GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES FOR ACADEMIC STRATEGIC PLANNING

It is important that Case Western Reserve University begin an academic strategic planning process at this time as the institution emerges from the transitional period characterized by leadership changes and financial stress. In advance of the arrival of a new president, the Schools can and should start divisional planning processes that will together provide an important launching point for the University’s new leadership.

Academic strategic planning is a systematic planning process designed to guide decisions about the maintenance and development of academic programs, the allocation of financial and other resources, and the procurement of new resources. Priorities for faculty hiring, program development, and fund-raising will be guided by the outcome of this planning process.

In addition, as the University begins using the principles of Responsibility-Centered Management, funds will be available at the institutional level for investment in selected new initiatives. Decisions about allocating these funds will be guided by the strategic plans that flow from this planning process. Rather than developing a culture of competition in these allocations, however, it is important to maximize collaborative efforts across strong programs within the University.

We recommend the following principles and practices for this strategic planning process:

Principle 1: Academic strategic planning seeks to develop coherent, strategic responses to current and anticipated conditions within and outside the University. Examination of the financial implications of the response should follow articulation of the strategic direction, however. The overall statement of strategic direction for the University, to be completed after the arrival of the new president, will include a statement of direction for the University, statements of direction for each of the Schools, and their implications for fund-raising, budgeting, and development over the next five years.

Principle 2: Academic strategic planning in the Schools should be closely coordinated with the Office of the Provost, led by the Deans, and implemented by faculty leaders who are widely considered to be independent and objective and whose regular responsibilities would be reduced in order to complete the task. The Office of the Provost will provide assistance in the form of a facilitator or consultant to work with the leadership of the School, and will also furnish interim feedback on planning drafts developed by the School.

Principle 3. Academic strategic planning should occur at two levels: (1) each School (and, as appropriate, each of the School’s departments) according to processes and procedures that suit the organizational structure of each School, and (2) the university level. Agreement on a time frame in which to complete this task is required.
Principle 4: While schools may elect to engage in a traditional, more broadly based strategic planning process, the process described here would direct each unit to address three issues:

- the School’s proposed strategic direction in the areas of education and research (and rationale for each)
- the proposed strategic approach to recruiting and retaining highly-accomplished faculty and well-prepared students; and
- opportunities for innovative collaboration and interdisciplinary programs both within the school and with units elsewhere in the University (see attached outline).

The rationale may or may not be provided in the form of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. In whatever format, attention to external factors within relevant fields of practice/specialization will help others outside the discipline to understand the priorities being advanced. Planning documents from the Schools should record faculty voting on issues where appropriate, and where there is significant disagreement on strategic direction, divergences of opinion should be recorded.

Each school should develop its own path for proceeding with the planning process. Schools may consider consulting with units that have recently completed extensive strategic planning processes (e.g., Nursing and MSASS). Schools may also involve the consultant or facilitator noted above in determining their procedures.

Principle 5: The College and Schools should submit their plans to a University-wide planning committee that will review and evaluate the documents. In this review, the Planning Committee will address questions such as:

- What essential programs must be supported with internal funds?
- What are the common themes across the units?
- What interdisciplinary programs should be strengthened?
- What new interdisciplinary programs should be initiated?
- What areas of education, research, and community service should be advanced because they represent a unique niche in which the University might excel?

This University Strategic Planning Committee will produce a document that addresses these issues and makes recommendations as to directions, fund-raising priorities, and allocation of funds. We expect that communications between the Schools and the Planning Committee will be iterative, with preliminary reactions and follow-up questions being quite common.

The University Strategic Planning Committee will comprise faculty, staff, students, and administrators. We suggest the Faculty Senate, in consultation with the College and Schools, develop the mechanism for identifying faculty to serve on the committee. Staff representation would be drawn from areas crucial to the functioning of the University, such as the Offices of Student Affairs, Undergraduate Studies, and Graduate Studies.
Students would be drawn from major student groups (Undergraduate Student Government and the graduate and professional student organizations). Administrators, faculty, staff students, or alumni from outside the committee could be asked to examine specific issues in their respective areas of expertise.

Principle 6. Strategic planning documents should be examined and discussed by multiple “stakeholders” in each unit of the University, the University administration and staff, student, and alumni. Reliance on existing structures such as the Faculty Senate to review and to comment on documents would strengthen the validity of the resulting plan. We recommend that the integrated document that is developed by the University Strategic Planning Committee be sent back to the schools and Faculty Senate several times for review and discussion for review and input before a final document is completed.

OUTLINE FOR SCHOOL/COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLANNING

1 Mission statement for the School/College

2 Focused responses to the following questions:

   What are directions and goals for research and education based on strengths and possibilities for development of unique niches? What are strategies for reaching the goals?

   What are the opportunities for collaboration and innovative interdisciplinary programs both within the school and across the University? Include current programs as well as possible new initiatives?

   What are strategies for recruitment and retention of faculty and students?