



Strategic Planning

STEERING COMMITTEE

July 8, 2008

From the president

Nine months ago, I charged the Strategic Planning Committee with the task of helping set a course for the future of American University. The plan they shape for our consideration and the board's approval will be the road map for a thriving university to realize its full potential. Their work is at an exciting and critically important stage.

After scanning the higher education environment, collecting data, listening to the community, and engaging the leadership, the committee offers its first tangible outcome for your review. Bill DeLone, Sarah Irvine Belson, and their team have come up with a thoughtful analysis of our institutional strengths and opportunities, and also a realistic look at our limitations and challenges. This analysis is the foundation for clarifying our aspirations for the next 10 years and establishing the specific goals that will form the heart of the plan. I encourage all in our community to consider the analysis and provide feedback that will make it richer and stronger. The quality of the vision and goals that follow depends on your active participation.

Cornelius M. Keenan

Report 1

STRATEGIC PLANNING AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

A Six-Month Progress Report from the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and Request for Feedback by August 1

INTRODUCTION

This report contains a broad summary of an environmental analysis (in draft form) of American University—its strengths and weaknesses, and identifies opportunities and threats facing us as we plan for the next decade and beyond. The items listed were derived from three town hall meetings; more than 30 meetings with AU constituencies; online chats; comments submitted via surveys, suggestion boxes, and the Strategic Planning Steering Committee's blog; and a day-long retreat with the president, provost, vice presidents, and deans.

Members of the AU community are invited to provide feedback about this environmental analysis—by **Friday, August 1**. Since this information forms the foundational assumptions for the strategic plan, which will be drafted in August and released to the community for comment in September, we need to know:

- What needs to be added?
- Are items categorized correctly?
- Is this a sound analysis of AU?

BACKGROUND

American University's Strategic Planning Steering Committee was formed by President Neil Kerwin in late January 2008. The committee was charged with developing a plan for the next 10 years for every functional aspect of the university,¹ grounded in our current strengths and future opportunities. The committee must follow an ambitious schedule in order to produce a plan for adoption by the Board of Trustees at its November 2008 meeting.

In February 2008, the Board of Trustees approved the strategic plan's [scope](#), which outlines broad subject areas to be examined. The committee's outreach efforts engaged more than 1100 members of the AU community including faculty, students, staff, alumni, trustees, and senior administrators and generated more than 140 pages of comments and ideas. These activities shaped the following environmental analysis. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee will rely on community feedback to refine and validate our work at this and other critical junctures in the planning process.

THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING: A BRIEF HISTORY OF AU²

When American University was officially chartered by an Act of Congress on February 24, 1893, the first full-time salaried chancellor of the university, Franklin Hamilton, included in his opening plan the creation of an Institute of Research. In this first "strategic plan," he declared the need for research to be central to the "search for ultimate reality" and "the vitalizing of truth."³ Today, this commitment to research and scholarship continues with the extraordinary creation of new knowledge by professors and students at American University.

Discovery was one of several important missions in the forefront as we prepared this institutional analysis. In 2008, as in 1893, a commitment to public service and professional development must be grounded in excellent scholarship. Outstanding teaching is crucial to the education mission and is vital to maintaining a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. Scholarship and teaching, leadership and education, will again converge on the campus along with a truly diverse and inclusive population of students and faculty from around the country and around the world.

Throughout AU's history, our strategic plans have guided the development of our programs and growth. Recent strategic plans have included goals such as: strengthening the faculty; raising admissions standards; increasing financial aid; and making permanent financial security a goal.⁴ Like the plans that precede it, our new strategic plan will have a horizon of 10 years, and will be built with an understanding of the particular strengths and opportunities, but will also take account of current limitations.

1 Scope of the Strategic Plan <https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/scope.html>

2 Adapted from Gary Weaver and Bishop John Schol's History of American University https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/pdf/docs/au_history_weaver.pdf

3 The initial plan was presented to the Board of Trustees in 1912. The quotes are from an article by Hamilton written in 1914.

4 Provost's Address 23 April 2008

<http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/provost/communications/speech042308.html>

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY TODAY: AN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The following analysis of the university is grounded in several layers of data collected during the past six months and is the result of discussions between the committee and university leadership in June 2008. The president's council and strategic planning steering committee worked to identify the university's strengths, limitations, opportunities, and threats within the university framework and to better understand industry trends.

Themes that emerged repeatedly are represented in bold text. (A complete listing of the group's analysis is available online at https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/pdf/docs/July_2008_Env_Scan.pdf) For the purposes of this environmental scan, these elements are outlined in broad terms. Often these elements are inter-related and can be generalized to most, if not all, areas of the university.

STRENGTHS

Thriving institutions optimize their strengths. AU's greatest strength is grounded in the **core values of the institution**—which include social responsibility and a commitment to ethnic, racial, cultural and intellectual diversity.

Some examples of American University's strengths include:

- **High expectations for quality:** growing reputation in academics, professions, and the arts
- **Experiential Learning:** strong links between scholarship and application in policy and practice
- **AU as a community:** fostering a community of scholars and leading public intellectuals
- **Global reach:** depth of study abroad programs, international student body, partnerships, affiliations and consulting agreements with peer institutions around the world
- **Location:** in northwest Washington, D.C., a safe and welcoming neighborhood, capitalizing on the benefits and extensive offerings found in the nation's capital
- **Size of the university:** mid-size university, with the opportunities comparable to the best liberal arts colleges
- **Beautiful campus:** status as a national arboretum
- **Balance of high-quality undergraduate and graduate programs**

LIMITATIONS

Successful institutions recognize and address their weaknesses. Perhaps the most prominent limitation facing AU is the **lack of a strong and consistent brand identity and institutional confidence.**

Some constraints facing American University include:

- **Lack of a well-developed enrollment management system:** in order to better predict class size, enrollment in AU's schools and colleges, and to maximize usage of campus facilities
- **Space limitations:** stiff zoning regulations and neighborhood opposition limit our ability to expand campus borders
- **Centralized decision-making:** does centralized decision-making prohibit or discourage entrepreneurial opportunities
- **Lack of investment in sustained development**
- **Risk-averse culture**
- **Alumni:** increased alumni commitment and establishment of a better alumni network would promote lifelong involvement in AU
- **Research support:** increased funding and administrative support is needed to pursue grant opportunities, professional development, and external funding for research in general

continued from page 3

OPPORTUNITIES

A number of strategic opportunities are available to American University, particularly in the areas of strategic **positioning and partnerships** related to our **core values in social responsibility, public service, and human rights**, and grounded in our core mission of **knowledge creation and high standards for scholarship**.

Building on our strengths, particularly in academic programs and scholarship, opportunities available to AU include:

- **Interdisciplinary academic programs:** creation of new programs in the areas of alternative education (online courses), international programs, and alternative delivery systems
- **Faculty and staff development:** enhance professional development opportunities such as funding to attend conferences, creation of staff sabbaticals, recognition of participation in community service
- **Alumni support:** encourage a life-long connection to AU by tapping into our well-placed and connected alumni and involvement in campus life – through the creation of internships, hiring of graduates, assistance with student recruitment, and institutional advocacy on the national, international, and local level.
- **Applied research and experiential education**
- **Partnerships:** facilitate partnerships with governmental agencies, NGOs and others to broaden AU's reach into the local, national and international community
- **International marketplace:** continue to support international education, an international student body and opportunities for study abroad
- **Collegiate athletics:** provide adequate support, funding and facilities to enhance and encourage athletics success
- **Environmental sustainability**
- **Social responsibility**

EXTERNAL THREATS

Our plan must also be crafted in recognition of likely external pressures. We recognize our need to diversify **revenue streams** and to develop a **model environment for working and learning**.

At American University, these include:

- **Increased competition:** enrollment pressures on a local, national, and international level
- **Business operations:** increased regulatory changes, compliance requirements and societal changes (i.e., climate and technology change)
- **Lack of a unique and compelling identity**
- **Competitive environment:** local institutions, internships and local attractions vie for our constituents' time, involvement and attention.
- **Recruitment:** increased competition in recruitment and retention incentives for students, staff and faculty.
- **Entrepreneurial activities:** encouraging and facilitating entrepreneurial activities among all constituencies
- **Millennials/Generation Next:** AU must adapt to meet the demands of future students

NEXT STEPS

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee is working on a follow-up report focusing upon AU's mission and university themes and goals. A draft report will be shared with the community in early August. This report will:

- match themes to the strengths and opportunities enumerated in this environmental analysis
- describe the general themes as reported to the steering committee
- cross-check and knit the draft themes to the elements of the scope document as promulgated by President Kerwin and ratified by the Board of Trustees

The next town hall forums are planned for:

- **Monday, July 28** (12:30 to 2:00 p.m.) — focusing on AU's mission, goals and themes
- **Thursday, September 4** (4:00 to 5:30 p.m.) — focusing on the draft strategic plan

All members of the university community are invited to participate in the forums and to provide feedback.

Submitting Feedback

Since the environmental scan provides the framework for assumptions in the strategic plan, your feedback on the contents of this report are crucial. Comments should be submitted by **August 1**:

- Email: strategicplan@american.edu
- Blog: <https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/feedback.html>

You may also contact members of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee individually (<https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/committee.html>). We welcome your involvement in this process.