

Remarks to Faculty Senate on Strategic Planning

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As you know, the current strategic plan for the university was developed a couple of years ago, by means of a process involving faculty and staff from every part of the university. In December of 1997 we published the document, "Texas A&M University, the Next Four Years: One Principle, Twelve Ideas." You may recall that this document, which provides a strategic overview outlining our plans for the four year period 1998-2002 and focuses on academic themes, was written with the assistance of the then current Speaker of the Faculty Senate and two former Speakers. I hasten to add that the "Twelve Ideas" document is not the entire picture of strategic planning at the university-- individual unit plans continue to guide the departments, colleges and divisions of the university.

My purpose today is to report how the strategic plan, as promulgated in the "Twelve Ideas" document, has affected decision-making. Last year you heard me report that fifteen committees, aligned with the twelve themes in the plan, were appointed to make specific recommendations for actions that would move the university towards the goals and targets of the strategic plan. Those committees, comprised of faculty, staff and students, have served well and today I offer my public thanks to them for their fine work and for the leadership of the chairs of those committees. The current state of the committee recommendations is compiled and a hard copy is available in the Faculty Senate office. The electronic version will soon be available on the Executive Vice President and Provost Office Website. The recommendations have led to several actions, budget and non-budget, which I believe are very beneficial to the university. Here are some, but not all, of the actions, organized by strategic plan theme area:

Challenging and Rewarding Worklife for Faculty: To respond to eroding salary competitiveness, a 6% merit pool for faculty was built into the fiscal year 2000 budget. Plans for another merit pool in the next fiscal year are in process. The size of that pool is not yet known, but will depend in part on the certification of sufficient state funding for the legislature's directive for a 3% faculty salary merit pool. To respond to a faculty desire for more administrative accountability, associate provost reviews have been instituted and the first review is currently in progress. Associate Provosts will be reviewed at least every four years from the date of appointment and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee will direct the Senate's participation in those reviews. Also, a small scholarship program for faculty children was begun.

The Aspiring Mind - The Graduate Student: Plans are underway to establish a tuition fund, so that within a year or two we will have a fund of one to two million dollars to subsidize resident tuition for our best graduate students. Combined with non-resident tuition waivers where warranted, this will allow more competitive offers for top recruits. We have begun doctoral program reviews, reviewing five programs this year and with the intention in future years of reviewing approximately 10 programs per year, using external review teams. Implementation of the Grad Trak software will enhance our graduate admissions process for the departments. The Office of Admissions has developed a web page that allows applicants and departmental graduate advisors to determine the status of application files. The legislature funded a 100 dollar a month staff salary increase this year. Although this legislative initiative did not specifically identify graduate assistants, we included them in the plan. In addition, we worked with our Federal representatives to eliminate the deduction of social security from graduate students' stipends.

The Spine of the University - The Library: One million dollars in one time funds was allocated to the Evans Library in this fiscal year. In addition, we have invested \$ 800,000 in the digital library project by directing discretionary grant funds available to us. Approval for another increase in the library fee was obtained. Since fee increases are a politically sensitive area, our support for a fee increase sends a strong signal about our priorities.

Vitality Through Diversity: Two years ago, we established funds for recruiting of senior rank minority and female faculty. Due to continuing changes in the legal environment, we have reformulated use of all our funds for increasing the diversity of our faculty. These funds, as well as the ongoing deans' resolve to increase faculty diversity, will continue to have strong impact. This fall, of our new tenured or tenure track faculty, 26% were women, 5 % were African-American, and 5% were Hispanic. On the student front we have instituted a pilot program in 16 targeted high schools in Houston, called the Century Scholars Program. This competitive program, which requires top 10% status for eligibility, offers those selected the opportunity to complete their degrees at A&M free of debt, through scholarships, grants, and student work. Paying attention to our own community as well, we initiate this year a Bryan-College Station Outreach Center. Moreover, we expect to launch one or more new outreach centers within the next year, funded by a Department of Education grant obtained by the state. Continuing evaluation, refinement and innovation to achieve more diversity at Texas A&M is required and is ongoing. Although not a part of Texas A&M University's array of scholarships, the Texas A&M Foundation's privately funded Foundation Excellence Award scholarships deserve mention as a private sector resource for the state's minority students who desire to attend Texas A&M.

Life Sciences, Telecommunications, Bush School and Race and Ethnic Studies Institute: Funding and assigned space was provided for an improved NMR facility. Matching funds for a new Electron Microscopy Center director have been made available to help recruit new leadership and provide service in that area. Moreover, the two new targeted initiatives in the life sciences and telecommunications and informatics are about to kick off after a year's planning, with initial funding of \$250,000 apiece, leveraged with

contributions from the colleges. One million dollars has been committed for teaching laboratory renovations. The Bush School has received new funding from the state and has moved to the next stage of development. The Race and Ethnic Studies Institute received new and larger space for its operations. We are funding the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute to conduct research that will assist us in understanding the issues we must address to attract more minority applicants for admission to the university.

Private Giving, Public Learning: The newly instituted Bright Chair matching program has been very successful in generating private matching gifts for faculty chairs for recruitment and retention of excellent faculty. Matching programs for chairs and scholarships will continue to be a focus of our efforts to gain resources for our objectives. We are contemplating steps toward another capital campaign.

Extending Our Reach: We have invested half a million dollars to support significant master's program initiatives in distance education. These funds were granted on the basis of proposals that were peer-reviewed. The first projects have begun this fall. A second round of proposals is planned for next spring. A committee is to provide recommendations for enhancing participation in Study Abroad Programs. The effort to gain a Phi Beta Kappa chapter continues. The International Center at the Bush Complex has instituted several programs that support the international development of our students and faculty while reaching out to the larger community.

Curriculum and Resources: The effort to assess the core curriculum is well underway. We have instituted internal enrollment management to attempt to balance the resources for instruction with student demand in some popular colleges: Business, Engineering, Architecture. We have allocated extra funding to the Mays College and Graduate School of Business to meet the very high demand for courses in that college. The "requirements phase" for planning the enhanced information management system to supplant SIMS is underway. The ultimate choice of successor will be an important decision for not only the academic sector, but also administration and finance. I have already mentioned the funding for distance education and Grad Trak, which were responsive to this committee's recommendations.

Information Processing, Development and Management: This theme group committee is developing recommendations in four areas of information technology: academic, administrative, computer networking and high performance computing, and distance education. I have already mentioned the plan for enhancing student information management system. The development of enhanced electronic access in the libraries relies on progress in this area.

Campus Life for Students: Advising is a central issue for this theme. The continuous improvement effort supported from the Provost's office is focused on two areas-- academic advising and graduate admissions. Continuing to develop and support mechanisms that will enhance academic advising is an important effort. The university community is indebted to the many individuals who advise our students so well. The Division of Student Affairs is pursuing several initiatives at improving campus life. Of

particular note are the alcohol abuse task force, the critical incident response team, the campus climate study and follow up, and the enhancement of psychological services. It is the development of the whole person that we are committed to.

Staff Support for Academic Excellence: The pay equity plan for staff continues to be implemented. This is an important issue for staff morale. In the last legislative session, the university supported the 100 dollar a month raise for staff. The newly instituted scholarship program for students of staff attending Texas A&M is another step in the right direction of supporting loyal and dedicated individuals.

Strong College Model of University Leadership: Because the future of the academic life of the university depends on the faculty, and faculty are best nurtured in colleges, strong colleges are key to our success. The core of what we aspire to as a university lies in the academic programs, which are developed and supported by our colleges and their faculties. Essential leadership for the colleges rests with the deans and the Council of Deans provides academic leadership for issue formulation and problem-solving.

I believe you can see that the current strategic plan has not been put on the shelf to gather dust--it has resulted in actions. But what of the future--how will the strategic plan continue to be used?

First, the committees that have served so ably to date will continue to refine their reports and recommendations.

Second, there are still many recommendations from the committees that need attention. We will continue to pursue those recommendations.

Third, the plan will be checked for alignment with Vision 2020, which states our intention to be a top ten public university by the year 2020. As you know, the Vision 2020 document was just recently published and represents a new lens through which we must view our shorter range strategic plans. This fall, units of the university will be asked to consider amending their current strategic plans in light of Vision 2020 and any other new information they wish to take into account. This will not be a major rewriting--that will occur in the Fall of 2001. December 2001 will mark the publication of the successor to the "Twelve Ideas" document.

Fourth, committee recommendations will continue to be used to decide where to invest one-time monies, where to invest base budget resources, and what kind of facilities should be acquired.

Strategic planning combined with open communication among the vice presidents, the deans, the Faculty Senate, the provost's staff, various faculty groups and others in the university community will enable us to make intelligent and informed decisions in moving the University forward.