



WINSTON-SALEM
STATE UNIVERSITY



October 21, 2016

Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) hosted a University of North Carolina (UNC) Board of Governors Strategic Plan Public Forum on Thursday, October 20, 2016 at 3:30 pm. 136 attendees participated, including 58 faculty, 48 staff, and 24 students. Those in attendance provided feedback on draft goals which, when finalized, will form the basis of UNC's Strategic Plan. The draft goals are organized into five (5) strategic priority areas: access, student success, affordability and efficiency, economic impact, and excellent and diverse institutions. This executive summary synthesizes attendees' written and spoken comments from that event by strategic priority area.

Access

- *Admissions, Enrollment, and College Readiness.*
 - Several speakers emphasized that access begins in early education, from kindergarten through high school. Participants mentioned that increasing the rigor of K-12 education will make higher education more accessible because students will be more prepared. They suggested that it is important that we improve education at all K-12 institutions so that students will be prepared regardless of the school district in which they are educated.
 - Attendees suggested better bridge and pipeline programs so that high school students can have better transitions to college.
 - Attendees discussed the admissions process. It was difficult for everyone to agree on what the admissions standards should be in order to assure access while maintaining quality academics with integrity. However, most agreed that any admissions instruments should be thoroughly vetted and validated, and that multiple indicators should be considered (*e.g.*, not just standardized tests, but also GPA and courses taken).
 - As one approach to making a college education more accessible, participants recommended that the system re-evaluate college entry requirements. More specifically, attendees recommended a review of the current policy which requires the use of standardized tests such as the ACT and the SAT to gain entry into college. They also discussed how modifying UNC's minimum requirements would increase access for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds.
 - With regard to enrollment, attendees pointed out that increased enrollment will require adequate facilities to accommodate an influx of students.
 - Attendees mentioned that standards for admission should account for the situations of many minority students. Participants specifically discussed the need to consider how to close the achievement gap for African American males through this planning process.
 - An attendee stated that access does not equal success. Participants discussed the need to place as much emphasis on persistence, graduation rate, and average student debt as is placed on access.
- *Needs of Non-traditional Students.*
 - Participants suggested that access should focus not just on increasing enrollment, but also on retaining and graduating students once they are enrolled.

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- Attendees recommended an increase in online course offerings, as this would make it easier for students to complete their degrees.
- Participants discussed providing more courses in the afternoon for non-traditional students.
- Forum participants pointed out that we are too limited in supporting students of non-traditional age. At least one participant stated that we have many students who are over 30 years old, have jobs, and support their families. These individuals are only able to take a limited number of courses given their job and family responsibilities.
- Another participant noted that if we increase fees as consequences for not finishing degrees within a certain amount of time, we are placing a heavy burden on non-traditional students and their families.
- *Minority-serving Institutions.*
 - Participants suggested that the working definition for access be reworded to be more mindful of minority-serving institutions.
 - At least one participant voiced a need to consider how to make WSSU a national leader among historically black colleges and universities.

Student Success

- *Needs of Non-traditional Students.*
 - The student success area generated discussion about the need for more flexibility to accommodate the success of all students, both traditional and non-traditional.
 - Some suggestions were more night classes, fewer fees and restrictions, and a broader perspective and understanding of what “the student experience” means for those students.
- *Strategies for Student Success.*
 - One commenter suggested leadership training--not only for students, but for faculty and staff as well--because the definition of success is changing in the 21st century. One student indicated that those who understand how to lead can bring about needed change and have a more holistic, global mindset.
 - A commenter said we should place emphasis on preparing entrepreneurial mindsets versus job-oriented mindsets. More specifically, a commenter said we need entrepreneurship and development in black communities so that students can create jobs and solve problems together.
 - Commenters recommended establishing more dual degree programs for students.
 - Participants discussed the importance of developing relationships with businesses and other organizations to create internship opportunities for our students.
 - Another suggestion to support student success was to increase mental health support on campus to meet the needs of rising numbers of students who have high stress levels and who are medicated for mental illness, which could otherwise interfere with their education.
 - Participants emphasized that, if we are to provide a consistently high level of education to an increasing number of students, we cannot do so adequately without more funding.
- *Collaboration Among UNC Institutions.*

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- The idea of sharing resources across campuses was a common theme. One commenter noted, “Equity in resources is directly tied to successful student outcomes.”
- Participants suggested that we should promote more collaboration rather than competition among students in the UNC system.
- Participants suggested that there be collaboration between UNC system schools and private institutions within the state to give students more exposure to opportunities such as internships.
- *Definition of Student Success.* At least one attendee suggested that the working definition of student success end after the phrase “21st century life so as not to be too restrictive, as follows:

“Student Success is a multifaceted construct of positive intellectual, personal, and social transformation facilitated by a high quality University education. It includes:

- *the timely acquisition of a degree, and*
- *the development of competencies – critical thinking, life-long learning, technological mastery, resilience, effective communication, flexibility, and collaboration, among others – for a meaningful engagement in 21st-century life, including, but not limited to the workforce.”*

Affordability and Efficiency

- *Affordability.*
 - During the forum, participants expressed concerns about how tuition rates would be set in the future. An attendee pointed out that, while the tuition needs to be affordable, basing tuition on the median income of the state will not work because tuition would still be too high for low-income families, the number of which is especially high for WSSU. Commenters expressed that WSSU also needs adequate funding to help students, especially those who are Pell eligible, complete their degrees.
 - Attendees expressed the need for creative opportunities for financial assistance as a way to fund students’ tuition.
- *Efficiency and Automation.*
 - An attendee pointed out that technology can certainly make work more efficient, but only if the infrastructure is in place and there are knowledgeable faculty and staff on board who can teach others how to use it effectively. Now that UNC has automated data collection via Student Data Mart and Human Resources Data Mart, UNC-GA could increase efficiency and free up staff by automating reports instead of having them replicated by each institution. This would allow staff to learn new skills and complete new or additional projects.
 - Attendees also mentioned online offerings and evening classes as ways to help increase efficiency in terms of college degree attainment.
 - Other efficiency discussions centered on issues of technology, and participants raised concerns about ensuring that relevant skillsets are available for the implementation of new, IT-related systems and technologies.

Economic Impact

- *Graduate Retention in North Carolina.* One participant said that the key is to retain our graduates in this state--not just STEM and healthcare graduates, but students from all content areas. That participant proposed that students have access to incentives (*e.g.*, a grant) for engaging with the local community--an experience that would teach them important skills and have a social impact, as well.
- *Community Involvement and Investment.*
 - Attendees emphasized that investing in higher education is the same as investing in the community because it leads to economic growth and changes the trajectory of peoples' lives. A participant mentioned Research Triangle Park as a working example of this.
 - Multiple participants suggested that fostering and supporting the entrepreneurial spirit of our students will lead to an increase in small businesses, which create jobs, which benefit the community.
 - Another suggestion was to focus on continuing education opportunities for community members, which are more readily available at community colleges than at universities.
 - Much of the conversation emphasized the need to broaden the scope of the curriculum to allow students to impact their communities during their enrollment.
- *Collaboration Among UNC Institutions.*
 - In addition, forum participants said collaborative opportunities across research institutions in the UNC system should be explored and encouraged in order to facilitate greater engagement of both faculty and students.

Excellent and Diverse Institutions

- *Human Capital.*
 - Attendees suggested that there be an increase in pay for employees of both university and K-12 institutions. One participant explained that increasing teacher salaries would have a trickle-down effect by first improving teaching, thereby increasing graduation rates and test scores, and ultimately attracting excellent students to pursue the profession of teaching, which would bring the process full circle.
 - Another respondent said that salary was not the only way to compensate faculty and staff, but suggested additional benefits such as tuition assistance for spouses and dependents and flexible scheduling.
 - An attendee suggested that there be an "academy" for potential applicants to the university system, especially for areas like nursing, that would expose participants to resources and connect them with mentors across the state. The attendee suggested that the "academy" would be a way to educate potential employees and instill them with the skills we need them to have should they become employees.
- *Collaboration Among UNC Institutions.*
 - The forum participants encouraged UNC to review and address any disparities that exist between UNC's predominantly white institutions and historically-black institutions.
 - An attendee suggested that we provide students with more opportunities involving cross-campus programs to meet students' needs.

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- With regard to closing the disparities among students/institutions, an attendee suggested sharing our resources and infrastructures to provide more opportunities and as a way to offset some limitations.

Other Issues to Consider

- Forum attendees discussed the need to think about the context of our strategic plan, and particularly the interactions with community colleges and secondary schools. What is our piece of the puzzle? How do we interact? We need to place the strategic plan in a larger context and think about the broader topic.
- Collaboration between UNC system schools and other institutions was an overarching strategy mentioned to address several strategic priority areas. The collaboration comments focused on many different ideas from creating a “bank” of internship opportunities for students to sharing resources (e.g., facilities, employees, degree programs) between schools—especially institutions that are nearby. Participants suggested that doing so would increase opportunities for students, faculty, and staff, as well as reduce costs for the system. Participants said collaboration could help address disparities between institutions and compensate for shortcomings.
- A comment was made that there needs to be more interaction between the system schools in order to enhance our “system-ness.” Attendees voiced that the idea of “system-ness” may actually challenge parts of the strategic priority area of excellent and diverse institutions. WSSU forum attendees expressed more interest in cohesiveness than in setting WSSU apart as a niche institution. One attendee reminded UNC to pay attention to what data tells us, even if it’s not in line with our assumptions or plans, about where we are successful and where we need to improve.
- One final suggestion was that a subcommittee be formed to study how all five of these priorities will interact with and impact each other, especially when it comes to determining metrics, to be sure they can operate together.