

Developing an Academic Strategic Plan for Stony Brook

In only forty years we have created a research university that ranks easily in the top thirty in graduate programs, in per capita research productivity, and in reputation. We have weathered cyclic reductions in state support, but have enjoyed an uninterrupted five-year period of increasing state funding driven by the facts that we have increased our enrollments by almost 25% and sponsored research volume by almost 40%. Because of increasing numbers of applicants we have been able to increase enrollments while increasing SAT scores by almost 80 points. By increasing allocations for TA positions and for graduate student stipends, we have restored our doctoral student enrollment to what it was a decade ago. We have created new programs or departments that are very successful; some of the most recent examples are Biomedical Engineering, Environmental Studies, and American Studies. We have achieved excellent national recognition for our tradition of involving young students in research, and for some recent innovations and improvements in the way we do undergraduate education. Our sponsored research volume continues to grow at about 5% per year, and some new interdisciplinary programs have been established that flourish especially because of natural connections between East and West Campus, and between our university and Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) or Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL).

While there is much to be proud of, it is time to take stock of where we are relative to our aspirations, and to define new goals, and an operational approach with which to realize them. The best way to do this is by developing a formal academic strategic plan. A good plan has to be visionary and ambitious, but realistic. It should assume base resources driven by the SUNY performance-based budgeting model (PBBM), but should anticipate other types of support coming from special State initiatives, partnering with corporations or foundations, or private philanthropy.

A meaningful plan has to be developed through the thinking and work of faculty, administrators and staff in consultation with students. The plan must be created in collaboration with other vice presidential areas in order to ensure broad thinking and success.

A new strategic plan will help ensure that Stony Brook remains a leading research university and define a path for becoming one of the nation's best universities. All universities have some sort of plan; most important universities have a formal plan of the kind I envision. A useful plan has to be thought of as an evolving document. I think our plan should have a time horizon of five years but needs to consider where we want to be over a longer period. The plan should be revised as conditions and opportunities dictate. The plan must define an approach and general goals, but not be completely specific. For example, I doubt that any strategic plan could have anticipated Stony Brook's becoming the manager of BNL in 1997.

Our plan will almost surely take into account the special characteristics of Stony Brook: our proximity to New York City; the integration of Health Sciences on a single campus; the close relationships with BNL and CSHL; that as part of SUNY we offer an inexpensive path upwards for a diverse body of students; that we are one of a few major research universities in New York State.

The approach to strategic planning

- There will be a strategic plan advisory and coordinating committee (SPACC) chaired by the provost, and consisting of the deans of CAS, CEAS, MSRC, Senate presidents, and representative faculty. The committee will set the general principles and approach for the exercise, draft the overarching goals, and draft the charges to specific units (e.g., colleges) on West Campus. The committee will also define cross cutting planning activities (e.g., the undergraduate experience) or those that bridge vice presidential areas or extra-university links.
- Planning work groups will typically: do a self assessment as to where we are vis a vis our aspirations and best practices of peers; develop a vision; look for opportunities in education, new programs, and restructuring that align with critical objectives; relate planning to resource employment.
- The strategic planning exercise should be completed in draft form by the close of the Spring 2002 semester. After vetting in appropriate forums, a draft plan will be submitted to the President for approval. The project results should begin to affect allocations and operations already for FY02-03.

Elements of a strategic plan

- Overarching goal(s)
- Critical Outcomes (e.g., highly rated graduate programs, capability of making exciting initiatives, education programs that attract the best students and have the best outcomes, be the intellectual, public service, economic and technology base for LI and the State.)
- Objectives and plan to achieve them (main body of plan)
- Benchmarks
- Resource allocation approach within the academic VP sectors (driven by critical outcomes, informed by analyses (such as PBBM revenue versus cost, centrality, or aspirational peer institution norms)). Principles of campus resource allocations to academic sector.

Some examples of initiatives to be considered (These are some of the ones I think about and are for discussion only. There are certainly many others)

- New instructional programs or areas of concentration:
 - ✓ Performing Arts
 - ✓ Communications (maybe more than one program, components might be journalism, digital arts, writing)
 - ✓ Business (both MBA and also reconfigured undergraduate)
 - ✓ Chemical engineering
 - ✓ Teacher education (further strengthening of PEP and MAT programs, linked to NYC)

- ✓ New terminal Master's programs designed to meet the needs of today's students
- New centers for research and instructional activity:
 - ✓ Neuroimaging and cognitive science
 - ✓ Drug Discovery
 - ✓ Computational Neuroscience
 - ✓ Anti-terrorism
 - ✓ Bioinformatics
 - ✓ Global Studies
- The undergraduate experience:
 - ✓ Expanded honors programs
 - ✓ Residential colleges
 - ✓ Freshman seminars
 - ✓ Expanded research programs