



University of Pittsburgh

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Patricia E. Beeson
Provost
Senior Vice Chancellor

September 20, 2016

Ronald Larsen
Dean
School of Information Sciences

Dear Ron:

Over the past several decades, the University of Pittsburgh has become one of the top public research universities in the country by those measures most often considered to reflect excellence within the academy -- the ability to attract top students, and to retain, graduate, and place these students; the ability to impact and advance our disciplines through research; and the University's recognition in the top tier in select rankings. Our ability to attain this level of excellence is the result of a disciplined focus on advancing our research and educational missions enabled by a planning process that has allowed us to focus our resources on our highest priorities.

Having now achieved that stature, we have the opportunity to leverage that strength to enhance the impact of our efforts in ways that we believe will distinguish Pitt among the very best universities. This means not merely enhancing our position among our peers, as indicated by commonly used comparative measures; this should be our minimum expectation, not our ambition. Moving forward, we need to focus our energy and resources on developing those attributes that will enhance our impact in ways that are distinctly Pitt; for these ambitions, it means measuring progress not relative to these other universities, but relative to our own goals.

The Plan for Pitt was developed through a University-wide engagement to define Pitt's unique position among the best universities and will serve as a guide as we engage with the same discipline and focus to achieve that vision for the University. The plan provides an institutional perspective, but its success depends critically on all of the units across the University aligning their efforts to the goals and strategies outlined in the plan. The planning that took place this past year represented an excellent first step as schools, campuses, and operational units aligned their planning with the goals articulated in *The Plan for Pitt*. To be truly successful, over the coming year we need to take the next step and align the unit-level efforts to both the goals and to the strategies articulated for advancing those goals.

Before turning to specific comments on the School's strategic plan, I want to congratulate you and your colleagues on the very evident progress the School has made in advancing its goals over the past decade. During this period, the School has continuously revised both its structure and programs to remain current in the very dynamic environment of information sciences in

higher education, the most recent evolution of this structure being the planned establishment of the new School of Computing and Information. This latest effort has the potential to transform our impact in this area, and I greatly appreciate the efforts of the School's faculty, staff, and administration in the development of this exciting proposal.

Turning to the specific accomplishments and strategies in the planning document regarding our commitment to *pursuing educational excellence*, our aspiration is to prepare students to lead lives of impact by providing an educational environment that positions them for success. This environment is one in which students are engaged inside and outside the classroom. It is characterized by innovative and effective teaching; a personalized approach to student development that provides each student with the tools they need to be successful; a diverse environment that expands students' perspectives and engagements; and is reasonably priced, high value, and affordable. SIS engages in a number of initiatives that are designed to advance educational excellence. This begins with educating undergraduate students for life-long information careers, partnering with PittServes so that students will have opportunities to apply their technical skills to projects for non-profits, featuring student projects during iFest 2016, and involving students in real-world projects. Master's students also have an increasing number of experiential opportunities to learn and develop as innovators, whether it is working on projects for the city of Pittsburgh, participating in real-world projects with cross-disciplinary teams, or joining a research project.

As plans for the new School for Computing and Information continue to develop, the Information Science and Computer Science faculties have the opportunity to strengthen academic programs and develop innovative programs to advance educational excellence that take advantage of the strengths across the University as well as within the School. I hope the faculty embraces this new opportunity by joining the University-wide effort to approach teaching with the same academic rigor applied to research, and that the new School becomes a national model for innovation in educational programs.

A great university is also defined by the strength and character of its research programs, and Pitt is clearly in the very highest ranks of universities as measured by the contributions our faculty make to the advancement of knowledge through our basic and applied research. *The Plan for Pitt* strives to position our faculty to continue to be a leader in advancing the frontiers of knowledge moving forward. Looking to the future, *The Plan for Pitt* anticipates that addressing some of the biggest challenges will require bringing together large, multidisciplinary teams of experts from universities, industry, government, and/or non-profits; that data, information, and computing are increasingly important in advancing research from the humanities to social sciences, sciences, and health care; and that to have an even greater impact, we need to support work that brings research closer to practice in schools, healthcare, and industry. The new School is a key element of the infrastructure being put in place to support these efforts, and we will need to work closely together to ensure that the School is properly positioned to support our faculty in these endeavors. Faculty conversations around contextually-situated computing in health sciences and education, engaging in collaborations with researchers from across the university, and the opportunities to engage with industry and translation of technology are exciting, and I anticipate these will be areas in which Pitt can become among the best in the country.

As we move forward, it will be important to develop an understanding of how the collaborative, multidisciplinary, and translational research envisioned in the Plan is considered in your school's tenure and promotion process. As with all aspects of faculty work, there is no simple one-size-fits-all formula that should apply to all members of the faculty; but there should be a set of guiding principles, and I ask that you engage your faculty in a discussion of those principles as appropriate as the new School takes shape.

One of the distinguishing features of *The Plan for Pitt* is the focus on strengthening communities --- the Pitt community (our faculty, staff, and alums), the regional community, and our connections to the world community. The increasing number of experiential opportunities for SIS students -- whether they are working with industry, government, or non-profits -- has the effect of strengthening student skills and strengthening connections with our region and beyond. Ongoing efforts to strengthen ties between students and alumni, to offer professional development opportunities to faculty and staff, and to facilitate social interactions with students from across campus all strengthen the Pitt community. The emphasis put on developing global connections and competence, and encouraging research with a global impact, builds awareness and understanding across communities.

Embracing diversity and inclusion are themes that run throughout *The Plan for Pitt*. The i3 program developed by SIS is a point of pride for both the School and the University. I am pleased to see the SIS Diversity and Inclusion Committee is off to a good start; it is important that we start to see these efforts translate into improved diversity of the faculty, staff, and students. To fully realize the value of diversity for the University requires that we go well beyond recruiting and retaining a diverse staff, faculty, and student body. It requires appreciating and respecting difference, and beyond, this as academics, we understand that advancing our core mission --- advancing knowledge --- requires that we engage with ideas and points of view that are different from our own. A key goal of our *Year of Diversity* is to explore and reaffirm our commitment to diversity as fundamental to our success as an academic institution. I ask that the School make this a focus of its programming for the coming year.

The University's focus on developing a culture of planning and assessment has contributed greatly to our success over the past two decades and will be equally important as we continue to advance our ambitious *Plan for Pitt* over the coming years. The School seems to have developed a culture of planning efforts. In this report, the narrative and matrices are provided with metric and data that match up against the goals of *The Plan for Pitt*, highlighting new initiatives related to the goals. I recognize the challenges of compiling this document this year in light of the ongoing effort to create the new school.

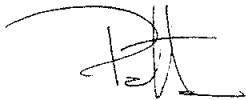
Over the coming years, as the new School of Computing and Information takes shape, it will be important to develop a hiring plan to match its strategic plan. In doing so, it will be important to consider each hire in the context of the overall vision for the School so as not to fall into the trap of simply hiring to maintain the status quo. Our ability to advance depends crucially on having in place a faculty that shares our ambitious goals for research and instruction and that possesses the extraordinary talent and diversity of perspectives and experiences needed to achieve those goals.

Ronald Larsen
September 20, 2016
Page 4 of 4

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 its comments are attached. I hope that you find these useful as you enter into this new planning cycle.

Clearly, the School 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, particularly as it joins with Computer Science to form SCI. Thank you for your efforts over the past year to advance both SIS and the University. I look forward to working with you over the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia E. Beeson', with a large, sweeping flourish at the beginning.

Patricia E. Beeson

School of Information Sciences Plan for FY 2017 – Summary

The School of Information Science is in the process of creating a new academic unit, the *School of Computing and Information*. This larger unit will bring together SIS and the Department of Computer Science (from A&S) to put computer science, telecommunications, library science and information sciences into one school, allowing expansion of research, grants and scholarly engagement in computing and information through the more cohesive, linked larger environment.

The School of Information Sciences continues to be highly ranked, maintaining its #10 US News ranking. The number of degrees and placement data are steady over five years, with 94% of undergraduates placed after graduation. The number of masters degrees has declined over the 2011 – 2015 period. Faculty sponsored research has been consistent over a seven year period, near or just over \$2 million per year. Scholarly productivity varies by program.

The unit's goals are to move faculty to research-centered and professional education and they have taken steps towards that with new hires, faculty packages, and other initiatives.

The written report focuses on expanding access to a number of programs with international institutions. The school hosted two students from Wuhan and one from Sungkyunkwan University. The school also developed a short course summer link with INSA Lyon. It has been successful in expanding the diversity pool by developing other venues for visiting fellows through Teaching Fellows programs.

The School has embraced applied service learning opportunities through its new partnership with PittServes that matches projects from nonprofit organizations with SIS undergraduates. This enables SIS students to be part of the many opportunities across campus for Pitt students to connect their scholarship and skills with community organizations, showcasing their technical, problem solving and critical skills. This program and others like it, such as the partnership with the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Innovation and Performance, address both goals of advancing educational excellence and strengthening communities and give much to build on over the years. The School should be commended for bringing opportunities, such as these with partners outside the University and those with partners in the University, including the Pharmacy and Dental schools, to its faculty and students.

The School of Information Sciences has continued to implement budget reductions and reallocations and distinguished one-time changes from permanent reductions and reallocations. It dropped financial aid to professional masters students for 2017, cut low enrollment classes, and with other reductions, redirected funds to enhancing signature areas and improving instruction resources.

The report has challenges to address. The matrix metrics are not well-conceived. While there are good cases that are from the executive summary and placed in the matrix, it's often not clear what the targets or measurable outcomes are, if these are to be compared over time. For instance, the benchmarking data give results of student satisfaction survey data, but it's not clear what markers the school is trying to hit over time. The matrix is a good place to specify some of those goals.

The report acknowledges the need for greater attention to Goal 5, Embrace Diversity and Inclusion. The school has formed a Diversity and Inclusion Committee and funded it with \$20,000 to enhance faculty diversity. The report, however, does not provide strength in measurable outcomes for some of the diversity strategies nor what the goals of the new Diversity and Inclusion Committee are to be. In the matrix for Goal 5, Strategy 2, enrich the student experience through engagement is blank and it's unclear why. There were other places where the school appears to be engaging in activities that could address this strategy. Finding information on diversity is not always easy, nor well labeled. For instance, a table on p. 41 covers domestic students' ethnicity. With 349 domestic students, 20.6% are neither White nor Unknown. One must infer this is for the total school and not broken down by undergraduate, masters, doctoral, a more traditional accounting of enrolled students and diversity.

The same occurs for Goal 3, Strengthen Communities and the strategies of that goal. Again, text from the executive summary, which describes valuable programs and projects, are listed as the measurable targets and outcomes.

The report would also be clearer if the executive summary and matrix template discussed the position of international students in the school and goals going forward. Additionally, discussion of development initiatives, endowments or donors is lacking from the materials.

Finally, and somewhat surprising, was the lack of metrics and discussion of the new unit being formed from SIS and the Department of Computer Science. Given such a major change, perhaps many of these metrics are only being forged now and more discussion of the goals and strategies for the new unit is on the horizon and not accomplished through this PBC round.

In sum, the School of Information Sciences has many achievements. It might better define its measurable goals to align with unit-level goals and achievable ends.