Memorandum

To: Chair of the Faculty Senate Mr. Eric Matte, Senators, and Faculty
CC: President’s Council; Staff Council; President, SGA; Chair, ESC
From: Brent E. Betit, Ed.D.
Date: February 15, 2008
Re: Strategic plan update

Dear Chairperson Matte, Senators, and Faculty,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written update regarding the strategic plan to the Faculty, and to present a draft document for your consideration. My apologies that I am unable to appear in person, but attending the meeting for an hour would have required a two-hour round trip from my home on this administrative holiday, and I therefore had to balance a desire for transparent and regular communication against our strategic goal of maintaining “a consistent focus on environmental sustainability principles as an organic part of the College’s operations, working to reduce our environmental footprint and modeling principled corporate behavior.”

As you all may be aware, at the last Senate meeting that I had the privilege of attending, we were poised to make a request to the Board of Trustees to extend the time available for our planning process. This was motivated by two primary needs: 1) to provide more authentic avenues for input into planning to the Faculty and community; 2) to integrate the findings of the capital campaign feasibility study into our strategic thinking.

As a recent communication from the President indicated, we have received the findings of the feasibility study. We have also established an extended timeline to engage in planning – with an expectation that we will deliver a rough draft of the plan to the Board for its consideration at its May 2008 meeting.

As the President and senior leadership team considered the findings of the feasibility study, engaged in our annual fiscal year goal setting exercise, and held these understandings up in light of the “Vision for the Future” draft as established by the Board of Trustees, we realized that further clarity about the next three years of our development as an organization was required. The bold vision for the future is clearly appropriate and operative, and will help guide us over the course of many decades to a bright future. However, our current strategic plan must guide our steps over the next three years, taking us to our 25th anniversary – and while not challenging or supplanting the vision, our plan must represent a more concrete framework that provides clear context for our operational, tactical and financial planning in the near term.
We therefore stepped back from the current plan, and spent a focused period of time developing the elements of a core strategy. A core strategy is inherent in the vision statement, but we felt that our strategy needed to be explicit, clear, and honest about our realities and our potential over the next three years of our development.

The result of this additional thinking is detailed in a concise core strategy document, just 8 pages in length, which attempts to outline in ambitious but realistic terms those initiatives and goals that appear essential over the course of the next three years. I believe this document balances realism with ambition in an appropriate way, and that it is honest about both our potential and our realities as an organization.

We do not see this document as a public plan, or even as a public document (which is why it is clearly marked “confidential.”) It is a document for our own internal community, meant to guide the dialogue about our planning and to inform the eventual development of a formal, public strategic plan.

I have spent a good deal of time considering the core strategy document in light of the lengthier vision statement. There are no discordant elements and relatively few inconsistencies apparent when these are considered side by side. Rather, the core strategy document provides a more clear, concrete, and almost brutally honest representation of our near term development, while the vision statement provides an uplifting and inspiring depiction of our ultimate potential over a much longer horizon. We must engage in the former to move purposefully toward the latter.

None of the planning that has previously occurred is therefore “wasted.” It all clearly contributes to our development, and to our tactical and strategic considerations. It will all contribute to the public plan that I mentioned earlier. In other words, there is consistency and integrity in this process.

We are vitally interested in your perspective on this new document, and ready to engage in the next phase of planning. Nearly every division is already working on its portion of the plan. The core strategy document should help divisions situate their portion of the plan within the global picture and the larger plan, achieving realistic and motivating objectives that will take us to our next level of achievement and development as an organization.

Your feedback is welcome, and I look forward to appearing in person at your next meeting for what I know will be a spirited and productive dialogue.