



University of Pittsburgh

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

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Patricia E. Beeson
Provost
Senior Vice Chancellor

August 13, 2014

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

Dear Ron:

As we continue a period of transition, the University of Pittsburgh is as strong and stable as it has been in its 227-year history. This standing reflects a collective effort by our faculty, staff, and students, coupled with strong leadership from our deans, directors, and presidents. It also reflects the successful balance of broad University-wide objectives with school and unit-specific goals. As underscored by the Board of Trustees' February 28, 2014 statement of aspiration and strategic priorities, to continue building on this success it is imperative that we remain focused on our core commitments to excellence in educational programs and pioneering research, and that we embrace opportunities to extend our global reach and build community strength. It is also imperative that we find ways to excel in these areas and bolster the University's resource base while remaining aware of the difficult economic environment in which we continue to operate.

Commitment to excellence in our educational programs lies at the core of our mission as a university, and has been a central focus of institution-wide strategic efforts over the last two decades. Through its focus on four signature areas—big data, spatial information, information assurance, and web science—the School of Information Sciences has made many contributions to these efforts over the past year. Particularly notable is the development of Certificates of Advanced Study for post-graduate and post-baccalaureate students in Big Data Analytics and Security Assured Information Systems, and enhancement of curricular offerings to align programs with the increasing advancement of digitization.

Pitt's success to this point and moving forward would not be possible without strong and dedicated faculty members, committed to advancing our teaching, research, and service mission. The School's successful recruitment of two assistant professors in the signature areas of web science and information assurance, as well as the hiring of the School's first Professor of Practice will further strengthen the faculty and enhance the student experience both inside and outside the classroom, building on gains made over the past year in improving student satisfaction with instruction, as indicated by SERU data. On the research front, though research expenditures and other measures of faculty productivity have decreased over the past few years, steps to reverse this trend, including mentoring of junior faculty, seem to be paying off with the new grants SIS faculty received this past year. However, it is important that the School continue to focus on ways to further strengthen its research profile.

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Over the past several years, we have extended our global reach through our research, our educational offerings, and our partnerships abroad. Continuing to build on this foundation is essential if we are to enhance our global impact and ensure that our graduates are well prepared to function effectively in a rapidly changing world. The launch of the 3+2 program between SIS and Wuhan University iSchool, which will welcome up to 10 students from Wuhan in fall 2014, is a valuable contribution to these global initiatives. Similarly, the new MOUs with Nanjing University and Nanjing University of Science and Technology will provide new opportunities for our students to expand their understanding and ability to work effectively in an international environment.

In March 2013, the Council of Deans endorsed the Diversity Task Force's recommendations that units take four steps to enhance diversity: establish a standing Diversity Committee, include faculty hiring and promotion data in their annual reports to the provost, create an award to recognize contributions to faculty diversity, and make efforts to mentor and sustain tenure-track faculty from underrepresented groups. Committees have now been established throughout the Provost's Area, and I look forward to real progress in recruiting, mentoring, and retaining talented individuals who enhance diversity. The School's ongoing efforts to introduce underrepresented groups to Information Sciences through the i3 program are important contributions to diversity at the University, and the program's success was recently confirmed by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Continuing to enhance the diversity of the faculty, staff, and student body will be important to our success moving forward.

During the past year, the Council of Deans' Task Force on Online Learning recommended that the University seek out new technological opportunities that serve to advance our educational and research missions, and the School has done well in its continued effort to transition the online MLIS program to Pitt Online, as well as develop online programs for post-bac and post-graduate certificates in Big Data Analytics and Security Assured Information Systems.

For the third straight year, the governor has proposed flat funding for the University. This is good news when measured against the dramatic funding reductions of previous years, but still signals an atmosphere in which we must look to increase operational efficiency and reallocate resources towards our highest priorities. The School's efforts in this area have been successful, most notably in targeting low-enrollment classes for elimination in favor of classes with higher demand. Of course, it will be important to continue seeking opportunities for efficiency gains in 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 ambitions in the coming years. The School of Information Sciences has been successful in developing and implementing plans that are moving the School forward, and increasingly is using quantitative measures to assess progress and guide future planning. As indicated in past letters, benchmarking against similar schools at other universities would provide useful insights to help assess and guide progress moving forward. It is good to see that the School has identified some comparisons of this type, but the School's planning efforts would be greatly enhanced by systematic benchmarking against other iSchools. Planning efforts would also be strengthened by articulating specific, measurable targets for goals such as faculty productivity and enrollments in the masters' programs and class composition. Measurable targets would seem to be particularly useful for this latter goal, given the challenges and importance associated with enrollments and the mix of

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applications. SIS continues to do well in the USNews ranking, remaining among the top 10 in ranked programs. With the addition of several new programs being ranked, the School should consider specific goals regarding rankings.

One of the major challenges facing the School is enrollment, and a plan for increasing applications and enrollments would be a welcome addition to next year's annual plan. SIS had a strong fundraising year, as total fundraising in 2013 was almost \$1.7 million, and your work with Elliance seems to be paying off in helping brand the School and position it for future success. Other positives include the completed building renovations that encourage collaboration, scholarly conversations and community-building, and your recent accreditation from the American Library Association. I look forward to seeing the School leverage these developments into increased enrollment in the coming years.

As you know, in FY12 we asked each unit to develop a 5 percent reallocation plan, with implementation spaced over five years and paced at 1 percent per year. In the first two years, reductions in the Commonwealth appropriation necessitated that the reduction component of the plan be taken centrally rather than reallocated within your unit. This past year, with the appropriation stabilized, the reallocations were to have occurred within your unit. The same will be true for this fiscal year (FY15), and I will ask you to report the details of these reallocations in this year's report.

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.

Reflecting on the last several years, I am constantly reminded of how active we have been in making changes and developing new initiatives to capitalize on our strengths and position ourselves as leaders in research and education. Over the past year alone, we have created the Innovation Institute and Brain Institute, and launched the Sustainability Initiative and PittServes programs all of which focus our resources in key areas and encourage innovative approaches to teaching and scholarship. I am also reminded of how much time and effort has gone into the creation of these and other initiatives on the part of Pitt's faculty, staff, and students, and I want to thank you and the rest of the School of Information Sciences for your contributions to the success of these efforts over the past year. The success of the School and the University would not have been possible without these collective efforts, and I am deeply appreciative. I look forward to continuing our joint efforts in the coming year towards building upon the upward trajectory we have established as a University over the last two decades.

Sincerely,



Patricia E. Beeson

School of Information Sciences Plan for FY 2015 – Summary

The University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences (SIS) FY 2015 Annual Report of Long-Range Strategic Plan (FY 2013—2018), submitted February 28, 2014, presents results of 2012-2013 long-range strategic planning updated for FY2014.

Goals and Strategies

The goals of SIS are to:

- (1) Educate undergraduate students for life-long information careers, educate master's students for preparation as innovators, creative problem solvers and leaders in the information professions, and PhD students to become the next generation of academics and researchers in the information professions.
- (2) Adapt the composition of iSchool faculty for research-centered and professional education,
- (3) Foster the development of an inclusive profession,
- (4) Position and differentiate SIS among other iSchools,
- (5) Serve as a resource of knowledge and expertise to the University community on issues relating to information and the systems that provide information services, and
- (6) Renovate iSchool facilities and upgrade the infrastructure to foster community among students, faculty, staff, professional partners and employers.

All of the goals seem to be entirely appropriate, sufficiently ambitious, and supported by sound strategies that appear to be having an impact. Notably, the iSchool's strategy of taking successive steps to improve undergraduate education seems to be on track:

- 1) Showcasing undergraduate projects.
- 2) Implementing an online marketplace for research tasks.
- 3) Appointing a first Professor of Practice.
- 4) Holding multiple research events and a career fair.
- 5) Surveying students re placement.

Accreditation of the MLIS program is a milestone, and SIS has organized ample activities to connect masters students with research experiences, employers, and international connections. SIS also reports a major increase in the number of PhD students given Teaching Fellow positions.

The goal for hiring new faculty to adapt the composition of the SIS faculty for research-centered and professional education seems to have been met with three new hires and a fourth in Information Security. The last, a joint hire with the Law School, will foster collaborative research and educational opportunities across the University. In that connection, SIS should consider making connections with GSPIA, which also offers a program relating to Information Security.

With respect to the School's effort to differentiate itself from other iSchools, the Professional Schools Subcommittee noted that the plan focuses on rebranding with the help of an outside firm and

instituting new certificate programs. The Subcommittee felt, however, that the plan could have articulated more clearly how SIS will go about differentiating itself from other iSchools.

There is a strong emphasis on diversity recruitment of faculty, and a slight increase in diversity of the student body with continuing efforts for improvement. In light of the strongly international composition of some SIS programs, the Subcommittee did note the potential importance of diversification across international the student body. For instance, if tensions with China erupted, the enrollments in the MSIS program could plummet.

Need to Sharpen Metrics and Targets

The Professional Schools Subcommittee noted that the SIS matrix could be improved by increasing and sharpening the use of numerical goals and targets. The report tends to minimize the use of targeted percentage increases. When used, the subcommittee wondered if the goals were sufficiently ambitious. For example, on p. 14, the targeted outcome reported is, "The majority of PhD graduates will be offered appropriate positions within 12 months." For such an important goal, this seemed like a very low target. On p. 8 the targeted outcome is, "Place 80% of graduates in appropriate professional positions or related graduate school programs within six months of graduation." This, too, seemed low. We note that the outcome reported ("100% placement rate (60% response rate)") was high but the response rate seemed low and lower than in previous years.

Reallocation Narrative

With respect to the reallocation narrative, the report distinguishes between one-time reallocations versus permanent reductions and permanent reallocations. It was somewhat less than clear to the Subcommittee what exactly this distinction meant for whether and how the school would meet the further 1% reduction.

Pruning low enrollment courses, moving the online MLIS program to Pitt Online, and reducing scholarships are reported as among the primary sources of reallocation funds. The Subcommittee wondered whether SIS had investigated any effects that: (1) moving to an online version of the MLIS had on the quality of the program (either before or after transferring to Pitt Online); or (2) the reduction in scholarships had on the quality of applicants who are accepted and agree to enroll.

Conclusion

The Subcommittee was impressed by the accomplishments of SIS as reported in the Annual Report for FY 2015. In particular, the Subcommittee commends SIS for being responsive to the changing demand of student markets and job prospects, for example in decreasing the MLIS program and increasing the MST and MSIS programs. The Subcommittee also compliments SIS on what appears to be a very successful year of hiring new faculty to meet strategic needs.