



University of Pittsburgh

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July 3, 2007

Dr. Ronald L. Larsen
Dean
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Dear Ron:

As my remarks at several Deans' Council meetings in recent years have indicated, I find reviewing the school plans each March very stimulating, partially elating, and partially worrisome. We have accomplished so much in the past dozen years that we are truly an improved University, even though we were always a very good university. And those accomplishments are so visible in the material incorporated in the school plans in ways that show such widespread contributions to our achievements from faculty, staff and administration that we all clearly have a right to share a deep institutional pride. The plans also show true ferment of very good thinking on the part of the entire academic community about opportunities for further growth and about challenges posed by internal barriers and external developments. There are so many good things we could be doing if we could overcome the barriers to our further success!

When I analyze the barriers to success that I discern from reading and reflecting on the school plans, I find that almost all fall into one of two categories. Some involve lack of financial resources. These challenges are clearly real, as real as they were a dozen years ago, because our successful elevation of the University has resulted in our competing with far more affluent institutions than used to be our peers -- with the result that our vastly improved financial situation still leaves us with fewer resources than many with whom we compete. We are addressing these issues forthrightly through the extension of the Capital Campaign and through our continued emphasis on cost-effective management, and we should all be proud that all of our recent accomplishments have been achieved in an environment where the competition is richer and that we make up for that with careful planning and prudent management.

Other barriers arise far more from human foibles than from financial constraints (although these are normally presented to us by some of our colleagues as financial in nature). These almost always result from key individuals or groups who find ways to block needed changes in their activities even though such changes would clearly help the

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school to develop and improve. Ten years ago, the need for change was so clear and urgent that we were able to overcome many such human barriers. We need to regain the ability to change our internal behavior.

In recent years, I have been able to minimize the reallocations of funds from one unit to another by a combination of insistence on reallocation within individual units and an aggressive use of expanded revenue streams to make needed investments in developing key programs. Those centrally directed investments were at first confined to a small group of programs whose improvement could be argued to drive the reputation of the University as a whole and thus help all our programs. Our success has been so significant that, more recently, I have been able to make at least limited investments in all the schools in the provost's area. However, I am very worried that, other than revenues from endowments growing in the Capital Campaign (most of which are restricted to specific schools of the University), the growth in our revenue streams will be tapering off during the next few years, leaving me with little way to make further investments without returning to centrally driven reallocations.

As we have discussed in several Deans' Council meetings, there is a complacency to many of the school plans that exhibits itself in an assumption that reallocation is impossible and that various groups within the school will make no sacrifice for the further improvement of the school. While I fully understand the concern of deans and campus presidents that political opposition to attempts to address this complacency could be very destructive to the health of the school, I also deeply believe that our progress in elevating the University will cease if we allow this problem to persist.

Next year's plans must meet the following criteria:

1. Their formulation must not waste a lot of your time, or that of your faculty and staff, in producing "boilerplate";
2. They must be responsive to the urgency that we continually better ourselves;
3. They must show results of the previous year's activities in terms of the goals articulated in the previous year's plans; and
4. They must commit to goals for the coming year in support of their longer range goals for the improvement of the school.

By the time you receive this letter I will have discussed this at the May meeting of the Deans' Council, and shortly thereafter I will empanel a Working Group of that Council to help me formulate the instructions for the improved planning.

As I reflect on the School of Information Sciences' FY08 planning document, I find some encouraging developments along with some issues of serious concern. On the encouraging side, it is a truly positive step to have the organizational structure of the

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School be program-driven as it is now. This change should make it possible to improve cooperation to optimize the response to challenges. It is also good to see that the undergraduate program has been restructured into three concentrations (Information Systems, User-Centered Design, and Networks & Security) to clarify the relationship between the program of study and potential careers. I also applaud the changes in some of the entrance requirements that had been barriers to admitting promising students.

I am concerned about enrollment in the School's programs. The enrollment shortfall is especially but not exclusively centered on the undergraduate program. Attention must be paid to the undergraduates throughout their time in the program, and word of that careful attention must get out to prospective students. Similarly, placement of graduates must be emphasized, and successes in placement must be communicated. More work needs to be done articulating what each program of the School can do for its students so that prospective students can see the attraction of the program. In last year's plan response letter I raised the possibility that faculty size might need to be trimmed to match realistic enrollments if we did not succeed in enhancing the enrollments; during the coming year we will need to address that issue in more detail.

I am concerned that research funding has fallen back. While there are signs of improvement, particularly with some federal funding sources, this is still an area of concern and one in which we should be able to do better.

I am also concerned with the commitment made when the Boyce Chair was accepted from the Buhl Foundation. We must begin a search to fill that chair during FY08.

Searches require real care to recruit the best possible person for each position we try to fill. Since the best possible person must be extraordinarily talented in order to help us reach our ambitious goals, and since the aggregation of our searches must provide us with the diversity of people that characterizes our country and our world if we are to succeed as an institution, each search must be conducted with the greatest care. Please do all that you can to make all the searches for positions in your school truly successful. While balancing all the issues in a recruitment is difficult in any case, it is especially difficult in faculty recruitment where the search committees can be somewhat diffuse in their behavior and where the members of those committees tend not to serve on enough such committees to provide them with good individual perspectives on the effect on the diversity of our faculty if we do not take diversity into account in each search. Your careful attention to charging search committees to be attentive to these issues is a very important way in which you can contribute to the development of your school and the University.

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As we strive to recruit students of the highest caliber to enhance our programs, we more and more encounter competition from excellent public universities that have significantly more endowment for scholarships and graduate fellowships. During the next phase of the Capital Campaign it is essential that we attract significant gifts to support our need for scholarships. Please do all that you can to enhance the endowments for scholarships in your school, and make this as high a priority as any in your fund raising efforts.

As has been my practice for many years, I enclose the analysis of the School's plan that was formulated by the Provost Area Planning and Budgeting Committee. That committee works very diligently and conscientiously to provide their advice, and so I find it very interesting to receive that advice from such an independent and respected source.

Thank you for your efforts to advance the ambitious agenda of the School of Information Sciences and of the University. And congratulations on the array of successes that you and your faculty and staff have achieved. I look forward to working with you to make the crucial further progress to which we aspire.

Sincerely,



James V. Maher

JVM/tmlh

Attachment

cc: Provost's Senior Staff
Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg

School of Information Sciences

The School of Information Sciences is in its first year of a major reorganization. The School's structure was based on two departments. Now it is a single faculty organized around academic programs and research clusters. They have been moving toward a governance structure based on degree programs that encourages collaboration across disciplines. The departmental structure was creating barriers to faculty interaction. The reorganization's goals are:

1. Promoting research collaboration among the faculty.
2. Enhancing the likelihood and ease of new programmatic initiatives.
3. Effective resource allocation across the School.

The reorganization will continue to drive the planning efforts for FY 2008.

Status of FY 2007 Objectives

Optimize Student Enrollments. Enrollment in the Information Science and Telecommunications programs is no longer declining, but has yet to substantially recover. The School believes that the drop in enrollment is over and modest increases will be forthcoming. Given the size of their marketing and recruitment budgets, rapid increases are not anticipated. Other significant initiatives include a major marketing and branding campaign to establish the I-School, redesigning the undergraduate curriculum, and increasing financial aid from outside sources.

Enhance Diversity Initiatives. The School has made progress in recruiting underrepresented groups at the graduate level.

Enhance Research Productivity. Several faculty members have received substantial research awards. However, one of the objectives of the reorganization is to build an environment fostering the creation of collaborative, multi-disciplinary research teams (Research Interest Groups). In the fall of 2006, nine RIG's have been formed, with six receiving start-up funding.

Foster A High Quality Of Life. The School seeks to create an environment that will encourage collegiality and research productivity among the faculty, efficiency and enthusiasm among the staff members, and an accessible and exciting learning environment for students. Strategies were listed but there was no mention if the goal was met.

Strengthen Curricula. The B.S.I.S. curriculum has been revised and expanded to a four-year program. Online education has been strengthened as faculty increased their use of technology and hybrid/blended courses. Redesigned the Ph.D. degree in Library and Information Science and have reevaluated the Master of Science in Telecommunications program.

Promote SIS And Its Programs. External Relations staff have updated and redesigned the School's website. Recruiting efforts, particularly for the undergraduate program, have been increased. A set of more effective messages for recruiting have also been created.

FY 2008 Objectives

Increase Student Enrollments. While enrollments have ceased falling, they have yet to recover and remain at precariously low levels. The main focus will be at the undergraduate level.

Increase the Visibility of SIS. Focus group results demonstrate that too few students with potential interest in Information Sciences know of the field or of the School. The School's website and marketing materials are being redesigned in response to results from the focus groups.

Develop Greater Organizational Efficiency. The School is building processes and procedures to fully implement the reorganization.

Increase External Funding. The School aims to increase funding from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Other Comments

Benchmarking data is limited. However, in February 2007, the School has received surveys from 14 institutions. The School should compile the results and make modifications to its plan accordingly.

The School's budget is heavily tuition-driven. If enrollment is not increased to 600 FTE students, additional budget cuts will be forthcoming. It is imperative that the School develop other revenue streams – research support and outside donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations. The School should work with Institutional Advancement (Alumni Office?) to identify potential donors.

The School should build on its successes: the growth of online education programs; leading the national I-Schools initiative; and keeping all of its programs and specialties ranked in the top 10 by *U.S. News and World Report*.

If faced with a 2.5% budget reduction, the School does not have flexibility in their base budget to preserve their highest priorities. They are struggling to protect these priorities within the current budget. To meet this reduction, the School will defer filling current and future vacant faculty and staff positions.

The FY 2008 budget in Appendix 3 lists FY 2006 actual expenses and FY 2007 projected actual expenses. Nothing is listed for FY 2008. Also, the budgets for FY 2006 and 2007 have a footnote to exclude fringe benefits on all salaries. No explanation was given why fringes are not in the budget since they are automatically charged to each unit's budget by the payroll system. The fringe benefit rates for FY 2007 are: Faculty - 35%; Staff - 36%; Students - 7.9% and GSA/TA/TF - 50%. Total FY 2007 fringe benefit costs of \$1,605,211 (Faculty - \$978,629; Staff - \$339,989; Students - \$6,905 and GSA/TA/TF - \$279,688) should be added to this appendix. This will result in a more accurate representation of this significant expense.

The School needs to maintain the integrity and rigor of its programs while building on its successes. The School's plan is a realistic assessment of where they are, what has been done, and what additional steps need to be taken to maintain and improve their position, both internationally and within the University.