

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

University Strategic Planning Steering Committee

Analytic Summary of October 28, 2015 Meeting

Participants: *University Strategic Planning Committee Members* – Michael Amiridis, Abbas Benmamoun, Michael Bohlmann, Ryan Croke, Jauwan Hall, Tom Hardy, Barbara Henley, Princess Imoukhuede, Tim Killeen, Jim Moore, Christophe Pierre, Sara Rusch, Rob Rutenbar, and Dee Dee Williams. *AKA/Strategy (AKA)* – John Braunstein.

Introduction

After welcoming the Steering Committee members, President Tim Killeen noted the importance of engaging the campus communities in the strategic planning process, ensuring at a minimum that they are aware of it and know how they can have input to the process. He asked Committee members to serve as sponsors for the planning process on their campuses as well as liaisons to the full Committee. President Killen then asked the Committee members to say a word or two about what they been hearing about the strategic planning effort on their respective campuses. John Braunstein of AKA asked the members to reflect also on what could be done to improve engagement if they felt it was insufficient on their campuses. Remarks from Committee members included:

- It is most helpful when people on a campus hear directly from the President and their Chancellor about the planning process, the two speaking with one voice. (UIC)
- People are wondering how this plan will mesh with their campus plans, whether the campus plans will become irrelevant or if they will inform the University plan. This should be addressed at the town halls, which should also present substantive ideas for people to reach to rather than being open-mike sessions. (UIUC)
- On our smaller campus, the process is more visible, especially now that the Chancellor is actively promoting the early November town hall meeting. (UIS)
- “The state budget issue sucks the air out of the room.” In this context, we need to work hard to create visibility and interest in the strategic planning process. (UIUC)
- People wonder what is the role of UA and if its bureaucratic processes can really be streamlined and the entire University be made less risk averse. (UA)
- Junior faculty are hopeful about the process. Graduate students are more or less oblivious to it. (UIUC)
- It is unclear, even to many of us here, who the audience is for the strategic plan – the campuses? The outside world? (UIC)

- “Once you engage people on the subject of planning, they do want input to the process. However, there is significant confusion about whether the planning process is for ‘UA’ or for the University of Illinois system, the word ‘system’ being somewhat unfamiliar in how we’ve spoken of the University in the past.” (UA)

Possible Themes for the Strategic Plan

AKA then moderated a discussion of the preliminary themes articulated in the document, *Building the Architecture of the University Strategic Plan*. Comments from the Committee members included the following:

- U of I comprises three very different universities. It is important to create a University plan that is relevant to all of them but avoids doing so by reduction to “the least common denominator” or a set of goals so generic as to be meaningless.
- The plan should emphasize the University’s impact. “For every idea or initiative proposed in the strategic plan, the emphasis should be on the impact it will have on students, Illinois citizens, societal issues, the nation, the world, and so on.”
- The challenge for the University strategic plan will be to come up with a message that resonates internally (among the campuses) and that the University can sell externally, among legislators, taxpayers, prospective students, the business community, and other such stakeholders.
- The U of I system touches every county of Illinois, a distinctive aspect that could be better leveraged.
- To resonate internally, the plan should echo some of the language of the campus strategic plans, ideally in ways that help the campuses to explain the value of their goals to external stakeholders.
- Much of the language used reflects the “canonical” categories used in higher education. “There’s nothing here that wouldn’t apply to most large universities. We need to find a fresh way to express what we want the University of Illinois to be.”
- None of the themes deals specifically with research, which seems odd given the volume and quality of research at both UIUC and UIC.
- The plan must articulate *why* the University pursues research; it must make very tangible the impact the U of I has and hopes to have.
 - The public debate around the value of a college education has focused largely on the teaching side of the institution and the return on investment in terms of careers.
 - In this context, it is particularly important to emphasize the value of the great research university, focusing on the value of research in and of itself as well as its importance to the university’s teaching and learning mission.

- In a time of crisis, an institution should focus on its core values – on making the case for the continued relevance of those values.

Branding the University of Illinois

The President asked Tom Hardy, Executive Director of University Relations, to discuss branding with respect to U of I. Tom shared a document presenting current logos used by the University and the campuses and possible logos under consideration for the University. He compared these with many other logos used by major public universities and university systems, reflecting on what they conveyed explicitly and implicitly. The discussion that followed focused largely on how to convey an overarching identity for the U of I, visually and in terms of messages about the University. Comments included:

- “The University must convey the ‘added value’ that comes with being a system of institutions. An emphasis on both horizontal and vertical integration will be helpful in conveying this. The horizontal relationships among the three campuses and the state’s other public universities bring one kind of value. The vertical relationships among U of I, the state’s community colleges, and the K-12 system represent another kind of value.”
- “Maybe we should plant a stake in the ground and assert that the system needs to be bigger if it is to offer greater benefit to the state.” If this assertion is expressed publicly, however, the University must be prepared also to deal with the associated question: “Why shouldn’t the University become smaller or even cease to exist?”
- “Does the word ‘system’ imply too much bureaucracy?” It will be important to make clear how greater scale provides opportunities for synergy and greater impact rather than just making the U of I into a bigger, more bureaucratic behemoth.
- In articulating the value that U of I offers as a system of institutions, it is important to emphasize what the University will do to amplify the efforts of the individual campuses.
- It is critical to disambiguate “UA” and the “University System” or “University of Illinois.” The difference is not widely understood. The result is that it is not universally clear that this planning effort is focused on U of I the system and not on UA, the collection of administrative service units. Those on the campuses who assume the latter are probably wondering what this planning effort has to do with them.
- “Who are the consumers for the University’s messages?” In thinking about messages about the system, the focus has been mainly on Illinois – the citizens and the legislature. The branding process needs to also consider the University’s messaging to other prestigious universities, many of which we already work with on the level of individual faculty, labs and departments but to whom we have not presented a coherent message about the U of I system as a whole.

Preparation for the November Town Hall Meetings

Ryan Croke and John Braunstein described the preparations that UIS is making for its town hall meeting on November 9th. In addition to the all-campus town hall meeting, AKA, joined by the

Steering Committee members from the Springfield campus, will conduct eight to twelve individual interviews and small focus-group discussions of UIS leaders and stakeholder groups. These groups will include several of the following

- The deans and provost leadership group;
- Student affairs leadership group;
- Student government representatives and other student leaders;
- Top faculty (University Scholars);
- Junior faculty;
- Other selected faculty;
- Staff; and
- Representatives of alumni, donors, and outside community members.

In addition, the President and Chancellor will hold open “office hours” on Tuesday following the town hall, a time when anyone at UIS may drop by to speak with President Killeen and Chancellor Koch.

The Committee agreed that these discussions, including the town hall, should be focused around a set of ideas, concepts, or questions to which participants can react, an approach preferable to conducting more open-ended discussions. The Committee also urged that the town hall meeting begin with a presentation from the President that emphasizes several points raised during today’s discussion, most importantly:

- “University Administration” and “University of Illinois System” are not synonymous, and while there may be changes in UA, the strategic planning process is intended to develop a plan for the U of I System.
- The U of I strategic plan will not preempt the campus strategic plans but will be informed by their goals and be a powerful voice on behalf of the campuses collectively.
- There is not a common definition of “university system” among everyone associated with U of I; hence, defining what it will mean to be such a system is a central part of the discussions of the strategic planning process.
- These discussions must answer the questions:
 - What value-added accrues by becoming a true university system?
 - What can we do together that we cannot as individual campuses?
 - What can the U of I system do on behalf of the campuses? How can it become an enabler, an entity that adds-value to the individual efforts of the campuses?

Next Steps

- AKA will draft an analytic summary of the Steering Committee meeting for distribution to members before the next meeting.

- AKA will work with the chancellors to develop plans for their respective town hall meetings and associated conversations along the line of those planned for Springfield.
- AKA will work with the President on a presentation for the town hall meetings as well as on a set of ideas or a brief document that can be shared in the town halls and small-group discussions for review, reactions, and other input.
- Based on the town halls and associated interviews and focus groups and discussions with the President, AKA will develop a document for the next Steering Committee meeting that, although not a first draft of the strategic plan, will offer substantial assertions, ideas, language, and structure.