

BOG Chairman Hans Remarks on Strategic Planning November 09, 2012

In August we announced the strategic planning initiative.

We're about three months into this effort.

And we expect to bring a final report to this board in February.

So we're about halfway home.

Let's take stock of where things currently stand.

We're engaging leaders of the state's business community in an important conversation about acquiring the knowledge necessary for our students to succeed in both the workplace and in life.

We're engaging political leaders in a way that I believe will prove to be beneficial -- particularly when you consider we have a brand new Governor and a legislature where more than half of the membership will be beginning their first or second terms.

We're listening carefully to leaders from higher education including our chancellors, the faculty, the staff, the students, and outside observers of the academy.

We're learning from other states about their experiences and to see how we stack up.

Thanks to SAS and Ann Goodnight, we're going to have the latest technology to track our progress.

Thanks to Fred Eshelman, we're challenging assumptions and asking questions.

And thanks to President Ross, we now have a recommendation about increasing the state's education attainment levels -- an aspiration to make our state stronger.

What strategies will this plan likely entail?

Almost assuredly it will include -- among other things -- a focus on performance funding, more coordination with our partners in the community colleges and public schools, an expansion of online learning, and an emphasis on academic rigor.

Now, could we have saved time and effort by just validating what we're already doing?

Yes, we could have.

And we could have simply listed the enduring values of this University that we all hold dear (such as access, affordability, quality, research) and called it a strategic plan.

But that would miss the whole point.

Pick an indicator and you can tell the world around us is changing.

Demographics. Politics. Economics.

Higher education is not immune to these developments.

I cautioned the advisory committee on Wednesday that an emerging critique of higher education has been offered on a bipartisan basis.

Notwithstanding the many things we do well, the challenges before us were recently summarized by President Obama's Education Secretary as "high prices, low completion rates, and too little accountability."

He was offering a national perspective but let's be straight with ourselves.

Given the outlook for federal and state fiscal conditions (and our friend Erskine Bowles has been quite clear about the dire outlook), the University of North Carolina needs to achieve our goals in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

I had a conversation a few days ago with someone who told me this strategic planning was all fine and good as long as we didn't actually change anything.

True story by the way.

I couldn't get him to see that the way to maintain his individual autonomy and our institutional flexibility is to get ahead of the curve.

Now this particular person has been with the University for a long time and they will surely outlast me and most of the people sitting around this table.

But they're not going to win the battle with change.

So the question is will we embrace and shape the change ourselves by presenting a renewed vision and a sustainable one -- as many of our chancellors are working to do on their campuses.

Or will we resist and hope the forces of change will mysteriously leave us untouched?

The people in this room -- the leaders in this room -- know we can take the best of what made this University great and adapt it to challenges and realities facing us.

Education is our best chance for a better future.

Thank goodness there are so many good people who care so deeply about it.