, including the usually-ignored

“elephants in the room.” He also stressed the need to hear all of the University’s voices, not just “the usual suspects,” and urged the Committee members to listen broadly and deeply at their institutions and among their colleagues and peers.

Role of the Steering Committee

Tony Knerr and John Braunstein described AKA|Strategy’s role in the planning process, which includes information gathering, analysis, and synthesis; development of working hypotheses for consideration and review by the Committee; crafting discussion documents, a framework for the strategic plan, and multiple drafts of the plan; and providing overall project management. They noted that the Steering Committee will serve as the primary working and coordinating body for the planning process:

- Delimiting what the strategic plan will address;
- Reviewing and discussing documents and data and teasing out their implications;
- Establishing priorities for the University;
- Developing from these priorities a clear vision, set of overarching goals, and selected initiatives to pursue to achieve those goals; and
- Ensuring that the entire University community is aware of and engaged with the planning process and has numerous opportunities for input to it.

AKA emphasized that planning should be future oriented, rather than unduly taking account of recent history. Committee discussions should be at a high altitude; and candor is important.

Committee members offered several comments and ideas for consideration, as follows:

- It is critical to obtain large-scale engagement and input from across the University early in the process in addition to that provided through the June and July retreats.
- While the analytic summaries of the retreats drafted by AKA note numerous emerging themes, it is important to emphasize the planning process is only beginning, and no issues or directions have been “preordained.”
- The campuses already have strategic plans of their own, about which the Steering Committee and AKA should be cognizant as they work to develop goals for the University. These goals will represent broad priorities for UI within which each campus will have the latitude to establish local goals and initiatives that address its specific needs and circumstances.
- A real challenge will be to reach consensus on significant goals for the University – bold and transformative ideas – that are not simply “least common denominators” so benign that no one disagrees but in addition no one pays attention.

- An “elephant in the room” is the mistrust and competition that exists among the campuses and between the campuses and the University administration. The planning process and the plan itself must acknowledge and overcome this.

Initial Issues and Ideas for the Strategic Plan

Based on their review of the analytic summaries of the June and July retreats (which had been distributed in advance of the meeting with the agenda) and their own thinking, Committee members identified an initial set of primary issues for the strategic plan to address, including the following:

- There is an optimism reflected in the comments from the retreats – a vision of what is possible if stakeholders across the University are willing to get on board.
- The retreat comments also reflect enthusiasm about service by the University to the State and its citizens – a sense that UI can improve healthcare, enhance economic development, provide greater access to education at an affordable cost, *particularly* if it is able to work as a system of diverse, complementary and collaborative institutions.
- The nomenclature used in the University community reflects serious confusion about roles and relationships among the campuses and University. Additionally, the strategic plan must be cognizant of the sensitivity that exists among the campuses about their names.
 - “University of Illinois” is used to refer to both the central university administration and to the Urbana-Champaign campus (where “UIUC” is disliked).
 - The central administration is also called “UA” or “University Administration,” which does not accurately capture the idea of a system of institutions.
 - Unlike Urbana-Champaign, the Springfield and Chicago campuses almost always use both “UI” and their campus names to make clear that they are part of the University of Illinois and are not Urbana-Champaign.
- It will be important for each campus to define its connections and potential interactions with its immediately surrounding community, as well as with the State as a whole.
- Reinventing the land-grant university for the 21st century is a conceptually appealing idea, one rooted in both the history of UI and its future and which could turn a clumsy and somewhat dated term into an opportunity. A corollary should be how the University will redefine what it means to offer extension services today across Illinois’ diverse communities and cities.
- Discussions of citizenship and democracy are often avoided because of the political implications they have for many people. This makes it all the more important for UI as a public institution to engage every member of its community in thinking about what it means to be a citizen – the responsibilities that come with citizenship in one’s community, state, and nation.

- UI must move away from a culture of risk aversion, of “we don’t do that here.” The University must become more assertive, define a positive role, and encourage risk taking.
- UI is characterized by a startling level of bureaucracy – countless transactional steps in processes that slow just about every everything. There are amazing things happening around the University; however, the pervasive bureaucracy stifles innovation and makes it impossible to react quickly to changes circumstances and opportunities that arise. UI needs to become much more nimble.
- The bureaucracy of University Administration in providing services to the campuses reflects the culture of the State of Illinois – conservative and risk averse. As an institution of higher education – particularly one with a history of significant societal impact – UI cannot afford this ethos.
- It appears to some observers that the University’s Board of Trustees has not always put the interests of the University before the interests of the legislature, at least historically, and that legislative intrusion in the affairs of the University has stifled innovation by creating fear and mistrust. The current Board, however, is highly supportive and clearly puts the interests of the University, especially students, first.
- A focus on “the Illinois Impact” and on civic engagement as a fundamental commitment of the University may be part of a vision that will help counter cynicism.
- The plan should set a goal of negotiating a “compact” with the State – one that describes what UI will promise in return for more predictable funding and potentially greater autonomy;
- It is important to clarify whether the intent of the strategic plan is to go *far* by focusing on foundational initiatives or *fast* by emphasizing “flashy” efforts. In its desire to articulate bold, transformational goals, the University should take care to avoid messaging and initiatives that are not achievable and sustainable. The strategic plan cannot afford to ignore the need for the kind of foundational changes in the University and in the State that will support sustained achievement and impact. “We must go both fast and far.”
- Marketing is sometimes perceived as flashiness rather than substance. But “marketing” should not be a bad word. It is how one articulates one’s value.
- The plan should address UI’s connections to community colleges and the K-12 system, defining these relationships as an investment by the University in its future. It has been estimated that one in four University students comes to UI via the community colleges.
- The State’s dramatically increasing Latino population is an important demographic factor, offering challenges and opportunities for UI, particularly at a time when race, ethnicity, and immigration are the focus of enormous national attention.

Engaging the University Community

AKA asked the Steering Committee to offer suggestions for creating awareness of and engagement with the planning process throughout the entire University community – across and including all campuses, offices, and units. Suggestions included the following ideas:

- Regular communication, from individual to mass efforts, using every possible vehicle and forum available;
- To obtain meaningful input, focused questions that are clear but do not inhibit discussion of other concerns people may have;
- Emphasis on the University’s desire to understand how it can best help the campuses achieve their individual goals within or in addition to University goals;
- Making it evident that UI is determined to be an enabler of collaboration across campuses, programs and offices;
- Similarly, creating hope that UI can enable strong relationships with the State and regulatory agencies that will benefit the University and every campus rather than inhibit risk taking; and
- Reaching consensus early on some initiatives of University-wide and Statewide importance to help engender confidence in and excitement about the planning process.

Next Steps

- AKA will draft an analytic summary of the Steering Committee meeting for members to discuss at the next meeting.
- AKA will be conducting selected interviews and group conversations among the campuses as well as with external stakeholders of the University.
- Based on these meetings, and other analyses, AKA will develop a discussion document that frames some early “working hypotheses” for review and comment at the next meeting of the Steering Committee.
- AKA will draft sample agendas for the November campus town hall meetings and other focus group discussions and conversations at the campuses.