

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

University Strategic Planning Steering Committee

Analytic Summary of December 1, 2015 Meeting

Participants: *University Strategic Planning Committee Members* – Tim Killeen, Michael Amiridis, Antony Augoustakis, Abbas Benmamoun, Michael Bohlmann, Tom Hardy, Barbara Henley, Princess Imoukhuede, Sara Rusch, Dee Dee Williams, and Jorge Villegas. *AKA/Strategy (AKA)* – Tony Knerr and John Braunstein.

Introduction

President Tim Killeen welcomed the participants and described two objectives for the meeting: to debrief about the three town-hall meetings and office hours held at Springfield, Urbana, and Chicago over the past several weeks; and to begin to shape the early architecture of the Strategic Framework. He noted that, overall, he is pleased with the planning process so far, which he sees as balanced and reflective. AKA commented favorably on the energy, interest, and articulateness of focus group and town hall participants and remarked on the high volume of input to and engagement with the planning process, with perhaps as many as 750 or so individuals having been at the focus groups, town halls, and office hours at the three campuses.

The Committee approved the analytic summary of the October 28th meeting.

Town Hall Meetings

President Killeen asked members of the Steering Committee to note ideas and comments from the meetings that they found especially interesting or relevant to the planning process. Ideas that the Committee members described included:

- *Creating an “enabling infrastructure” for the future:* Identifying and putting in place efficient policies and processes and establishing a culture that is adaptable and nimble; creating an environment that both supports “getting business done” efficiently and at the same time encourages innovation – all of this in contrast to inventing things on a case-by-case basis.
- *Personalized education:* Understanding that the students of the future will not be those of the past, and using pedagogical innovation, technology and other tools to create “personalized education” in the same sense that the healthcare field talks about “personalized medicine.”
- *Identity of the University:* Have frank conversations about this sometimes-volatile issue, but settle it, finally.

- *Race and Ethnicity*: At this juncture in U.S. history, addressing the significant range of issues surrounding race and ethnicity has become a “grand challenge” equivalent in its effect on society to the grand challenges that are often described for the scientific fields. “It is a national issue and one that U of I may be especially suited to address.”
- *U of I Extension for the 21st Century*: The extension system may be an effective network to use in addressing public health across Illinois diverse citizens and geographies and even in preparing students for roles in international public health. Create a “Healthstension.”
- *Telling the U of I Story*: Communication is not just a tactic. It is critical to convey the University’s message(s) – its purpose, rationale, impact – not only among legislators but to the citizens of Illinois at large.
- *Societal engagement*: As a public institution, U of I has a particular responsibility to encourage and enable civic engagement. “We don’t question it when a Jesuit university requires courses in theology of all students. Why shouldn’t U of I create the norm that a public university requires some form of civic engagement education and service?”
- *Rural Illinois*: Although the world is urbanizing, U of I has a role to play in helping to revitalize small-town Illinois.
- *Continuing the dialogue*: Participants in many of the town halls and focus groups asked if the University plans to come back to these groups once the strategic plan is more formed. There was widespread appreciation of these forums, and it will be important to consider these and other forms for engagement and input going forward.
- *Convener, enabler*: “Convener” and “enabler” are words that came up regularly in discussions of the University’s role.
 - The former describes the need to bring together people across U of I who would not otherwise cross paths.
 - The second represents the role of the University in reducing bureaucracy, supporting promising initiatives, and seeking regulatory relief from the State.
- *A catalyst*: A key role for the University is to serve as a “scout” that identifies key needs of the State (and throughout society) that U of I is especially well able to address and then as a catalyst that brings together the human and other resources necessary to create action on the issue.

The Committee also discussed many ideas arising from what had been discussed in focus groups and town halls as well as various informal dialogues on campus:

- The State speaks of a goal of raising the degree attainment rate of Illinois citizens from its current level of approximately 40 percent to 60 percent in the coming decade. “Mathematically, this may be an unattainable goal. If so, what is the appropriate goal?”

- How the U of I can best contribute to stemming the outflow of degree holders from the State is an important associated question.
- “Instead of assuming that everyone needs a college degree, we should ask: What is the appropriate path to a stable life and career?”
- U of I has a role to play as a “hub” and a convener of a coalition of public, private, and nonprofit organizations that have a mutual interest in identifying and addressing the needs of the State.
- “Grand challenges,” whether in the State or globally, cannot be imposed successfully by University on its campuses or other parties. The System’s role should be to highlight critical State and societal needs and encourage faculty to bubble up solutions and even to reshape the questions.
- Collaboration must be faculty driven; however, the University can help convene individuals who would not easily find each other and provide them time to identify and explore their mutual interests. SUNY’s Networks of Excellence is an example of a system incentivizing collaboration across strongly independent institutions.
- The biggest challenge to collaboration is simply the lack of time in light of competing interests. To catalyze collaboration, the University must find ways to “buy” the time of the people it wishes to engage.
- One potentially fruitful way to conceptualize successful university education is to view students as carriers of information and ideas across boundaries among established faculty who serve as hubs.
- Education in the broadest sense is obviously a natural focus for the University in addressing critical state needs. However, U of I needs to change the conversation by considering its connections and roles with respect to education before the baccalaureate level (*i.e.*, K-12 and community college) and beyond higher education.
- The University must make people comfortable that, even as U of I promotes new initiatives it will not ignore current initiatives that have gained momentum and support, such as sustainability.
- Similarly, identifying significant, high-visibility issues that can be addressed quickly – “low-hanging fruit” – will provide momentum for the planning process and credibility for both the process and the resulting strategic plan.

Possible Themes for the Strategic Plan

The Committee next turned to the document, *Initial Architecture for the Strategic Plan*, offering their thoughts about the major thematic areas it lays out.

- “Tomorrow’s University Today” might be a good title or overarching theme for the strategic plan.

- A clear rationale for the bullet points in the initial architecture is missing. They each need a strong articulation of purpose, in particular their impact on and benefit to students.
- “Serving the Public Good,” sounds too static. It doesn’t capture a truly forward looking action, such as serving as a catalyst for social changes.
- Some themes that might strengthen the plan include: “Creating healthy human futures,” “Healthy students creating healthy communities,” and “Building cultural proficiency.”
- Discussions of diversity have increasingly moved to a broader goal of “inclusiveness”; that is, of not just being diverse as an institution but taking advantage of that diversity – creating interactions among very different people to build cultural proficiency and create a sense of participation and agency among groups often underrepresented in segments of our society.
- For the strategic plan to be truly credible within the University, it needs to convey a strong sense of the U of I as sustainable institution – one with predictable finances, stable leadership, and opportunities that will allow it to retain its human capital.
- Impact should be a core theme of the plan: “Come to U of I, and you will change the world.”
- The plan should reassert the relevance and centrality of liberal learning. It should emphasize how the humanities help students become well prepared to succeed in the rapidly evolving job market, develop strong analytical skills, and understand the complexities of today’s quickly changing world. In addition, the University should think through what role(s) there are for humanities in its extension programs.
- In its tone, the strategic plan needs to:
 - Capture the University’s current moment – guarded optimism, strong forward movement, and growing wind at its back;
 - Create the sense that U of I is unlike any other institution because of its history and its role; and
 - Convey the centrality of Midwestern values – modesty, determination, a kind of “stop us if you dare” attitude.

Next Steps

- AKA will draft an analytic summary of the Steering Committee meeting for distribution to members before the next meeting.
- AKA will review and analyze significant new input into the planning process since the last meeting of the Committee, including group and individual interviews, town hall questions/discussion, and notes from the President’s office hours.

- AKA will prepare a revised initial architecture of the Strategic Plan for review and discussion at the next meeting of the Steering Committee.