

## UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

### University System Strategic Planning Steering Committee

#### Analytic Summary of January 5, 2016 Meeting

Participants: *Strategic Planning Steering Committee Members* – Michael Amiridis, Abbas Benmamoun, Mike Bohlmann, Ryan Croke, Tom Hardy, Tim Killeen, Gay Miller, Mark Murphy, Christophe Pierre, Sara Rusch, Rob Rutenbar, Megan Styles, Jorge Villegas, Catherine Vincent, Dominique Wilson (by phone) and Dee Dee Williams. *AKA/Strategy (AKA)* – Tony Knerr and John Braunstein.

#### Introduction

President Tim Killeen reported briefly on the town-hall meeting held on the Peoria campus a few weeks ago, noting that it was well attended and included a substantial number of Peorians unaffiliated with the U of I. He noted that overall, there has been good and growing engagement with the strategic planning process and that the number of people attending various planning events is approaching four figures. While that number is significant, the President added, it represents only a small fraction of all members of the U of I communities, and he urged members of the Steering Committee to continue efforts at their respective universities and campuses to encourage awareness and discussion of the emerging strategic plan. Members of the Committee made several points on this topic:

- There is interest among the universities in hearing more about the specifics of the strategic plan, and it is difficult to generate discussion without such substance to debate.
- While the President has noted that a “penultimate” draft of the plan will be shared for widespread discussion, it may make sense to release an earlier draft, perhaps the framework, to the community as early as February and conduct town-hall sessions or other meetings around it. Posting it on the website for feedback would also be useful.
- It is worthwhile to consider how to create ongoing forums and opportunities for discussion – beyond the period of strategic planning – at all the universities about the U of I’s future and priorities.
- Social media – a U of I Facebook page, Twitter updates, and the like – offer opportunities to create such an ongoing dialogue in a way that students in particular are likely to participate in.
- The University Senates Conference has clearly engaged with the planning process by providing a set of recommendations to the Steering Committee. It would demonstrate responsiveness on the part of the University System and the Steering Committee to approach the Senates Conference directly for discussion of their ideas and the emerging plan.

- In reviewing all of the past months' Steering Committee materials, there is a reassuring sense of genuine, frank dialogue around many difficulty issues – the elephants in the room – in the planning process. It would be a good idea to post all of these materials – discussion documents, the framework, the analytic summaries, etc. – on the planning website to demonstrate the transparency of the process and provide insight into what have been very rich discussions.

The President appreciated the Committee's ideas and indicated that he would give thought to the suggestions, discuss them with the Chancellors and AKA, and return to the subject at the next meeting.

### **Discussion of the Strategic Plan Framework**

AKA moderated a discussion of the January 1<sup>st</sup> draft of the *Framework for the University Strategic Plan*. The consultants noted that this draft was an effort to expand upon the three major themes that had been the basis of the town-hall discussions. These themes were restated as high-level strategic goals, with many of the ideas that arose in the town-halls incorporated into them.

Themes:

***Build a Prosperous and Healthy Future for Illinois***

***Be an Institution of and for Students First and Foremost***

***Create an Accessible, Networked, "24/7" University***

***Clarify the University's Identity and Broaden Its Reputation***

***Demonstrate Effective Stewardship and Efficient Use of Resources Throughout the University***

The Committee responded with extensive comments, generally and with reference to specific elements of the framework. The discussion touched on the following points.

- As written, the framework does not sufficiently distinguish U of I from the many other public universities in the State.
  - It is important that the Committee consider this as a substantive question: what initiatives and achievements will set the University System apart in the coming years.
  - An important System role will be to lead discussion of how best to provide public higher education across Illinois – the most effective configuration of institutions and delivery mechanisms.
- As the strategic plan is revised in the coming months, it will be important to find vivid language, a title, and graphics that make the plan engaging and help create visibility and distinctiveness for U of I.

- Phrases such as “the Illinois model,” “a university of the people,” and “the public’s university” bear consideration as titles for and language in the plan.
- Removing the introductory verbs from each of the big goals may make them more concise and hard-hitting: “Students First and Foremost,” “A Healthy Future for Illinois,” for example.
- The current draft does not yet capture a “big picture” for U of I, a vision that makes clear what it strives to be in pursuing its overarching goals.
- An important message to convey in a vision statement is that the University System’s role is to *add value* to what is done by the individual universities and campuses across the system – bringing resources to bear, enhancing visibility, giving voice to accomplishments, and the like.
- The framework needs more direct discussion of what the U of I System will do for faculty. The second goal, “Be an Institution of and for Students First and Foremost” should be changed to include faculty and emphasize students learning through partnerships with them.
  - On the other hand, the average person considers students the primary focus of a university. It is appropriate for the strategic plan to try to expand this perspective; however, it is an important one in the minds of policymakers and the general public, particularly with increasing discussion of the value of a college education.
  - U of I might be described as “for the students by the faculty.”
- The plan should emphasize that a primary strength of U of I is that it comprises *two* premier research institutions, albeit each distinctive in its programs, students, research, setting and the like.
- Faculty consider their colleagues and research partners to be faculty among universities and other organizations nationally and internationally, not just within U of I. This is an important concept to get across even as the plan emphasizes U of I’s value to the state.
- Perhaps the idea of “the Illinois model” should be that U of I creates solutions, tests them, and then brings them to scale globally – it is an “exporter of ideas.” The visibility this brings to the University is in part what attracts large numbers of international students.
- In this context, the plan should discuss civic engagement by students as a step toward making them more globally engaged, both while at U of I and throughout their lives.
- Land-Grant remains a perplexing term for most people. The strategic plan should not assume it is widely understood and instead find new ways to express the purposes and ethos of U of I’s Land-Grant mission. “The Public’s University” may be a term that captures this.

- In conveying U of I's scope and impact, the plan should emphasize that 20-25 percent of the System budget supports healthcare delivery to over 200,000 patients annually, making U of I the largest public healthcare provider in the State. This is also important in conveying a message that U of I is not only a place that serves students.
- The strategic plan should emphasize that workforce development (Goal I) is not just a means for meeting the needs of employers.
  - Note the role of building students with capacities and flexibility to adapt to a rapidly-changing work and career environment. And ultimately, some of these students will start businesses and become job creators themselves.
  - Although to some people “workforce” may connote a 19<sup>th</sup> century view of labor serving management, the term has very strong currency in the Legislature in the context of economic development.
- In discussing an expanded and enhanced University Extension (Goal I), the plan should convey a sense of commitment to improving the lives of people, whether or not they are students, across Illinois' communities.
  - The Extension is a network connecting U of I expertise to communities and those communities to each other. This bricks-and-mortar network can be greatly enhanced by building a stronger digital network among the Extension sites and between the Extension and the University System.
  - The Extension makes the fruits of U of I research widely available. In this sense, it is a major engine for the transfer of discovery into application.
  - The Extension is a vehicle for regional economic development and the development of human capital associated with that. It also serves as powerful means of access to education for citizens of Illinois.
- Faculty and students as partners should be a central message of the strategic plan, one which also emphasizes that this partnership is not simply in teaching settings but also extends to research, the creation of knowledge. This is, of course, especially true for graduate students.
- Research is a topic that also needs to be addressed more directly. Its role in state economic development is touched on in Goal I; however, this speaks more to research partnerships between the U of I and external entities than a University-wide vision for research in the coming years.
  - The plan should emphasize the centrality of “discovery” – research, scholarship, innovation, and creative production – throughout the University System.
  - The plan should also articulate a goal of harnessing U of I research and the System's “enabling architecture” to address some of the most pressing social-technical challenges of society.

- The bullet point on “developing a comprehensive enrollment strategy” (in Goal II, *Be an Institution for Students First and Foremost*) seems out of place in a plan for the System as it focuses on a function that occurs in the individual universities. With the exception of the first bullet point, on diversity, the ideas in Goal II detail responsibilities that should rest with the universities.
- Goal IV, “*Clarify the University’s Identity and Broaden Its Reputation,*” is qualitatively different from the other goals in the framework. It speaks largely to what is an internal, operational matter. Although it is one of importance, it may be of little interest to U of I’s the external audiences and potentially be interpreted as little more than a PR effort.
- Goal V, “*Demonstrate Effective Stewardship and Efficient Use of Resources,*” is also an internal, operational matter.
  - However, given that U of I, as a state university, is accountable to the public; given the State’s poor record of public stewardship; and given the national debate over the value of higher education, Goal V conveys a message that will be important to many external stakeholders.
  - Goal V *is* a very big deal, and not only to external audiences. Faculty will be reassured by what it promises. They, too, want to know, for example, that the University System is financially stable.

### *Next Steps*

- AKA will draft an analytic summary of the Steering Committee meeting for distribution to members before the next meeting.
- AKA will revise the framework based on the Steering Committee discussion and a meeting with the Chancellors and President later in January and share the revised draft with the Committee for review before its February meeting.