

Strategic Directions for the Auburn University System

The strategic planning process for the Auburn University System was initiated in October 2007 when members of the Auburn family were encouraged to participate in a web-based survey. Since then, face-to-face sessions were conducted in Auburn and around the state with individuals representing each of Auburn's core constituencies – alumni, students, faculty, staff, administrators, community officials, business and agricultural leaders and others.

The survey and focus groups were designed to address two questions that are key to Auburn's future:

- Given Auburn's strengths, distinctive features and constraints, what are appropriate aspirations for Auburn a decade into the future in the three key mission areas of instruction, research and extension?
- What are the major strategic initiatives we need to implement over this decade to meet those aspirations?

Based on these findings, this document represents a first draft of recommended strategic directions for the Auburn University System. This draft will be returned to each of Auburn's constituencies for additional comment and input on the 62 potential strategic directions that it includes. As the document is reviewed, it will also present an opportunity for suggested additions of initiatives that may have been omitted from this draft. The goal is to complete and present a final draft of strategic directions at the April meeting of the Auburn University Board of Trustees.

Undergraduate Education

A long-standing strength of Auburn University is the quality of our undergraduate education. One point of evidence is the response to the following question given by graduates five years after graduation:

“If you had it to do again, would you come to AU and major in the same discipline?”

Responses indicate that 96 percent of Auburn graduates would make the same decision. The results are indicative of both a strong undergraduate study program and the out-of-class experiences that Auburn affords our students.

As we think of the world that our graduates will face, we want to ensure that they have the appropriate skill sets and abilities that will make them successful for their careers during the next 40 years and longer.

A committee appointed by the University Senate on each campus will advise the Provost (Auburn campus) and the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs (Montgomery campus) on requirements or new initiatives to ensure that our students

possess the skill sets for successful careers. These requirements or new initiatives may include some or all of the following:

- 1) *Demonstrate international skills in one of the following manners*
 - a. Six credit hours of language training
 - b. Pass the U.S. State Department foreign language or equivalency test at the basic level
 - c. Engage in an approved study abroad program
 - d. Obtain six credits in International Studies
 - e. Exceptions to these requirements may be determined by the Provost (Auburn) or the Vice Chancellor (Montgomery), who may add additional experiences and/or combinations that would satisfy the concept of international skills or proficiencies.

2) *A writing center to sharpen written communication*

Employers indicate that writing is one of the most valued skills but that more than 80 percent of their employees need help and improvement. Auburn will fully organize and staff a writing center to help address this challenge.

The basic functions of the writing center are as follows:

- a. All entering freshmen will be evaluated on their writing skills during the admissions process. Either the ACT writing sample or a placement exam based on writing skills will be used for this review.
- b. Course selection and remediation plans will be developed for any entering student that does not have appropriate writing skills.
- c. Basic writing or composition courses at the lower division will be in small classes, preferably of 20 students or less. The concept is that the small classes will allow all students greater opportunities to have more writing assignments and stronger feedback.
- d. At the upper division (junior and senior levels), three writing intensive courses will be required within each major. Samples of each student's work will be reviewed and evaluated by the center. Writing intensive courses will be approved by the Provost (Auburn) or Vice Chancellor (Montgomery). The logic of working on writing skills at the upper division level is that we want to retain those skills learned early in the

students' college career and for them to have experience in the writing of their discipline.

3) *Participation in a "learning community" or "service learning"*

There is much data to suggest that students who live on campus and are engaged in student activities graduate at higher levels and complete their degrees at a faster pace. When the new residence halls on the Auburn campus are completed and a learning community is established, we expect either participation in the learning community environment or participation in service learning of a substantial nature, such as through the Cooperative Extension System or in the local community. The standards for both would be determined by the Provost's Office.

4) *Review of general education (core curriculum) requirements*

Both campuses should conduct a review of our general education requirements and the new or novel general education programs at peer institutions. While it is not necessary that we change our requirements, it is important to understand what other schools value in their general education approaches. In the review, we should look at opportunities for students to study and engage in the theory and practice of American democracy.

5) *Training in on-line learning*

Most of the learning opportunities that our graduates will face later in life will be in electronic on-line training. It is important that all graduates have the skills to be successful with this form of learning. Six credit hours of on-line courses will be required for graduation.

6) *Academic quality admissions criteria*

The demand for an Auburn education continues to grow yet our capacity for large increases in on-campus student enrollments is approaching our limits. This situation offers Auburn an opportunity to increase the academic quality of entering freshmen as we remain true to our land grant heritage. Approximately 75 percent of each entering class should be admitted based on national quality metrics (ACT scores or class rank) with 25 percent selected for unique talents, diverse experiences and demonstrated leadership potential. Students applying to the Auburn campus who are not admitted will be referred to the Montgomery campus.

7) *Standards for graduation rates*

Graduation rates at the Auburn campus should be in the top 25 percent of land grant universities. Graduation rates at the Montgomery campus should increase 5 percent during the life of the strategic plan.

8) *Wellness and sustainability center*

Students have asked for a new student activities facility and have indicated a willingness to help pay for such a facility through the use of fees. The basic purpose of such a facility is to improve the physical and emotional health of students. Instead of a traditional student activities building found at most universities, Auburn should construct a wellness and sustainability center. The center would address human health from an individual perspective as well as the perspective of environmental health and the relationships between people and communities. Please note that sustainability as a strategic direction is subsequently addressed in this document. It will be important that sustainability goals established by Auburn are complementary to the focus of the wellness and sustainability center.

9) *Exit examination*

An exit exam will be developed to ensure that graduates possess the needed written and quantitative skills for success in the 21st Century.

10) *Course priorities*

Priorities for program and course offerings will be developed to ensure that classes have a sufficient number of students and students can enroll in the courses they need.

11) *Cooperative Extension System participation*

Develop a process to increase student participation in Extension projects and develop linkages with programs and departments not traditionally affiliated with Extension.

Research and Graduate Education

In selected areas, Auburn maintains a strong research and graduate education focus while in other areas we are below national norms. As Auburn moves forward, we must strengthen our graduate, professional and research programs.

Our current situation results partly from historical funding patterns and partly from a campus environment that has not systematically encouraged and promoted research and graduate education. To make dramatic improvements, Auburn must make a decades-long commitment.

A committee appointed by the University Senate and the Provost's Office will offer recommendations to the Office of the Vice President for Research. Several of the initial issues that we must address include the following:

12) *Non-profit foundation*

Auburn is structured such that it is a burden for faculty to respond to certain types of research opportunities. Establishing a 501(c)3 foundation will help facilitate research activities. The foundation should be capable of easing the current bureaucracy for international programs, classified research, construction or renovation as well as for atypical personnel actions. Auburn at Montgomery faculty and staff will participate in the new research foundation.

13) *Training and education*

Auburn will simplify the proposal submission process. The Vice President for Research on the Auburn campus will “certify,” via training and education programs, appropriate individuals at the college, school or department level who can process proposals for submission to granting agencies. The Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs on the Montgomery campus will do the same for Auburn at Montgomery.

14) *Culture of research and scholarship*

A culture of research and scholarship will be fostered via simple techniques that may include some or all of the following:

- a. Weekly campus visits by federal program and grant officers, foundation representatives and appropriate industry officials.
- b. Use of the Auburn aircraft for up to three days per month to allow faculty to interact with federal program and grant officers.
- c. Encourage broad input from faculty in developing state and federal budget requests.
- d. The Provost’s Office will encourage the establishment of 100 joint faculty appointments to facilitate interdisciplinary research programs that can respond to new research questions and priorities.
- e. To further engage undergraduates in research, 500 students will each receive \$1,000 for one semester to assist faculty in research.

15) *Distance education*

While the capacity to greatly expand the number of students on the Auburn campus is limited, we should look at specific disciplines that may present opportunities for distance education delivery. Our goal is for 20 graduate degree programs to be offered that are dominated by electronic distance technology.

16) *Reporting and measurement*

Auburn should develop an annual report of the research, scholarship and creative endeavors with appropriate metrics at the departmental level. The report would include agreed upon expectations (a percentage increase in external research funding) for each college and school.

17) *Graduate students*

The Auburn campus should recommit to enrolling 5,000 graduate students, both on campus or via electronic delivery. The Montgomery campus should set a goal of enrolling 800 graduate students. The Auburn campus must maintain stipends for graduate teaching and research assistants, in general, at national norms. The Auburn at Montgomery campus must maintain stipends, in general, at regional norms.

18) *Technology transfer*

Auburn will reaffirm its commitment to technology transfer. Putting Auburn products and processes in the marketplace will achieve both recognition and appropriate financial returns.

19) *Auburn Research Park and the Auburn Research & Technology Foundation*

Auburn is very supportive of the Auburn Research Park and the Auburn Research & Technology Foundation. We will work with the ARTF Board to streamline processes, thereby encouraging park expansion.

20) *Library support*

Auburn will commit to maintaining its membership in the Association of Research Libraries.

Faculty Retention and Development

Auburn has some of the most gifted and giving faculty that can be found at any university. It is important that we promote an environment that retains our best faculty and supports the development of all faculty.

A committee appointed by the University Senate will develop recommendations for the Provost's Office and may include some or all of the following:

21) *Faculty study opportunities*

Development and implementation of a faculty study policy will encourage further faculty skill development. Very few faculty members have had the opportunity for a study leave, and Auburn is very atypical in this respect. Our policy should allow

faculty to take one semester every 7th year at full pay or two semesters at half pay. With the large number of faculty that would be eligible based on national standards, interim policies need to be developed to address the backlog over time.

22) *Faculty positions*

We should increase the number of faculty positions for those departments that are 20 percent or more above the norm for student credit hour production.

23) *Faculty salaries*

The Auburn campus must maintain faculty salaries, in general, at national norms based on merit. The Auburn at Montgomery campus must maintain faculty salaries, in general, at regional norms based on merit.

24) *Post-tenure review*

Make composite annual reviews the trigger point to implement full post-tenure review. For example, post-tenure review is triggered if a faculty member has two unsatisfactory annual evaluations within a five-year period.

25) *Faculty consulting*

Encourage faculty consulting and annually recognize engaged faculty who are contributing to professional organizations, business and industry, state and federal agencies, etc.

26) *Biggio Center for Teaching Excellence*

All new tenure track faculty with teaching assignments on the Auburn campus will be expected to work with and participate in the opportunities offered by the Biggio Center for Teaching Excellence. Faculty with classroom teaching evaluations below departmental averages or who have deficiencies based on peer review would be expected to work with the Center to develop teaching improvement plans. Auburn at Montgomery will design and implement a training program to foster teaching excellence.

27) *New professorships*

Eighty new professorships with a stipend of \$12,500 annually will be developed for support of existing faculty. (Please see #46 for additional details).

Employee Retention & Development

Auburn must constantly make available educational opportunities for all employees. Most organizations outside of academia require annual training with the view that education is important to their business or agency.

It is important that Auburn maintain an environment that retains our best employees and supports the development of all employees. A committee appointed by the University Senate, the Staff Council and the Administrative and Professional Assembly will develop recommendations and may include some or all of the following:

28) *On-line courses*

On-line credit courses will be made available to employees as part of our existing policies. Any additional costs will be incurred centrally.

29) *Continuing education*

Fifty, on-line continuing education courses (from a few hours to several days) will be developed. Completion of these courses will comprise a portion of the annual review process.

30) *Spanish language training*

On-line Spanish language training will be made available to all employees at no cost.

31) *Extension employees*

For Extension employees, a complete on-line master's degree will be developed that is appropriate for our outreach responsibilities.

32) *English as a second language*

Provide English as a Second Language (ESL) electronically via our Extension offices for the growing Hispanic population in Alabama.

33) *Staff recognition program*

Develop a strong staff recognition program that is based on ideas to make Auburn more efficient. For this effort to be taken seriously, the cash awards need to be up to \$20,000.

34) *Staff salaries*

The Auburn campus must maintain staff salaries, in general, at national norms based on merit. The Auburn at Montgomery campus must maintain staff salaries, in general, at regional and/or local norms based on merit.

Infrastructure & Facilities

There is a tremendous amount of pride at Auburn in our buildings and grounds. Approximately \$600 million in additional new facilities are either under construction, being planned or have been conceptually approved by the Trustees. Following are directives to continue to upgrade our physical infrastructure or improve the process by which infrastructure decisions are made.

35) *Priority framework for campus facilities*

As we move forward, we need to develop a priority framework that is open and transparent for new facilities, renovation and infrastructure. The campus master plan for both campuses will be fully discussed with all constituents on an annual basis and these constituents will be afforded the opportunity for input. This discussion is important to determine the placement of specific projects in the appropriate categories listed below:

▪ Top priorities:

Top priority projects are those that simply must be done. If no private funding is available, then Auburn must be willing to fully fund the amount. Some discussion on deviation from our standard 50 percent private investment for naming opportunities should be addressed.

▪ Key priorities:

Key priorities are those projects that are clearly needed, but ones in which we would expect 50 percent private investment.

▪ Enhanced priorities:

Enhanced priorities are those projects where an opportunity exists with the expectation that they be fully funded from external sources.

36) *Sustainability*

Develop and adopt “green building” or LEED guidelines for new construction and renovations.

37) *Information technology*

Develop a plan and cost analysis for a new information technology facility that would, among other projects, foster creation of a completely wireless campus.

38) *Campus security*

Develop a campus security plan, including additional facilities if needed, to better protect students, faculty, staff, visitors and campus resources.

39) *Health Science Center*

Auburn has many of the component disciplines that address healthcare, including food and nutrition, kinesiology, nursing, pharmacy, psychology, family and child development, etc. A study will be done to assess the creation of a Health Science Center (without a medical school) to develop new methods of healthcare delivery.

Alumni Engagement

Auburn alumni are very special and willing to assist in numerous ways. A committee appointed by the Auburn Alumni Association and the Office of Alumni Affairs will offer recommendations on ways alumni can help advance Auburn and may include some or all of the following three important goals:

40) *High school recognition programs*

Auburn often does not have the staff needed to participate in all high school recognition programs around the state and region. The Alumni Association will organize the participation of its membership in these programs, sending a powerful message about Auburn to high school teachers, principals, students and their parents. The Auburn at Montgomery Alumni Association will organize the participation of its membership in such programs in central Alabama.

41) *International chapters*

The Auburn Alumni Association will establish three new international chapters each year.

42) *Student scholarships*

The Auburn Alumni Association will commit to a plan to increase student scholarship by 10 percent, adding approximately 400 scholarships.

Development Campaign

Auburn has done a wonderful job in its current comprehensive campaign. Now is the time to plan and execute our next fundraising effort, according to the following benchmarks:

43) *Timeline*

Plans for the next campaign should be developed by April 2009.

44) *Increase student scholarships*

The campaign must contain a goal for a substantial increase in student scholarships. On the Auburn campus, our goal should be 7,000 students with an average scholarship of \$5,000 annually. Our goal should be 200 students on the Montgomery campus.

45) *Unrestricted funds*

The campaign should include a new fundraising category for “unrestricted” funds, making \$500,000 available annually for flexibility for departments, colleges and schools.

46) *New professorships*

The campaign should create 80 new professorships for existing faculty with exceptional merit. The salary support should be approximately \$12,500 annually. This initiative could be viewed as a key component of a faculty retention program (#27) and involves both students and private support.

Image & Reputation

Auburn should consider a number of options to enhance our image and reputation.

47) *Comprehensive communications campaign*

Develop and implement a comprehensive campaign that promotes Auburn as an institution (the Auburn brand), emphasizing Auburn as a top destination for students and its contribution to the economic health and overall well-being of the state, region and nation.

48) *Marketing campaign for top academic programs*

Develop and implement a plan to annually market those academic programs that are nationally or regionally ranked.

49) *Attract visiting distinguished professors*

Recruit two outstanding faculty members with national reputations and research records each year to serve as visiting distinguished professors.

50) *Attract retired CEOs and executives*

Develop a program that would consistently attract and place well-known and distinguished retired executives from various fields in the classroom.

International Engagement

As a university, we need to strengthen and increase our international engagement. There are great examples of excellence within various departments, but our engagement is uneven across campus. There are several issues for us to address:

51) *Study abroad*

Approximately 10 percent of our students are currently engaged in study abroad, which is better than national averages. We should set a goal that 25 percent of our students at the Auburn campus and 10 percent from the Montgomery campus receive this experience.

52) *International graduate students*

The Auburn and Montgomery campuses should together increase the number of international graduate students by 50 percent.

53) *Faculty study and work abroad*

Perhaps as part of our study leave program for faculty, we need a structured, university program that encourages faculty to work and study internationally.

Miscellaneous

54) *Reassess Outreach & Continuing Education*

The outreach and continuing education component of our mission needs to be reassessed. (This does not include the Cooperative Extension System.) At most land grant universities, and Auburn would follow a similar view, outreach is the non-agricultural extension of the university to the citizens of the state and beyond. Some typical activities may include a special cultural program, library sharing with rural communities, small business development centers, etc.

Auburn should view outreach and continuing education as a process to “do good” but to also extend our “brand” to all types of agencies, corporations, major foundations,

etc. Well done outreach and continuing education is both profitable and greatly expands our reach and impact as an institution.

55) Establish Sustainability Goals

There is rapidly growing national interest in the concept of sustainability, much greater and from broader segments of society than the environmental movement of the 1970s. Auburn needs to establish specific goals for sustainability based on the metrics that have been developed nationally.

56) Maintain Ethnic Diversity Standards

Auburn must maintain a strong commitment to ethnic diversity with standards developed to ensure faculty, staff and student diversity. Possible programs include a joint minority recruitment program on both campuses, hiring additional senior level minority faculty, and development of a Diversity Research Institute to provide leadership in diversity-related research.

57) New Model for the Honors College

The Auburn Honors College needs significant help for future growth of top academic students. There are many different models for “honors,” and we should incorporate some of the newer ideas into the Auburn model. Some examples are the selective use of study abroad, cultural tours, various types of capstone or summary research projects, service learning, etc. Based on a well-developed plan, with a Dean leading the College, we must add additional support centrally.

58) Auburn – Auburn at Montgomery Collaboration

The Auburn and Montgomery campuses currently collaborate on a small number of joint degree programs, such as the master’s in nursing and the doctorate in public policy. We should improve joint academic collaboration in other selected majors and degrees. A committee comprised of Deans, department heads and faculty leaders from both campuses will offer recommendations on those programs that should be considered. In addition, we should consider an admissions process that allows interested students whose Auburn admission has been deferred to enroll at the Montgomery campus and matriculate in Auburn.

59) Adopt Standards for Athletics

Auburn has established a strong tradition for athletics. On the Auburn campus, we should formally adopt standards for our future:

- Full compliance with NCAA rules.

First Draft

- Graduation success rates for student athletes will be in the top 20 land grant colleges that participate in Division I athletics for each sport.
- Maintain financial self-sufficiency for the athletic department.
- Ensure that all athletic events are well planned and viewed by the public as high quality relative to ticketing, parking, traffic control, concessions and safety.
- Finish in the top 10 percent of Division I institutions in the annual NACDA (National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics) Directors' Cup standings, which measure athletic success in all sports.

On the Montgomery campus, we should pursue the following for our future:

- Assess the desirability of moving from NAIA to NCAA Division II.
- Increase graduation rates for student athletes by 5 percent.
- Increase development efforts to reduce support of athletics from general university revenues.

60) *Develop Accountability Guidelines*

Auburn needs to define the metrics of accountability for each important constituent group. The obvious groups we are referring to include regional and specialized accreditation bodies; various state and federal bodies with responsibility for higher education; auditing bodies; and the Auburn family.

61) *Policies & Procedures Review*

All universities have multiple sets of policies and procedures that have originated in various manners and at various times in the life of the institution. We need to have a broad based comprehensive review of all existing policies and procedures. Those policies that are necessary for compliance with federal or state laws as well as Board of Trustees policies and directives will be clearly retained. However, those that originated internally should be reviewed for relevance. The goal is to ensure that our policies are current and that they add value to the future operations of Auburn.

62) *Supervisory Reviews*

All supervisory positions should be reviewed on an annual basis, but every five years a comprehensive review with broad input will occur. This review would include both academic and non-academic positions.