

November 2008

Dear Members of the Campus Community:

I am pleased to indicate that Carnegie Mellon's Board of Trustees approved the university's 2008 Strategic Plan during its October 2008 board meeting.

The Strategic Plan was the result of a year-long process that included extensive engagement of faculty and academic administration from all the colleges, as well as with staff, students, and other constituents. There were regular reports to the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, the Student Senate, and a series of open town meetings last spring and this fall. There were presentations to the board of trustees at several points along the way, and an earlier draft of the plan formed the basis for a summer retreat of the board. The development of the Strategic Plan of 2008 dovetailed nicely with the substantial activities surrounding the decennial Middle States accreditation in the Spring of 2008, and the outstanding efforts to date of our university-wide fundraising campaign, the public announcement of which took place just a few weeks ago.

The last such comprehensive strategic planning exercise led to a plan that was approved by the trustees in the spring of 1998. That plan has served the institution very well, I believe. The current 2008 Strategic Plan in many ways builds upon and "updates" the 1998 plan. It is a plan for the future. At the same time, it clearly is a product as well of the directions and momentum of the university over the past decade, directions established and led by President Jared Cohon, and embodied in the initiatives of colleges and departments and the efforts of the almost 1000 Carnegie Mellon faculty over this period of time.

Carnegie Mellon is one of the most strategic and self-reflective universities I know. The President's Advisory Board process, as but one example, imposes strategic reflection on all of the academic units and many administrative units on a regular basis: what are our goals, how are we doing, how did we respond to the challenges that were itemized previously, what are our plans for the future. That said, I often worry that the phrase "strategic plan" conveys a certain stiffness and a top-down connotation that, among other things, is not very descriptive of how we function. Carnegie Mellon has a strong sense of itself, well-captured in its formal vision, mission, and values statements. Yet around these broadly shared views of our goals and values, there is a flexibility and even a willingness to reinvent parts of ourselves from time to time. We are an entrepreneurial and bottom-up place—not exclusively, but more so than others.

As such, the 2008 Strategic Plan should not be interpreted as a predetermined or complete itemization of the specific educational and research thrusts that we will pursue in the coming years. Those will also be affected by decisions at the departmental and college levels, by the particulars of resource availability, and, fundamentally, by the decisions and actions of individual faculty. Nor, for similar reasons, is the strategic plan a specific resource allocation timetable. But it does give a sense of key priorities for the institution circa 2008: areas where we think there can be important future synergies among multiple units of the university; areas in which we feel Carnegie Mellon is especially well situated to make unique, impactful and world-class contributions; and areas where we believe that efforts to procure additional resources can be successful.

I think a good example of the relevance of a strategic plan can be gleaned by looking back to the 1998 plan. In the 1998 plan, two items of emphasis were the desire to move in a more concerted way into biotechnology and the life sciences and to become more active globally. We did not know the exact timing, nor precisely where resources for these thrusts would come from, nor how much would be needed or would be available in terms of resources, nor all of the specifics of how those thrusts would be pursued. Still, those did turn out to be important and significant directions marking the past decade for Carnegie Mellon, more so than had these priorities not been itemized in the 1998 plan.

With this as background, let me turn to the highlights of the 2008 plan:

- In research, the plan reaffirms Carnegie Mellon’s capabilities in interdisciplinary research as well as the importance of seeking comparative advantage as a way to leverage our limited resources. The plan recognizes the continued core importance of foundational research and of artistic expression. It also applauds the practical and problem-solving nature of the Carnegie Mellon culture, highlighting opportunities for contributions in five broad areas:
 - Transitioning to an environmentally sustainable society.
 - Improving health and quality of life.
 - Understanding and engaging global societies, economies, and cultures.
 - Understanding human and social behavior.
 - Transforming science and society by advancing information, computation, and communication.
- In education, the plan affirms the importance we place on the rigor that characterizes our curricula; our desire to enhance student breadth; and the importance of student learning and engagement outside the classroom. It endorses continued efforts to provide opportunities for understanding global, environmental, and ethical issues. It makes special note of the importance that should be given to writing and communication skills as well as to information literacy. We will look for ways to enhance student engagement in the world around us, to support students’ sense of personal well-being, and to integrate learning-science-based technology into student experiences. We seek to create students who will be “architects of change.”
- We will continue to support economic growth in the Pittsburgh region, and contribute to the quality of life in the region by leveraging core research, artistic and outreach activities.
- We will respond to globalization both through Carnegie Mellon’s activities outside of Pittsburgh, and also by increased attention to the global and cultural knowledge our graduates will need in their future.
- We will create a positive and supportive campus environment for faculty, students, alumni, and staff, and continue to support efforts to achieve greater diversity in every part of our community.

- Our resources are far more limited than we would wish in order to accomplish our goals and aspirations, often falling well below those of our peer institutions. At the same time, as tuition has increased in real terms, there is justifiable pressure from students, the federal government, and the public to demonstrate that we are handling our finances responsibly. It is vitally important that we seek to increase our resource base going forward, but also that in so doing we steward our resources with great care, and manage them efficiently and effectively. It is also important as we do this that we are responsive to the growing legal and regulatory obligations we face, while seeking to preserve the agile and relatively unbureaucratic culture that has sustained this university through a period of strong growth and achievement.

It is certainly reasonable to ask whether the recent global economic crisis will affect the speed we can expect to implement the thrusts identified in the Strategic Plan? Undoubtedly so. It is hard not to imagine these events affecting, at least for some period of time, our endowment draw, the speed of our fundraising, the federal and corporate research funding climate, and the finances of our students and their families. But institutions have to make strategic choices during times of financial stress as well as times of financial growth. Having a sense of strategic priorities seems to me as useful, and perhaps more so, in challenging times as it does in good ones.

I encourage you to review the entire 20-page strategic plan document, which is available at www.cmu.edu/strategic-plan/.

There are literally scores of individuals who deserve major thanks for work far beyond any conceivable call of duty on this effort. Let me single out just a few for special mention. Vice President Michael Murphy served as de facto chief of staff for this strategic planning process; Vice President Rick McCullough co-chaired with me the general oversight engagement of the deans during several months of Saturday meetings. There were six formal subcommittees and these were chaired or co-chaired by Dean Jennifer Church, Trustee Linda Dickerson, Vice President Rick McCullough, Vice President and CFO Deborah Moon, Vice Provost Indira Nair, Director of Economic Development Don Smith, Assistant Vice President Everett Tadem, and Dean Mark Wessel. My thanks to them, and to all of you who served on committees, attended campus forums, and sent in ideas and comments.

Sincerely,

Mark S. Kamlet
Senior Vice President and Provost
Chair, 2008 Strategic Plan Steering Committee