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December 1, 2017 - From the President's Desk

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December 1, 2017 - From the President's Desk

Dear Campus Community,

Earlier this month we took the first steps toward creating a comprehensive strategic plan that will shape Wright State University's future and position it to thrive in the dynamic and challenging environment facing higher education and Wright State. We have received excellent nominations for the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. Our university will soon begin the conversations needed to enact meaningful change for our students and our region.

Higher education is at a crossroads. A confluence of factors is driving academe and our university to do things differently. Changes are required not just in how we engage students in the classroom or conduct meaningful research in the laboratory, but also in how we do business. These influences require much more from all of us than in the past. They require us to adapt faster when we encounter challenges and to be resilient as we formulate solutions. They require us to be more nimble than ever before.

Some of the factors impinging on higher education's status quo are well known. Doug Fecher, chair of the Wright State University Board of Trustees, detailed them well at the board's last public meeting in October:

- Enrollment at public universities is under pressure and shows no signs of abating. The number of high school students in Ohio is falling, and competition among our peers for this declining population of graduates is increasing.
- Four-year universities face stiff competition from lower-cost community colleges, including some that now are approved to offer bachelor's degrees.
- The cost of higher education, as it should be, is under strict scrutiny.
- Though the value of a college degree is still one of the best investments any individual or family can make, national conversations have diminished a full understanding of its benefits to both individuals and society as a whole.
- The pressures facing our students have never been higher. Student demographics and needs are changing. A full-time student may often work full-time, juggling more than classwork and research.
- State budgets are stretched thinner than ever before as lawmakers are forced to make tough choices about state support for higher education.

These influencers may be out of our control in many respects, but that does not mean we cannot more effectively plan for them. We also have many strengths—especially our people—that we can rely on to position ourselves for a brighter future.

Our new comprehensive strategic plan will help achieve financial sustainability for Wright State and foster a campus atmosphere that provides our graduates with opportunities to excel in fields that define the future and our region. To achieve our goals we must stay firm at our roots but bend with our branches. Better flexibility is required if we are to survive the environment's high winds.

The Wright State Board of Trustees rightly understands the importance of global conversations among our various stakeholders that frame higher education's challenging environment and Wright State's vision for the future. Such conversations, although difficult, are critical as we begin our strategic planning.

While the university is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the negotiation process, it is not lost on me that the conversation negotiators are having at one bargaining table is a microcosm of the reality facing Wright State and higher education. Simply put, we will all grapple with the challenges facing higher education regardless of whether we wish to acknowledge that our world has changed.

We have already shown a great amount of resilience and flexibility. The campus community, including many of our dedicated employees, has already given much. It is my understanding that the Board of Trustees is asking AAUP-

WSU for some flexibility with the faculty membership it represents. The board is unanimous in its belief that the current negotiation is not as much about granular changes as it is about the flexibility the board believes is required for our university to succeed in this challenging and evolving landscape.

We cannot ignore what is required of us. We must be willing and able to change. We must learn how to bend and be nimble. We must work together to face our shared reality or we risk losing our opportunity to help students realize their dreams. It is our collective calling. It is worth sacrificing for and protecting. I trust you feel the same.

Our shared strategic planning process will help us examine where we are today and what we must become. This effort will also help Wright State redefine itself and its value proposition, while remaining focused on the high ideals of our mission. This will involve contributions from all of our constituents.

We must better learn to bend, but we will not break if we work together. It will be challenging, but I promise you it will be worth it.

Warmest regards,

Cheryl B. Schrader, Ph.D.

President

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