

May 23, 2001

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Ray M. Bowen, President
Texas A&M University

FROM: Jon L. Hagler, Off-Campus Co-Chair
John R. August, On-Campus Co-Chair
Vision 2020 Advisory Council

SUBJECT: Report from the Council

Since its formation in early 2000, the Advisory Council has met five times to review the University's progress on the twelve Vision 2020 imperatives. Considerable time in our early meetings has been devoted to learning more about the University's academic programs through invited presentations by deans and other administrators.

We will devote our next meeting in September to an in-depth review of the draft strategic plans of all of the colleges, and of the other main academic and support programs. Thanks to the decision that these plans be developed in the format of Vision 2020, the council should be better able to determine if the aspirations and plans of these academic units are supporting the imperatives of the Vision 2020 initiative. Following our meeting, we will provide you with a timely report so that our observations and recommendations may be considered, as appropriate, in the ongoing review of the drafts by the central administration.

Although we do not wish to make prescriptive recommendations to the colleges from the presentations that we have heard, the council as of this date has identified the following issues, some cross-cutting and some directly aligned with the twelve imperatives (and not in priority order), that may deserve special attention, and we respectfully submit them for your consideration:

Efforts to Enhance Faculty and Student Diversity

The council applauds the efforts of Dr. Janis Stout and colleagues to increase the numbers of highly qualified minority and women faculty members. Similarly, the council recognizes that the administration has made efforts within existing laws to attain a more diverse student body.

Nevertheless, it is the council's perception that our lack of progress on both fronts is a serious systemic issue, that both issues are inter-related, and that there is real urgency to improve the University's modest successes in these areas. There also is a perception that the stated commitment to faculty diversity is strong in the central administration, but that this is not being translated to aggressive and committed efforts at the department level. Most of our members feel that, without significant new thinking and initiatives, we will continue to lag in this critical endeavor.

Deans' Searches

Repeatedly in our discussions, the council has recognized the critical role of the deans in providing vibrant leadership to promote college commitment to the goals and imperatives of the Vision 2020 process. Nowhere is this more important than for the College of Liberal Arts, and we strongly encourage the administration to set high expectations and provide full support for the new leader of this college.

Execution of Strategies

The council is impressed with the difficulty and complexity of translating an effective vision (Vision 2020) into plans and actions that will lead to high odds of success, especially in the Strong College model of Texas A&M University's administrative structure. Some members of the council worry that we are not identifying, either at the university or college levels, the clarity or decisiveness in actions and plans that would convince us that execution to the Vision is being taken adequately seriously.

Some of the college plans that we have reviewed (most of which were developed initially in the 1997 cycle) have clearly articulated strategies. However, few plans also contain specific details about how those strategies will be achieved and the time-lines to monitor accomplishment. We urge the colleges to be more specific about these issues in the 2001 strategic planning process to allow more accurate assessment against established metrics. The council encourages the colleges to be innovative and bold in their strategies to accelerate the pace of change in our academic environment, and to identify accountability measures and individuals who will be responsible for the accomplishment of the goals.

Leadership at All Levels

Effective and integrated leadership at every academic level is essential to the achievement of the goals of Vision 2020. A record of proven, creative leadership must be an essential criterion in the selection of the institution's administrators, resulting in the appointment of leaders who understand the importance of focusing on both internal and external challenges and opportunities, including development and the building of strategic partnerships. Evaluation and re-appointment of administrators should be based on very high performance standards. The council believes that the strong autonomous administrative structure of the college and department model at this institution may prevent administrative leaders from exerting positive influence in some situations where change is needed.

Development of Metrics

The establishment of a valid set of metrics to evaluate progress toward Vision 2020 goals has been slower and more difficult than expected. However, at our most recent meeting, the

council was encouraged by the presentation of new data by Dr. Bill Perry and colleagues that may form the foundation of an evolving set of metrics for future use. We encourage the administration to commit appropriate human and fiscal resources for the continued development of a set of vital indicators of progress, which will be essential for the measurement of the University's success in the attainment of the goals of Vision 2020.

Retention and Success

The council strongly believes that the University must continue to strengthen its efforts to retain and graduate students matriculating into its programs. The academic success of every student should be the goal of the institution, and of each of its faculty and staff members.

External Advocacy

The council strongly endorses the additional efforts of the administration to recruit external constituents to advocate a state commitment to national excellence in higher education, and the University's own high aspirations for academic excellence and national recognition.

Emphasis on Core Values

The council questions whether ongoing planning processes at the university and college levels are continuing to pay close attention to the core values of the institution, as listed on pages 12 and 13 of the final Vision 2020 report. The council encourages planning groups to hold these core values central to their evolving aspirations and goals.

The Arts and Sciences Core

The council recognizes that attainment of the aspirations of Vision 2020 will require a strong arts and sciences core. As noted earlier, the success of deans' searches and selections for these two colleges is critical for reaching these goals, especially for the College of Liberal Arts. Although the College of Liberal Arts is young compared to many other colleges on campus, it is absolutely essential that it take full advantage of the unique opportunities offered by the Vision 2020 initiative over the next 18 years. Strong and entrepreneurial leadership by the new dean will be needed to help the College of Liberal Arts meet its full potential as a central contributor to progress toward Vision 2020 goals.

Thank you for allowing the council this opportunity to share our reflections with you. As co-chairs, we would be pleased to meet with you if you wish to discuss any of these issues in more depth. We look forward to providing you with additional input during the upcoming strategic planning process.

JRA/ek

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