



University of Pittsburgh

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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: jvmaher@pitt.edu

James V. Maher
Provost
Senior Vice Chancellor

July 17, 2008

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

Dear Ron:

Reviewing the schools' planning documents each March can be a stimulating, elating, and worrisome experience – sometimes all in reviewing just one document. The sources of the University's accomplishments over the past decade are visible through the materials incorporated in the school plans as widespread achievements from faculty, staff and administration. For many schools, the plans are also an opportunity to engage in the challenges posed by internal barriers and external developments and generate creative initiatives that demonstrate a real awareness of the University's goals as well as the school's particular strengths.

A lack of financial resources can be a barrier to success. These fiscal challenges are clearly real, as real today 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.

A dozen years ago, however, the need for change was so clear and urgent that we were able to overcome the human barriers that can result from key individuals or groups who find ways to block needed changes in their own activities -- even though such changes would clearly help the school as a whole to develop and improve. I have brought this to your attention in previous years, but reading this year's planning documents

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indicates to me that we continue to need to change internal behaviors. Complacency in many of the school plans continues to exhibit 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.

Let me take this argument one step farther this year and be very clear. If a given school’s planning document this year did not specifically and directly address the concerns I raised in my letter to that school in response to last year’s plan, I consider that the academic leader and the faculty involved in developing the document are exhibiting complacency, and I strictly charge them to raise the bar for themselves in the coming year.

Your FY09 plan’s six main objectives are well aligned with University goals and, if successfully reached, would almost certainly position the School well to be a leader among schools of its kind. The analysis of activities and outcomes is sufficiently diffuse and non-quantitative that it is quite difficult to judge how much progress is being made, but it is clear that there has been laudable progress in: 1. refocusing the telecommunications program toward undergraduate education, 2. increasing external funding of research (and moving that funding more to federal sources), 3. increasing overall enrollments at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, and 4. generally reallocating resources in support of goals. I congratulate you on all these accomplishments and on the careful analysis you have performed to prepare to continue progress even if asked to absorb a budget cut (I am happy to say that a budget cut will not be necessary in FY09).

I do have some concerns that I hope you will take into account in implementing the plan during the current fiscal year. First, I do think you could profitably benchmark far more extensively against the other i-schools, and then use that benchmarking to provide more insight into your challenges and opportunities as you reallocate resources to meet your goals. Second, I am concerned about the lack of diversity in faculty hiring and in the recruited student body. In each case, a strategy is needed to reach the University’s diversity goals. Third, the plan is too long and too diffuse, making it less useful as a working document for implementation. It should be more tightly tied to the template, with evaluation and outcomes incorporated in the template, so that you can see as the year progresses whether you are actually achieving your objectives. This next year may prove crucial for determining whether your enrollments are really recovering or whether they will fall back, and close attention to trends here and at other i-schools may help to make any quick adjustments as might be needed.

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Please do all that you can to make all the searches for positions in the School of Information Sciences (SIS) truly successful. 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. 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 Information Sciences and the University.

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 SIS, 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 your School 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

Enclosure

School of Information Sciences

[Note: The comments below were written prior to receiving a supplement to the SIS plan, namely the strategic templates, on April 22. The supplement is addressed in an addendum.]

The School of Information Sciences (SIS) submitted a plan for FY 2009 that reflects on accomplishments achieved in FY 2008 and looks toward objectives to achieve in FY 2009. Since the University moved to a new methodology of creating annual plans, it is assumed the plan is based on the Provost's ad hoc Working Group on Instructions for Annual Planning. Therefore, these comments will reflect:

- How the annual plan addresses the Mission of the University of Pittsburgh and the key goals of the Provost's area;
- How the plan makes a distinction between long-term and annual planning (and whether the long-term goals are being met);
- Whether the plan contains measurable goals tied to specific objectives and strategies;
- The use of the suggested template for submitting the School's goals and objectives; and
- How plans on reallocating resources to achieve School goals/objectives.

Overall, the plan does not adequately address the instructions given by the Provost's working group. Specifically, the plan contains very few truly measurable objectives for FY 2009 and does not follow the recommended template for submitting this document. One-half of the document reflects on accomplishments from FY 2008, which was not the stated purpose of the new planning methodology outlined by the Provost.

Alignment of SIS Objectives with the Mission of the University

The plan outlined six objectives to accomplish in FY 2009 tied to the University's long-term goals. SIS relates their objectives to one of its three long-term goals:

1. Building financial strength for our future
2. Foster intellectual vitality for our community
3. Provide strategic leadership for our professions

Several of the objectives relate to more than one of the University long-term goals. However, the seven long-term goals of the University listed are not the same goals as outlined in the Provost's Instructions for Annual Giving. Admittedly there is some overlap between the two lists of goals, but some goals are quite divergent.

Distinction between Long-term Goals and Annual Planning

The plan states that the previous FY 2008 plan represents the third year of the School's five-year strategic plan (presumably the new FY 2009 plan would reflect the fourth year). As SIS only has one more year left in its long-term goals, one would expect to see steps being taken to consider and formulate a revised set of long-term goals, but this planning was not reflected in their document.

The plan considers how the School met or addressed its long-term goals in its FY 2008 accomplishments. Further, the plan tied the School's new FY 2009 objectives to specific long-

term goals as well as to the University's long-term goals. However, the first objective in the plan for FY 2009 calls to "increase external funding," which is not an apparent goal in the University plan.

Measurable Goals

Perhaps the most important challenge in preparing annuals plans for FY 2009 is reflected in the Provost's requirements to include measurable goals. Creating a metric for each goal means that SIS (and the Provost) can know whether progress is actually being made in specific areas. Although the plan includes sections on assessment measures for each FY 2009 objective, the metrics could be improved. Only the first objective includes an assessment measure tied to a specific metric (i.e., increase alumni giving by 5%). The assessment measures for the remaining goals repeatedly use the term "increase" without tying it to a specific measurement.

Other assessment measures included in the plan are overly general. For example, second SIS objective in FY 2009 is to "increase student enrollment." The measurements include an "increase in the number of applications...; increase in the number of inquiries...; increase in the number of students enrolled." But, what does that mean and how can success be adequately measured? The plan needs to include a specific means of measuring success, such as an increase of 15% in the number of applications received; an increase of 10% of the number of inquiries received; and an increase of 5% in the number of new students enrolled. Without these specific goals, it is difficult to measure whether this objective was achieved.

Further, even when a specific percentage is included in an assessment method, the plan should include a baseline metric in order to measure whether this objective was successful or not. The plan does not include any baseline figures. How will they be able to evaluate the successfulness of each objective? The plan does not address how each objective will be evaluated for success (or failure) or how they will know if the desired outcome will be reached.

Template-Indicating Goals and Objectives

The emphasis by the Provost on supplying measurable goals was a new part of the planning process for most Schools. In order to provide guidance on how to do this, the Provost included a sample template in the instructions sent to each School. After reading the instructions, it is very clear that each School was expected to complete and submit their FY 2009 objectives using this template. The SIS plan included no such template. [It was submitted as an addendum on April 22 and is discussed below.]

Reallocation and Budget Information

To achieve objectives in FY 2009, the Provost expects each School to reallocate existing resources if necessary to be successful. The plan describes such reallocations that took place in the last fiscal year, including financial reallocations and personnel redeployments. These reallocations will continue to impact the School in FY 2009, such as Research Interest Groups funding which fosters multi-disciplinary research teams across SIS and recruiting a new faculty member to the Doreen E. Boyce Chair in Library and Information Science. It should be pointed out, however, that the plan does not explicitly address any new reallocations for FY 2009.

Since one of SIS' major goals in the coming year is to increase external funding, their plan addresses several new sources of revenue. The School has already taken steps to work

collaboratively with Institutional Advancement to develop a strategy for approaching corporations, foundations, and select alumni for major gifts. The plan also calls for tapping into potential corporate and foundation research funding as well as other avenues of corporate solicitations. Lastly, SIS indicated it will make an effort to attract additional student aid, particularly for underrepresented populations. No specific foundation or strategy was mentioned.

The School has concluded that it can no longer sustain a competitive Master's program in telecommunications. The plan, however, does not state emphatically that it will eliminate the degree and potentially save resources by doing so. Further, SIS anticipates it will expand its online education programs, but does not indicate how this new program will be funded or impact the overall budget.

The SIS plan mentions a possible 2.5% budget reduction or increase by the University and how either scenario would impact the School.

Diversity

The plan stresses the importance of recruiting diverse faculty, staff, and students to best improve the quality of life and intellectual vitality. Nonetheless, the School is reluctant to set specific goals in this area since it cannot control resignation and/or retirements of faculty and staff. The plan does, however, acknowledge its desire to recruit underrepresented groups to diversify the School's student population. They list six approaches for doing so, including a plan to address gender inequities across the degree programs and professions.

Addendum

The SIS strategic planning template includes all the requirements as outlined by the Provost's working group. There is no explanation why the section on Evaluation and Outcomes is left blank unless these will be developed in FY 2009. The template developed by SIS indicates how their three main goals relate to the University's seven goals (although it is still unclear which University goals these plans should point to).

The SIS template establishes six main objectives to accomplish in FY 2009.

1. Increase external funding.
2. Increase student enrollment
3. Provide innovative educational opportunities
4. Enhance research productivity
5. Support University's diversity goals
6. Develop greater organizational effectiveness

These six objectives are repeated throughout the template as they relate to SIS' long-term goals and the University's goals. Each objective often contains several strategies to accomplish the specific objective which are well constructed and thought out. Altogether, SIS lists 53 separate objectives (or strategies) to work towards in FY 2009. While admirable, this seems overly optimistic for one planning year.

As required this year by the Provost, the SIS template includes measurements to gauge whether each specific objective is met. Altogether, the plan contains 57 metrics to track and evaluate at the end of FY 2009. Some of these measurements are repeated throughout the

template if they are tied to another objective. While ambitious, the plan and metrics should be scaled back considerably.

Lastly, the majority of the metrics stated in the template will be difficult to actually measure since they are not directly related to a specific target. Many of the measurements use the verb "increase" without providing a measurable figure. For example, the first measurement stated on the plan is to "Increase proportion of students from under-represented segments of the population." But increase by how much? One student? The plan should state equivocally what they hope to see (e.g., two students, or 5%, etc.). This pattern of not tying a specific objective to a truly measurable outcome is found throughout the templates. On occasion, the plan includes a true measurement such as "Increase research funding by 7% per year over the next 5 years." This is a very good example of a measurable objective that one can objectively measure success.