SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

The Academic Priorities Sub-Team of the Presidential Transition Team was constituted in March 2010 and consisted of the following members:

Ian Davison, Co-Chair  
Marcy Taylor, Co-Chair  
Dave Breed  
Claudia Douglass  
Richard Divine  
Vicki Graczyk  
John Hurd  
Randy L’Hommedieu  
Ryan Lambert  
Barbara Lindley  
Suzanne Shellady  
Jim Therrill  
Denise Webster  
Al Zainea

The team met on March 25 to discuss our charge and make initial recommendations. We decided to focus on tasks 2 and 4 of our charge:

2. Conduct internal assessment of issues, concerns and mood of the campus and community; and

4. Develop constituent itineraries, reflecting key issues and opportunities of each division, school, department and unit.

At that meeting, we made a list of documents that would give the president a good overview of the campus academic priorities, including the HLC Self Study and Special Emphasis report, CMU 2010 annual reports, strategic plans and annual reports from each academic college, the Foundations of Excellence report, and NSSE reports, among others. Assuming that these documents would be made available to the president, our committee focused on two other projects in April and May: suggesting key meetings the president should hold before the end of
the academic year (e.g., with DACs and the SGA) and creating an informal survey that would provide an environmental scan of a limited sample of CMU community members.

We met again on April 9th to refine the survey questions and the groups from whom we would seek input. The survey was constructed by Davison and Taylor to describe the general mood and concerns of the campus community; the co-chairs also analyzed the results in light of previous strategic documents and wrote the first draft of the report. The team met on April 22 to provide feedback on the draft, and the revised report was submitted by Davison and Taylor in May.

As a precursor to strategic planning, the sub-team wanted to create a reliable and valid survey instrument that would reach a larger portion of the community. Davison and Taylor met with Mary Senter on June 7 to discuss what that project would entail. Two questions emerged for us to take to the larger team:

- How will the various transition sub-teams coordinate their efforts in the fall as they seek input from students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members?
- How does our work in the fall dovetail with strategic planning efforts? Are there other methods of reaching these constituents planned for strategic planning purposes?

Our sub-team met again on September 13 to refine the kinds of questions we wanted to ask regarding academic priorities. We decided to develop a set of questions based on the University Goals\(^1\) and constructed to ask respondents to rank the importance of various priorities. Davison and Taylor sent the list out to our team on September 20 for response; we then met with Senter and the other transition team chairs on September 27 to refine our survey plans and coordinate them through Senter. We refined the draft of the survey in late September and October, obtained permissions from the representatives of the unionized employee groups, and conducted the electronic survey in November.

Davison and Taylor met with Senter on January 7 to discuss the results; she also briefed all the team chairs and the President at a meeting on January 13. The final activity for our sub-team has been to interpret the results and make recommendations to the President in the remainder of this report.

In reading this report it is important to remember that the Faculty Association, representing the tenure-track (regular) faculty, decided that their members would not be asked to answer the following questions:

- What is the appropriate balance between:
  - Teaching and Research

\(^1\) http://www.cmich.edu/Office_of_the_President/University_Goals.htm
Undergraduate and Graduate education
On and off-campus programs

• Evaluate the following priority areas:
  • Recruit and retain high-quality faculty and staff
  • Direct resources to programs defined as areas of strength
  • Provide more resources to support faculty scholarly activity

Because faculty were not asked these questions the survey does not fully reflect the views of the entire campus community about several fundamental questions that define what CMU is today and what it will strive to become in future. In some cases one would expect the results of the survey would have been different had faculty answered all of the questions. For example, “provide more resources to support faculty scholarly activity” was the lowest priority overall. One can postulate that it would be a higher priority for faculty, but we have no way of knowing if this is in fact the case.

The highest priority for faculty in the questions they answered was “enhance communication/openness between administration and students, faculty, and staff” followed by “promote participatory decision-making throughout the university”. While the Faculty Association is within its contractual rights to veto survey questions, open communication and participatory decision making require that the views of the faculty about some of the most fundamental questions facing CMU are known and discussed. In view of this, one of our most important recommendations is that President Ross engage the Faculty Association in a dialog so that he can obtain the perspectives of their members on the issues covered by the question that were not part of the faculty survey.

KEY ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority I: Make education both increasingly accessible and affordable
In the survey, more than 20% of all responses placed as a very high priority “increasing student graduation rates” and “holding tuition increases to a minimum.” Not surprisingly this was the overwhelming top priority for undergraduate students and also highly ranked by graduate students. This priority aligns with the University Goal 2: Student Success, particularly in the area of retention, and it echoes previous calls to “sustain and improve the value of and access to the CMU Experience.”

2 The emerging strategic directions reflected in Beyond 2010 documents recognize this somewhat ineffable quality they call “the CMU Experience,” which is defined as including CMU’s distinctive living-learning environment, a safe and healthy campus atmosphere, student support services, and an emphasis on public service and civic engagement for students, faculty, and staff.
• To increase the percentage of students who graduate, we should build on a strength noted in previous surveys as well as this one: committed faculty and staff who are concerned about student success. In fact, “recruiting quality faculty and staff” was one of the top three responses to our survey, even though faculty were not asked this question. We should fill open tenure-track lines, within the parameters of our strategic directions—i.e., potentially reallocate lines to follow the priorities but increase overall the number of tenure track positions vis-à-vis temporary faculty positions. This was an action step under Priority I of the previous strategic plan that has yet to be fulfilled. 

• Complete an enrollment management plan that maintains on-campus undergraduate levels while potentially growing in on-campus graduate and off-campus programs. This would involve improving how we recruit academically qualified students through increasing our financial aid packages and by marketing our programs well. Balancing enrollments to fit our resources will allow us to maintain reasonable tuition levels.

Since this survey was taken President Ross has announced the creation of a new cabinet level position of Vice President for Recruitment and Enrollment Management, a decision that is consistent with addressing the concerns and priorities of the campus community that were revealed by our survey.

Priority II: Focus on diversity and programs that enhance global understanding
This survey provides evidence that the issues surrounding diversity at CMU need continued attention. While a majority of all surveyed groups agree that CMU respects the diversity of others and is welcoming of people from many cultures, if you look closely at the responses, more than 35% of undergraduate students and more than 30% of graduate students disagreed that “diversifying the campus should be a higher priority at CMU,” while 20% of faculty hold this view. On the contrary, 45.3% of minority faculty agreed (code “1”) with this statement, compared to 28.7% of white faculty, while 35.6% of minority staff as compared to 9.2% of white staff agreed with the statement. In addition, minority students are more likely than white students to disagree that CMU embraces diversity. In the list of priority rankings, “enhance initiatives related to global understanding, including study abroad” and “recruit more students of color” were ranked as “top” by 24.5% and 22.8% of faculty, respectively, which differed greatly from the rankings of staff and students. 7.9% of staff ranked the first statement “top” and 6.3% ranked the second statement in the top three. For undergraduates, 11.3% felt initiatives related to global understanding were a top priority and only 7.0% felt recruiting students of color merited a

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3 http://planning.cmich.edu/.
4 The survey respondents were ambivalent in terms of the balance between undergraduate and graduate programs and on- and off-campus programs. However, for those respondents who answered this question, there is a preference for emphasizing teaching over research, undergraduate over graduate programs, and on-campus over off-campus or online education. Keep in mind that faculty were not asked these balance questions.
top spot. The numbers are similar for graduate students: 7.9% and 9.9%, respectively, ranked these as top three priorities.

Diversity and global understanding are priorities in all CMU strategic documents and should remain so. University Goal 3 focuses on this area, as does Priority II under CMU 2010 and the strategic direction of “Preparing Students for a Culturally Diverse World” in the Beyond 2010 documents. In addition, our mission and core values support three interrelated prongs of student “success”: “preparing students for productive careers, meaningful lives, and responsible citizenship in a global society.” To this end, we recommend the following:

- Recruit and retain qualified students, faculty and staff who will enhance diversity at all levels of the university.
- Increase funding for and integration of study abroad and other diverse curricular or co-curricular experiences within programs, and include criteria related to global issues/content in decisions regarding program prioritization.
- Implement the CMU Strategic Plan for Advancing Diversity and include diversity, global education, and campus climate issues in future strategic planning agendas.
- Continue campus/community climate studies and develop new programs for educating students, staff, faculty, and community members about diversity.

The recent announcement (January 2011) that Centralis scholars will receive an additional scholarship to encourage them to study abroad is a significant step in the right direction, but it is important to ensure that efforts to promote diversity and multicultural understanding include the entire student body and all members of faculty and staff.

**Priority III: Focus on programs of strength**

The Academic Priorities Sub-Team survey in April gauging the campus mood was clear in the desire for strategic direction, and that means making decisions about where we should focus and grow and where we should maintain or, in some cases, constrict. However, faculty did not answer questions related to this issue on the current survey, and therefore both “direct resources to programs defined as areas of strength” and “provide more resources to support faculty scholarly activity” are ranked relatively low in the overall rankings of priorities (the latter is dead last), although as outlined in the introduction, we suspect these would be very differently ranked if faculty responses were included. Clearly, however, “targeted investments” are already being planned through the prioritization process (in terms of academic programs and service units) and in terms of University Goal 4: Scholarship, Research and Creative Activity and Goal 6: Resources, Infrastructure and Culture. The new plan to hire cohorts of research (and grant) active faculty in targeted areas is another example of the University focusing on areas of strength and

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opportunity, as is the development of the new College of Medicine. These are important initiatives in a state undergoing an economic transformation and where the traditional college-aged cohort is shrinking; we have to be innovative and responsive to the market while keeping in mind what we already do well.

- Complete the prioritization process in an open yet efficient manner. Through this process, create the structures for “fostering the interdisciplinary collaboration to advance scholarship,” which is part of University Goal 5: Partnership and Public Engagement. Recognize and communicate that CMU is a large and complex institution and that it has the financial and human resources to be successful in both undergraduate teaching and funded research and that these are not either/or propositions.

Priority IV: **Enhance communication and participatory decision-making**

University Goal 6: Resources, Infrastructure, and Culture includes the idea of “shared governance and informed participatory decision-making to enhance organizational effectiveness.” Our current survey supports this notion. Of the top six priorities, “enhance communication and openness between the administration and students, faculty, and staff” was ranked as a top priority by 20% or more of three out of the four groups surveyed, with 37.4% of faculty ranking it as a top priority, although this may have been different had faculty been asked the full suite of questions. Likewise, faculty support the idea of participatory decision-making (31.2% placed it in the top category), with students and staff less likely to choose this as a top priority. Although this may appear to be outside the realm of “academic” priorities, we believe a culture of trust is necessary to create buy-in to decisions regarding the strategic directions of the university; our previous survey noted that while new leadership can create the energy and momentum to innovate and build on our current strengths, there is a significant sense that our culture is resistant to change and distrustful of each other. How do we change the culture?

- Launch an inclusive and comprehensive strategic planning process: One of the action steps for this year is to “align and integrate the financial planning and budgetary process with the university strategic and operational planning process to ensure effective use of university resources in support of University mission, vision, core values and priorities.” The strategic planning process is critical in changing the culture—strategic priorities must drive the budget, and all constituents should participate in determining these strategic directions (with this transition process being the first step). Then academic and service units should be held accountable to align their practices with the larger university priorities. On the other hand, faculty and staff voices need to be represented in the financial planning process.
SUMMARY

The survey indicates that a majority of staff and students (and faculty, although they did not answer all questions) are in favor of retaining the tradition of CMU as a regional university with a focus on teaching and on-campus undergraduate education. However, there is clearly a broad diversity of opinion on these issues and at least some support for research, graduate education and national prominence. As the President and senior leadership implements the Board of Trustee’s decisions to strengthen research, for example, it is important that they communicate effectively and reassure the campus community that doing so is not inconsistent with our historic strengths and mission and that new initiatives such as the College of Medicine are additions to, not alternatives or replacements for, our current core programs. Most important, President Ross must continue to recognize and reward faculty, staff and students across the entire spectrum of CMU and emphasize that both old and new programs are essential parts of the University.