University High School Strategic Vision Task Force
Richard Wheeler, Chair
Jeffrey Walkington, Director, University Laboratory High School
Elizabeth Majerus, Uni Faculty Representative
Sharlene Denos, Uni Faculty Representative
Steve Michael, Uni Parent-Faculty Organization Representative
Brent McBride, Child Development Lab
Amy Ando, Agricultural and Consumer Economics
Michaelene Ostrosky, Special Education
Timothy Stelzer, Physics
Matthew Tomaszewski, Associate Provost for Capital Planning, ex officio
Keith Marshall, Interim Associate Provost for Enrollment Management, ex officio

Dear Colleagues,

The University Laboratory High School, or Uni High, is widely regarded as an excellent school and an asset to the campus. Since 1983, when Uni was separated from the College of Education and began reporting to the Office of the Provost, there have been recurring questions about Uni’s mission, its status as a laboratory school and its position within the university. A report issued by the Uni Director’s Evaluation Committee last year noted that two of the most pervasive issues raised by the Uni community continue to be how Uni fits into the larger university structure and what the University sees as Uni’s mission. The report went on to note that answering these questions is critical to defining Uni’s future and ensuring its future success.

The urgency of these questions has been heightened in recent years by severe financial pressures. Uni’s primary funding source, General State Aid (GSA), has declined, while operating costs have increased. Indeed, Uni is now in a tenuous financial situation, facing an annual structural operating deficit of roughly $150K-$300K and a $1.5M accumulated debt. Further, the campus has identified $15M-$20M in deferred maintenance and facilities upgrades that must be addressed over the next decade, if not sooner, and an additional $5M-$10M is needed to upgrade facilities to current teaching standards.

Clearly, Uni’s traditional funding model of modest campus investment, moderate parent contributions, and strong reliance on GSA - a model that has been in place since 1983 - appear no longer viable. Moreover, significant new investments from the campus are not a realistic long-term solution either, given significant declines in state appropriations for higher education and the campus’s increasing reliance on tuition revenues.

It is time to revisit both Uni’s mission and its funding model. Indeed, these two issues are inextricably linked. Your group is charged to help the campus shape a vision for Uni High and its future by doing the following:

a. Propose a vision for the role and purpose of Uni High as secondary school situated within a research intensive university, while also considering its impacts on the local community.
b. Propose at least one new financial/operating model that could be sustainable over the next two decades or more.

In thinking about the role and purpose of Uni, please consider questions such as the goals and desired qualities of a Uni High education, the place of that education in relation to other high schools in our area, the ideal size of the student body, and the types of students and families that Uni should serve. You should also consider Uni's role as an asset to our community and to the University. The latter might include the indirect impact of a more vibrant and attractive community on the vitality of the University, as well as the potential for direct impact in recruiting faculty and staff to the University.

When you consider financial and operating models you may find it useful to review the findings of a 2013 ad hoc finance committee chaired by Uni parent and professor of finance Jeff Brown. That group identified six possible financial models for Uni's future:

- Austerity (the current model)
- Revenue enhancement
- Charter school (within Champaign or Urbana school districts)
- Independent school
- Private school within UIUC
- University-centric public

As noted, the current "austerity" model is not serving Uni well. The ad hoc committee concluded that the "University-centric public" model, where the campus would invest considerable new revenue into Uni because of its alignment with strategic planning goals, was the most desirable scheme. Unfortunately, current financial realities and priorities preclude this approach for the foreseeable future. Your committee, then, should consider the remaining four models, as well as any new models you devise.

The committee should also consider the viability of campus investment in the Uni physical plant. Specifically, is the estimated $20M-$30M investment needed over the next decade to address deferred maintenance and classroom modernization a prudent investment of campus resources, given competing facility needs across campus, and is this the most cost-effective approach to address Uni's facility needs? Associate Provost for Capital Planning Matthew Tomaszewski is an ex-officio member of your committee, and can be a useful resource about facility issues.

Uni's fund-raising efforts have grown in recent years, and you should certainly inform yourself about the potential for fund-raising to address Uni's financial needs. You should also remember that the stakeholder group for any organization has a finite capacity for giving. We can engage experts from our advancement office to give you an estimate of that capacity for Uni High.

Thank you for agreeing to serve on this important committee, and thank you in advance for the time and effort you will devote to this task. Please provide me with a final report by August 15, 2016.

Sincerely,

Edward Feser
Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

c: Abbas Benmamoun
   Charles Tucker
   Vicky Gress