

Forum - #1: University academic goals and measures of success

*Tuesday, February 10, 2015*

*601 Rudder*

*Hosted by Faculty Senate & Council of Principal Investigators*

**Moderators for Forum #1:**



**Mary Bryk, chair, Council of Principal Investigators**

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**Forum # 1 Details:**

More than 180 participants met from 11:30am – 1:00pm in Rudder 601, with more joining the discussion online via LiveStream viewing.

A presentation by Dr. Karan Watson, provost & executive vice president, was followed by dialogue with participants including more than 20 questions/comments in person and submitted via email ([vision2020@tamu.edu](mailto:vision2020@tamu.edu))

**Presentation for FORUM #1: Dr. Karan Watson, Provost & Executive Vice President**

[Presentation may be downloaded from the <http://stratplan.tamu.edu> website]

Dr. Karan Watson made a brief presentation of the current Texas A&M Strategic Planning Initiative for 2015-2020. Dr. Watson reminded that Vision 2020 remains our aspirational guide, highlighting 12 imperatives for creating a culture of excellence for Texas A&M University. The Vision 2020 was reaffirmed in 2010 with the Mid-Term Review of each imperative. Since 1999 we have had 3 near term strategic plans covering 5 years each. Most recently, we are completing the Action 2015: Education First, having reached a number of the objectives during that 5 year period.

Dr. Watson encouraged everyone to review these previous planning discussions and the 20 year goals included in Vision 2020, to frame future discussions based on previous goals and strategies.

She commented that while great progress has been made on a number of areas highlighted in these plans, there is still more work to be done. This moment provides a particularly unique opportunity to accomplish even more and continue to strengthen Texas A&M University's global reputation in the higher education arena.

The current working document for Strategic Plan 2015-2020, is a compilation and aggregation of the initial planning conducted by the Colleges, academic support units and operational divisions during Fall 2014. Dr. Watson noted that many of the colleges and units will be updating their planning with specific forums and dialogues this spring to further align with the overall strategic plan for the university, which still is being developed with the participation of faculty during the forums.

Dr. Watson then led a discussion within the context of higher education today, by stating that Texas A&M University status among identified peers is based on series of metrics that have been/are being utilized across the higher education landscape. She reviewed the variety of rankings and metrics that exist for higher education today. She also mentioned that private and public institutions not always share the same goals since most land-grant universities also have special and unique social responsibilities and commitments in different areas. She commented on some of the more popular rankings and considerations for families and the public at large as a State institution, and discussed how they represent unique challenges for large, public institutions like Texas A&M University. She also stated that "chasing" a ranking, would often lead to less efficiency, unsustainable expectations, which are often focused on incomplete higher education objectives such as class size, student-to-faculty ratio, and others. Dr. Watson expressed her opinion that some of the commonly held metrics don't fully reflect excellence or quality they way that they might imply.

As part of her presentation, she emphasized that Texas A&M University is among the 62 members of the American Association of Universities (AAU), which requires a certain standing among peer institutions within the AAU based on well-established performance metrics. Additionally, Dr. Watson challenged participants to understand how each college, academic support unit and operational division can or will contribute to the metrics in the near future.

Dr. Watson reviewed the 9 objectives that have been formulated in the Working Document, their basis and some of the current data we have in these areas. Future forums will discuss the data collection needed as well as framing the strategies around each objective.

As the first of four forums, Dr. Watson appreciated the attendance and participation by those in the room and those that were watching online via live stream.

### **Forum #1 Dialogue: Highlights of Questions & Comments (Q/C) Expressed by Participants**

***Dr. Jorge Alvarado, Executive Committee of CPI, moderated the Q&A with Jim Woosley, Speaker of Faculty Senate.***

***Dr. Alvarado made an initial statement on the rules of decorum for the Q&A and then opened with a statement on the timeliness of this effort, and asked for any opening comments on whether the participants felt their college and departments have been inclusive in their planning to date, and/or if the participants had any comments on the timing of these planning efforts.***

***[NOTE: These are offered as summary of comments/questions. For fuller understanding of context and content of the Q&A, please view the video of the forum by visiting the following link on the Strategic Planning website: <http://stratplan.tamu.edu>]***

*Q/C: Believe it is the perfect time to be pushing the next strategic plan. Is pleased with the hiring of the new president, at least what he knows from reading about him so far. Question to him is that, while he doesn't agree fully with the metrics of the US News & World Report, many in the public do view them and look for TAMU's ranking there. Since 2002 we have slid in those rankings and wonders if there aren't some efforts that could be made to dig into those rankings and find elements that can be improved?*

***–Dr. Walter Buchanan, Dwight Look College of Engineering***

***RESPONSE: TAMU has reviewed the rankings in great detail, have conducted “sensitivity studies” to determine how certain impacts on the metrics might improve TAMU ranking. In the end analysis, it is very difficult to see how adjusting some of these metrics, while improving a ranking, is really consistent with our mission as a public land grant research university. Example was given on Class Size, which is a weighted measure in the ranking. When looking at adjusting certain class planning to ensure smaller groupings, the scholarship found no actual impact in student learning outcome when moving from 24 to 19 in a class. While some larger sections moving to very intimate numbers could impact student learning, it is difficult to see how that offsets our abilities to meet our responsibilities to the state and if it truly makes our University better. With that said, one thing we are doing is looking at the handful of schools that are like TAMU who are ahead in the rankings...appears as though they are there because of qualitative reputational responses in the survey, more than quantitative. Important to keep an eye on graduating students, graduation rates, and those reputational enhancing activities that can help in this way.***

*Q/C: Email -Student to Faculty Ratio used to be mentioned in our goals, wondering if it has dropped off our metrics?*

***–Dr. Marty Loudder, Mays Business School***

***RESPONSE: still evaluated and reviewed, however important to note that public and elected officials don't understand that metric. Their concern is “why spend money to move ratios in small ways when difficult to tell difference between 20 to 1 or 17 to 1, on the kind of experience our students have”. Good for us all to note, that with the inclusion of allied health programs of HSC, which have naturally lower***

student to faculty ratios due to nature of programs, TAMU now has lowest overall student to faculty we've ever had. And yes, the HSC programs are now with us, we are now one university offering comprehensive programs and utilizing all combined metrics in our reporting.

Q/C: Looking at this discussion in different way, as a faculty member, also an Aggie graduate, Class of '81 and now as an Aggie Parent. Looking at the University the way many parents do and wondering if there is a missing objective. Something that speaks to the richness of opportunities and experiences we offer our students. Feel we should look for ways to emphasize the uniqueness of students and student experiences into the plan.

**-Dr. Gene Hawkins, Dwight Look College of Engineering**

Q/C: Concerns with the expanding number of student enrollment. Worried that increasing students will diminish quality and that some students will struggle. Sees in courses in Math, so far, the bell curve is holding with 1/3 excelling, 1/3 maintaining and 1/3 struggling, but wondering if larger numbers, particularly in Engineering is a concern?

**-Dr. Kim Deckman, College of Science**

**Response:** On Enrollment, all colleges have worked to consider providing where and how they have the opportunity to grow and graduate more students. As you know, the colleges control most of the valves for offering admissions to the University. Transfer, masters, doctoral and professional program offers of admission are determined by reviews within the departments. Centrally, due to the numbers and processing loads, Freshman admissions is facilitated in concert with the Admission's Office and Academic Affairs leadership, ultimately reporting to the Provost. In case of engineering and stated goals of "25x25", we have already reached the steady state numbers needed for freshman entrance, now up to college to retain and turn up or down the other valves of entry.

With that said, we are monitoring student quality, as we always have. We are seeing slight increases year to year in SAT score, particularly watching the Math scores and so far we are not seeing any evidence of quality of entering students going down. In fact, across the university we are seeing "better" learning outcomes being stated and thus far, no slippage in quality.

We will have to continue monitoring and be sure we have resources to continue managing the kinds of student experiences we want, or turn "valves up or down" accordingly.

Q/C: Is there an upper limit to 6 year graduation rate? Do these goals take into account, some students find other foci while here, whether it is to party or study?

- **Dr. Clint Magill, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences**

**Response:** Looking at our peers some have much higher rates. Ours can be impacted by a few more disciplines doing a better job at 4 year graduation rates, all of us doing better at 5 year graduation rates and for those disciplines that have been successful at 6 year, moving to 5.5, etc. Recognize that concerns over graduation rates of 6 years or longer are really concerns about student debt.

Q/C: Wonder if need a 10<sup>th</sup> objective on faculty and staff retention? Each year asked to more with less and stretched very thin..having a university metric on the climate and retention of faculty and staff would be a good way to support, nurture and mentor faculty as a metric of success and monitor the campus environment.

- **Dr. Won Bo Shim, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences**

**Response:** important point and should continue to be a focus. Faculty mentoring and support and the ability to start and complete a career at Texas A&M University has even been mentioned as an important factor by our new president.

Q/C: Concerned about wording in some of the objectives, in particular perhaps similarities in wording of #2 and #3, but more concerned with wording that suggest “satisfied” with experience, etc. leading to perpetuating of “customer” model and mindset. What we want is to have well educated students that were not just here to get a job, but to learn more broadly and be impactful in their lives after university whether first job or all jobs and life afterward.

Does like wording on “TAMU as a magnifier/multiplier of state resources”, but worried that the objective wording sounds like we aren’t currently good stewards of resources and we already are!

**–Dr. Helene Andrews-Polymenis, College of Medicine & Vice Chair of CPI**

Comment on being less about “workforce development” and more about “mind transformation and foundational knowledge to succeed in life”

**–Dr. Jorge Alvarado, Dwight Look College of Engineering**

**Response:** excellent point, we need to flush out that wording better. Right now, we have a really good record for our students feeling really good about their experience and the “value” of their investment, but want and need them to identify it at a depth and what we have been working on related to QEP: “Aggies Commit to learning for a lifetime”, we need to be sure wording captures it in this plan better

Q/C: Concerned about grade inflation and how this occurrence may be impacting drive to retain and graduate students?

**–Dr. Walt Daugherty, Dwight Look College of Engineering**

**Response:** Grade Inflation is an element that is entirely controlled by you the Faculty. We currently have no metric that shows a trend in grade inflation...unless reporting by faculty is somehow incomplete. Enhancements in graduation rates and retention, we would also be an indicator more based on improved teaching and higher quality of students. Demonstrating learning outcomes continues to be high.

Q/C: Don’t see a sense of faculty and university recognized by peers for creative, innovative and excellent teaching in the plan, would like to see how that could be fully represented and documented.

**–Dr. John August, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences**

Q/C: Seems like some of the objectives (1-3, & 9) are “customer” or financial focus, where others (4-7) are more inward focused around “supporting objective”...would like to see wording clarified so all objectives are more clear on our focus.

**–Joel Thorn, University Libraries**

**Response:** good observation, we need to clarify wording to be sure what kind of “awards” we are measuring and communicating too.

Q/C: These objectives could be applied to any university. Would like to see, as was mentioned earlier, a better focus on “what defines us as an Aggie university” (core values, etc). Believe we have unique culture and wants to be sure in our plan it is clear that we believe in being a “unique” university...not just same as peers.

**–Dr. Leonard Bright, Bush School**

*Q/C: Believes undergraduate research is imperative to retaining high quality undergrad students and graduate education focus more emphasized, in particular graduate students interconnectivity to undergraduate students.*

**–Dr. Gamal Akabani, Dwight Look College of Engineering**

*Q/C: These objectives align well with my personal impression of my role in university and that they complement well each other and the overarching mission of the institution. Best set of goals I have ever seen for the institution in terms of being workable. Compliments, but one that could be added in to measuring student success would be employers and those who place our students, including their impression of our students.*

**–Dr. John Nielson Gammon, College of Geosciences**

*Q/C: Role of land-grant institution, improve ways to commit to teaching, research, community service, extension etc. This is a real opportunity to talk about our difference and abilities to make a difference in the lives of Texas, work with public officials, schools, business to learn from one another. All of these leaders want to see A&M go up... this is a wonderful challenge and commitment to these areas.*

**–Dr. Raphael Lara Alecio., College of Education & Human Development**

*Q/C: Would like to see internationalization in these objectives and metrics. Important means of student experience, as well student educational exchange. We are a global community so global should be explicit in our planning.*

**–Dr. Li Gan, College of Liberal Arts**

*Q/C: Companies and universities are also ranked as Best Places to Work. Should we ask the people (faculty, staff, all) who work here, who help faculty and students be successful what they think of TAMU as a place to work?*

**–Dr. Michael Schuler, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences**

*Q/C: new to TAMU, overall goals are good, but impacts on quality of students coming in to TAMU is impacted by what happens in PK-12 and is affected by Teacher Prep, and professional development we provide. Would advocate for adding something in our goals related to how we help this. Also advocates educating the public through outreach not letting the media communicate it for us. #8 having an element to educating parents, etc. tell them directly.*

**–Dr. Kausalai Wijekumar, College of Education & Human Development**

*Q/C: Email- metrics for #7, some have accomplished highest level by becoming a Fellow of professional organizations.*

**–Dr. John Bowman, Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy**

*Response: Important. National Research Council has created a classification for prestigious and highly prestigious fellows. Should be used and we should get better in both areas as a metric.*

*Q/C: Follow up on others comments...wanted to be sure our distinctiveness is reflected. don't understand in these objectives where the "distinctive TAMU" is reflected... is it a problem of strategy or missing or ? how is it measured?*

**–Dr. Mark Houston, Mays Business School**

*RESPONSE: We haven't gotten there yet in these objectives, but more in strategies than these top objectives, perhaps needs to be elevated. Definitely important, because our students success and how they are perceived is due to this distinctiveness*

*Q/C: Objective #2 rate of subsequent placement and quality..... PhD and graduate students.. employers indicate they would like to have students with work experience, graduate students indicate their faculty won't let them take time away to do them...so in #2 how we can increase this when so many faculty focus on academic placement only?*

***–Katy Stober , Career Center***

***Response:*** *We are going to talk more about metrics in coming forums. Different professions have different focus and measuring how well in academic and industry professions will have to be decision of each unit.*

***PROVOST WATSON Shared additional slides on Performance Metrics that will be part of future forums as well. Discussed some US NEWS and AAU metrics and what they look at. When we put up university percent goals up, doesn't make sense to ask every department of TAMU to improve by the same % required to close the gaps, since norms in all of these areas are different in each department. When you look at these we have to be thoughtful about how linking objectives through metrics and optics (of some of these items) when we measure them for external audiences.***

*Q/C: like the goals and objectives, have we thought about tying these into the agricultural and engineering agencies, because many would connect nicely.*

***–Dr. Mike Arnold, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences***

*Response: We have a little in those colleges with direct connections, but we emphasize it even more.*

*Q/C: looking at numbers on Retention and Graduation Rates, I think it's caused by other factors including having more grants and attract more faculty and more students. Is it causality or correlation. Bring better faculty, more grants, reputation increases, more and better students...that is way to do it, not forcing artificial graduation metrics.*

***–Dr. Ricardo Gutierrez-Osuna, Dwight Look College of Engineering***

*Q/C: Metrics are varied department to department, would be good to have that wording in the document in order to clarify. Also problem on dollars amounts, etc., rather than relative context as opposed to absolute numbers.*

***–Dr. Alan Needleman, Dwight Look College of Engineering***

*Q/C: Metrics are great, Follow up on the Objectives comments earlier...what does each objective serve/what is its purpose. Make linkage from objectives to metrics to Excellence for buy in and in more detail. Also, When you look at these we have to thoughtful about how linking objectives through metrics and what the optics of some of these items for external audiences. So would like to see more linkage flushed out with optics, on objectives metrics and excellence*

*- John Criscionne, Biomedical Engineering*

*Q/C: Email – SLOGAN IDEA: Transforming Texas- One Mind at a Time*

***–Dr. John Bowman, Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy***

*Q/C: Email- a number of items..One that we will cover now is demonstrating impact on Texas could be accomplished by doing more research and projects for Texas Government, however it doesn't seem to be as valued because doesn't generate overhead. Would like to see this addressed in the plan.*

***-Dr. Jeff Haberl, College of Architecture***

*Q/C: Also on Legislature, data on how much state contributes to education year to year. Is there data on how much the state contributes to higher education? Perception is some of these peers spend more and contribute more to higher ed than in Texas. University is blamed for raising tuition and no blame taken by the State.*

***-Dr. Spencer Beamer, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences***

*Response: Texas is higher than a lot of the others. Some are higher and some are lower... state budgets in other states have been far more challenging than in Texas. Some criticism over raising tuition and fees, but when you look at unfunded mandates and inflation, we have stayed about the same over 35 years in costs, although we are a much better university. Some of our university colleagues have raised tuition more. Texas A&M is the 11<sup>th</sup> most costly in a state with only 34 public universities. We are being put in the same bucket, but we are balancing and messaging better.*

*Q/C: seems like UG recruitment nationally and internationally is important, but don't see it as a written metric. Perhaps we need a metric that talks about out of state recruitment strategy. Profile versus national peers and how undergrad recruitment should tie in.*

***-Dr. Matt Fuhrmann, College of Liberal Arts***

*Q/C: #3, serving the public. Propose New metric to the Aggie Spirit. Consider the Number of hours of service our students give back to the community. Do we have statistics on that could be included?*

*Q/C: Pushing A&M forward to higher rankings, 9 objectives sound good, however interdisciplinary scholarly work is happening more and more. Need more diversity in disciplines and people to meet what the world needs to solve problems that can't be solved by one discipline.*

***-Carmen Torres, graduate student, College of Architecture***

*Response: Scholars includes faculty and staff. Is this a strategy (previewed in coming forums) or an objective? Need your feedback in future forums.*

*Closed by Dr. Alvarado*