



University of Pittsburgh

SEP 21 2011

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

801 Cathedral of Learning
4200 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
412-624-4223
Fax: 412-383-9640
E-mail: beeson@pitt.edu

Patricia E. Beeson
Provost
Senior Vice Chancellor

September 19, 2011

Dean Ronald L. Larsen
School of Information Sciences
514 IS Building

Dear Ron:

Reading your planning document, and those of the other schools and campuses, reinforced my belief that our success in the past reflects, in no small measure, the disciplined institutional focus on our academic goals, and the development and execution of good strategic plans. Moving forward, the good habits and focus developed over the past 15 years will serve us well as we enter this next stage in the University's evolution -- a stage that will likely be characterized by lower state funding than we have experienced in the past, but not lower ambitions.

Looking forward, we are entering a pivotal period for the University: a period that I fear will be characterized by flat or declining Commonwealth funding; flat or declining federal support for research, and more financial constraints on families as they consider colleges. I do not believe this outlook should fundamentally alter our goals; however, I do believe that it places much more urgency on our need to succeed, particularly in building strong undergraduate and professional programs, solidifying our research base, increasing our operational efficiency, and focusing our limited resources on our highest priorities. Moving forward we need to look carefully at every aspect of our operation and focus our energy, and our resources, even more clearly on our goals.

I am optimistic that we can overcome the challenges before us through continued focus on our academic goals and disciplined planning. The plans that are in place are good plans that have guided us over the past several years as we have made considerable progress. However, given the changing landscape, all units could benefit from a reassessment of their existing plans, many of which are now dated either because so much progress has already been made under the plan, and/or because the external environment in which we are operating has changed so dramatically.

As these plans are reviewed and developed, each unit must carefully consider how they can contribute most significantly to advancing themselves and the University over

the coming year(s). Since it is unlikely that additional resources will be available to advance these priorities (in fact, it seems more likely that fewer resources will be available) you will need to find ways to reallocate resources from lower priorities to advance these highest priorities. To make this exercise more concrete, and to plan for the uncertain future and align our resources even more closely with our ambitions, this year's planning instructions will require each unit to provide a plan to reallocate one percent of its budget to support high priority areas, each year for the next five years. This planning should include a careful analysis of enrollments and staffing levels in all programs, and may require rethinking some of the strategies articulated in existing plans, especially where those plans involve expanding the faculty and/or staff.

This year's planning instructions will also be more explicit about using measurable goals to assess progress in each unit. Though we cannot measure everything of value that is done at a university, and so need to consider those things we can measure in the broader context of all of our goals, it is important to have benchmarks in place by which to gauge our progress and direction. Most units now regularly assess progress using measures appropriate to their goals; however, most have been less successful in developing benchmarks that allow them to gauge progress relative to other institutions. Being able to gauge this comparative progress is particularly important during these difficult times. For the past several years, the University has been working to identify appropriate external benchmarks. Over the next few months, my office will be working with you to determine which of these can most appropriately be used to help the gauge your school's progress. Each school and campus will also be asked to establish explicit targets for these and other key measures of progress toward goals.

With this as background, I offer the following comments on the planning document submitted by the School of Information Sciences. Let me start by congratulating you and your colleagues on another successful year where you managed to maintain your focus and advance your priorities despite the many potential distractions associated with day-to-day operations and external challenges. The School's efforts to enhance diversity, both within the School and the profession, are to be applauded—particularly the successful launch of the i3 program. The School is also reaching out and developing mutually beneficial partnerships with other units within the University including with the World History Center and the Graduate School of Public Health, and throughout the world—efforts that advance the University as well as the School.

The reorganization of the administrative service areas and the use of the PIW system have been successfully completed and are already showing signs of positively impacting the efficiency of your operations as well as the culture of service throughout all the staffing areas of the School. I encourage you to continue your efforts to refine the School's long-term fiscal strategy and related efforts on student recruitment and fundraising as these efforts are certain to be increasingly important to our success in coming years. I am also pleased to see that the School continues to assess student learning outcomes and that the School has initiated comprehensive program evaluations that will make good use of student learning outcomes assessment. Building strong

Dean Ronald Larsen

September 19, 2011

Page 3

academic programs will be even more important to our success in coming years, and these reflective considerations of the curriculum are important in continuing to advance these programs.

The School is now completing the fifth year of a five year planning cycle. As you work to develop a new strategic plan that will guide the School in the coming years, you will need to consider many important challenges and opportunities for the School. As you do, I offer the following comments for your consideration.

First, over the coming years, our success will depend even more crucially on offering exceptional academic programs and, in particular, we will need to continue to develop strong professional programs if we are to continue to advance the University in an environment that is increasingly tuition dependent. In this regard, the School has made progress in developing strong academic programs and student services, but I share your concern over recruitment and student placement. As the School develops its new plan and reviews its strategies for recruiting new students and placing them upon graduation, you may want to consider seeking the advice of outside consults used by other professional schools at the University, and possibly working with the Office of Career Services to identify potential employers for your students.

Not unrelated to the above, the School seems to have a strong and compelling vision that will be important in guiding the development of a plan for success in the future. The challenge will be to develop a plan that includes workable and specific strategies for realizing that vision, which might include extending collaborations across the University both in research and in its academic offerings.

Finally, our ability to advance depends crucially on having in place a faculty that shares our ambitious goals for research and instruction, and that possesses that extraordinary talent and diversity of perspectives and experiences needed to achieve those goals. Please do everything you can do to make certain that all faculty searches are truly successful, and that each faculty member recruited to the university achieves the potential we saw in them when they were hired. In terms of hiring, this means carefully considering each position in the context of your overall vision for the School, so as not to fall into the trap of simply hiring to maintain the status quo. It also means that the faculty needs to understand the importance of diversity to the overall success of the institution. The i3 program is an example of the success the School is having by approaching this recruitment in creative ways, and I encourage you and your colleagues to apply the same creative thinking to developing strategies for supporting and retaining all faculty members that the School recruits.

The comments above reflect my thoughts on your plan, as informed by discussions with my senior staff. The Provost Area Planning and Budget Committee has also conducted an independent review of your school's plan and their comments are attached. I hope that you find these useful as you enter into this new planning cycle.

Dean Ronald Larsen

September 19, 2011

Page 4

Clearly, the School of Information Sciences has achieved great things over the past decade and with the strong faculty, staff, and administration in place, the School is positioned to accomplish even more over the coming years. Thank you for your efforts over the past year to advance both the School of Information Sciences and the University. I look forward to working with you over the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patricia E. Beeson". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Patricia E. Beeson

PEB/arm

School of Information Sciences Plan for FY 2012 – Summary

The sense that one has from studying the iSchool's plan is that the School is in a state of transition. Given the fast-paced dynamics of information science and supporting industries, it is not surprising that there is ambiguity regarding the iSchool's course of direction. While there is a need to maintain flexibility, there is also the opportunity to act decisively. The plan's narrative and annual plan are more tilted towards maintaining flexibility than implementing a specific course of action. For example, the variety of Masters' programs seems to reflect historical strengths as much as current market needs. On the other hand, the iSchool appears to have made progress in developing operating efficiency. For example, the Hobson Connect initiative seems appropriate and resulting in positive outcomes.

Attention devoted to the Middle State Accreditation effort most likely is diverting resources from other promising initiatives. Thus, there is a sense that too many things are happening and not enough focus on a few core initiatives.

The structure of the plan is consistent with the templates provided by the Office of the Provost. There are numerous initiatives and metrics. One metric that seems to be absent is the ranking of the program. While there is benchmarking relative to peer schools, it is not clear what the implications of the benchmarking effort are or how specific initiatives are aimed at addressing competitive gaps/deficiencies.

The provost has requested that plans address five areas in particular. Below is an assessment of each of those areas. Overall, the plan has little material directly linked to most of the five areas. Possibly one reason for this is that the plan focused on linkages between overall University goals and the iSchool's long term goals.

- A. Improved retention must be an explicit, and ambitious, goal. There is little, if any, evidence in the documents regarding this area. While the documents do discuss efforts to enhance recruiting, the topic of retention is not explicitly linked to these efforts.
- B. Specific and aggressive goals for improving placement. While there is material related to placement, recruiting and funding efforts to facilitate placement, specific goals and strategic initiatives for improving placement are basically absent.
- C. Identify transformational ideas for major and/or multidisciplinary research initiatives. Pages 6 and 7 specifically focus on initiatives in this area. In particular, the initiatives on "Information Assurance and Security" and "Working Memory" seem very attractive from an interdisciplinary perspective. However, there is little indication of how these initiatives might

be linked with other schools in the University. This seems like a rich opportunity to set-up partnerships with several schools in the University.

D. Strategies and actions to move us to the next level in the international area.

Page 12 of the annual plan reports on international efforts. The narrative also describes international issues across a set of dimensions. However, there is little evidence in the plan regarding how the iSchool plans to move to the next level. In this regard, it is not clear the level at which they are currently residing. The benchmarking analysis does not have a metric for international efforts. The set of peer schools are all U.S.-based.

E. Increasing diversity of students and faculty. Of the five areas, this appears to have received the most attention and resources based on the narrative and annual plan. There is ample evidence that the iSchool has invested resources in enhancing student diversity. Faculty recruiting efforts focused in this area suffer from a systemic problem in the industry.