



## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

### **Presented at the Early Fall 2007 Meeting of the Board of Trustees**

### **Friday, September 28, 2007**

The American University community is ready for a new strategic plan.

The current plan was endorsed by the board in 2002. Various reports have documented our progress on the plan over the past five years. We now need a new plan to help focus our efforts on achieving a fuller measure of its potential. The plan must also convince those with the ability to support our work that the university has set an ambitious, exciting course for its future.

The development of the new strategic plan will proceed with a disciplined process that engages our entire community. The process must stimulate our best thinking about goals, encourage different points of view, and allow for deep, frank discussions in areas where there is disagreement. The community should expect leadership from the president throughout the process and clear accountability for results when the plan is approved for implementation.

We are a strong university. This fact has been demonstrated repeatedly in our past and quite pointedly over the past two years. The board has learned and practiced the value of inclusion and participation in decision-making. These facts and practices should characterize the planning we are about to undertake.

A framework is essential to our planning effort. Based on our experience with the current plan and the extensive literature on strategic planning in higher education, the following is offered as a starting point for discussion of such a framework:

- articulation of the areas of university work for which goals will be set;
- the best information available on the current status and recent trends (institutional and in the larger environment) pertinent to each area in the plan;
- a process to develop the plan that is both inclusive and disciplined, that relies heavily on existing governance and management structures, but also encourages and respects individual and group participation; and
- access to planning professionals to assist the community, as needed, at key points with both substantive and procedural issues.

Taking the first of these elements, the following is an illustrative list of the broad subjects that might be included in the plan:

- enrollment—size, composition and distribution, demographics
- academic program—content, instruction and learning, assessment
- faculty development
- scholarly, professional, and creative contributions
- student life and social experience
- alumni engagement and lifelong involvement
- our communities of interest—D.C. and region, the nation, the world—and social responsibility
- management and administration, including staff development
- finances
- facilities and technology, including the role of the library
- development
- reputation and prominence

The challenge we face is to develop a plan that is comprehensive, inspiring, and easy to communicate with those who do not know us as well as they should. One way to accomplish this is through a tiered approach in which the many individual areas and goals build to a limited number of compelling institutional themes or messages (e.g., “intellectual leadership,” “the university and the world,” “engaged learning,” etc.).

A disciplined and inclusive planning process will occur in stages. Again, for purposes of illustration, the following outlines one such sequence:

1. The campus constituencies discuss and make recommendations on subjects to be covered in the plan, based on initial list developed by the president.
2. The Board of Trustees reviews major areas of the plan.
3. The Board of Trustees will remain engaged with the planning effort throughout.
4. A university-wide steering committee will be convened by the president, consisting of elected and appointed representatives.

Information on the status of the university, environmental trends, and external influences is developed and provided to the university community concurrently with steps 1–3.

5. Governance bodies, management structures, campus organizations, and individuals deliberate, develop proposed goals, post, and communicate goals and commentary to the steering committee.
6. The steering committee interacts with key constituencies, groups, and individuals to clarify, discuss, and expand the list of proposed goals.
7. The steering committee develops a draft strategic plan, with proposed metrics and loci of accountability, and submits it to the community for review and comment.
8. The steering committee meets with key constituencies to hear comments, criticisms, and additional recommendations.
9. The steering committee completes the draft plan, with commentary on major recommendations considered and rejected, and forwards it to the president and the Board of Trustees for review and action.
10. Campus constituencies communicate to the board their views on the plan.
11. The board approves, amends, or rejects plan.

Assuming eventual board approval of a plan, implementation begins, carried out by responsible university officials and governance bodies and overseen by the board with annual reporting to the university community.