PRIORITIES FOR EXCELLENCE

The Penn State Strategic Plan
2009-10 through 2013-14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The full plan can be accessed at:
http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/strategic_planning/strategic_planning_brochure/index.htm

The Context for Strategic Planning at Penn State

Penn State, with its roots in the modest Farmers’ High School, has grown into a large and tremendously diverse university. It is today among the most complex universities in the nation, with a broad array of responsibilities, physical locations, and stakeholders. Penn State has blossomed, especially in recent decades, and is ranked among the top tier universities in the world.

Penn State is a research university of great accomplishment, nationally and globally, with a faculty of great distinction that contributes enormously to the body of knowledge and creativity for social and economic betterment. Penn State exists fundamentally to educate and serve our students—a commitment we must always remember—but what makes us different from most of the other 4,000 higher education institutions in the United States is our quest for discovery of the knowledge and creativity that we disseminate to our students and, in many cases, they help us to accomplish. This quest for discovery reaches across every campus of the University, and our standing as a major research institution is a critically important reason why students, both graduate and undergraduate, choose to study at Penn State. The translation of research and knowledge to the public is the basis for most of the outreach services the University provides.

These are challenging times for higher education across the United States. Nearly every aspect of higher education is being impacted by global, national, and state economic recession. In many ways, the current turmoil has brought into sharper focus the myriad of challenges facing the University. Shifting demographics, rising costs of operation, a changing competitive landscape, reductions in state appropriations, pressures for accountability, and widespread economic downturn characterize the environment in which Penn State operates. These pressures will clearly necessitate changes, and require the University to find new ways to improve teaching and learning, advance discovery and creativity, and serve our many constituents—while becoming more efficient and effective.

Despite obvious challenges, these are also times of opportunity in which we must move forward strategically, recognizing that we always have finite resources. We must innovate. We must prioritize. We must continue to think boldly. A key will be creating a sustainable university, not just in conventional environmental terms, but in a wide array of resource dimensions, including
fiscal sustainability. Penn State can do more than withstand the current challenges; it can emerge as an even stronger institution.

Penn State will clearly rise and thrive on the ingenuity and commitment of all of its stakeholders, as it always has. Yet good will, commitment, and hard work are not enough. If there is a single linchpin in our consideration of what Penn State must do in the coming years, it is that priorities must be set in the ongoing pursuit of excellence. Penn State is a very efficient institution that has accomplished great things with limited resources, but the University needs to think deliberately about the choices that it makes—including, perhaps, to shrink, consolidate, or eliminate some programs and activities—in order to build on areas of existing strength and invest in promising new ideas.

This plan is about setting priorities that will enable the University to continue on its trajectory of excellence. Some strategies are cost-saving in nature, and will serve to make resources available for other uses, including reductions in the rate of tuition growth. Other strategies are cost-neutral and mainly require shifting emphases or changing the ways in which we go about doing our work. And some strategies for excellence require new sources of funding; that funding will obviously be in short supply during the next few years. Many of the more costly strategies will not be possible to effectuate in the near term, but will nonetheless retain a high priority for investment as economic conditions improve. The resources to fund high priority strategies must be made available by doing less of something else, or doing it more efficiently and effectively. We must always be ready to seize opportunities to leverage University resources during what will likely be a period of substantial federal and state stimulus programs during the next few years. The University must balance current fiscal realities with continued optimism and our vision for the future. By setting priorities wisely and making smart choices, Penn State can continue to accomplish great things.

**Vision, Mission, and Values**

**VISION**

Penn State will be a global university, committed to excellence, with a passion for creating knowledge and educating students to be leaders for a better tomorrow.

**MISSION**

Penn State is a multi-campus public research university that educates students from Pennsylvania, the nation and the world, and improves the well-being and health of individuals and communities through integrated programs of teaching, research, and service.

Our instructional mission includes undergraduate, graduate, professional, and continuing education offered through both resident instruction and online delivery. Our educational programs are enriched by the cutting edge knowledge, diversity, and creativity of our faculty, students, and staff.
Our research, scholarship, and creative activity promote human and economic development, global understanding, and progress in professional practice through the expansion of knowledge and its applications in the natural and applied sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and the professions.

As Pennsylvania’s land-grant university, we provide unparalleled access and public service to support the citizens of the Commonwealth. We engage in collaborative activities with industrial, educational, and agricultural partners here and abroad to generate, disseminate, integrate, and apply knowledge that is valuable to society.

VALUES

- Education is the foundation of an enlightened, productive, and prosperous society.
- The best education produces knowledgeable, critical, creative, and ethical students.
- The quality of the intellectual life of the University is fundamental to success.
- The integration of teaching, research, and service enhances all three and the capacity of the University to serve the needs of communities—local, national, and global.
- The dignity of all individuals is affirmed, equality of opportunity is pursued, and diversity is fostered.
- Tradition is honored, innovation is embraced, and positive change is valued.
- The efficient and effective use of limited University resources benefits everyone associated with Penn State and those we serve.
- Environmental sustainability is researched, taught, promoted and practiced.
- The safety and security of all members of the University community are essential to a positive educational, workplace, and residential environment.
- Faculty, staff, students, and administration working together create a foundation for greater accomplishment, including our commitment to the concept of “one university, geographically dispersed.”

A Summary of Goals and Strategies

This plan builds on the theme of prioritization for excellence, offering strategies for each of seven
goals. Achieving these goals will require collaboration among administrators, faculty, staff, and students from academic and administrative units across Penn State.

- **Enhance student success.** Penn State’s commitment to students is at the core of the University’s mission, and structures, policies, and practices must facilitate student success. Strategies to enhance student success include: expanding learning outcomes assessment and reviewing General Education; increasing and promoting opportunities for students to engage in research and active learning including greater participation in professional internship and co-op experiences; improving key student transition experiences such as beginning college, entrance to major, change of campus, and launching of careers; encouraging better advising and student ownership of education; promoting and supporting high quality graduate education; and assisting students to explore ethical issues in their professional and personal lives.

- **Advance academic excellence and research prominence.** Academic excellence is the essential attribute of a world-class research university. The attraction and development of outstanding faculty, staff, and students will continue to be a high priority. As we consider setting priorities that will drive decision-making, we will build on the University’s strengths, investing in boundary-spanning fields of great societal importance. A rigorous and targeted review process for both academic and administrative programs can identify possible mergers and re-alignments to provide critical mass, greater focus, and operating efficiencies. Increasing private philanthropy must continue to be a priority for advancing academic excellence and research prominence. Enhancing the College of Medicine’s research and clinical capabilities in Central Pennsylvania will increase the quantity and level of medical care and biomedical research in the region that represents the greatest share of Penn State employees and their dependents.

- **Realize Penn State’s potential as a global university.** We expect that over the next ten to twenty years, the top tier of research universities will be those able to work effectively in a global context. Penn State must maximize the return on its investment in international programs, encourage globally oriented partnerships within the University, focus on a more limited and selective set of overseas partnerships, expand opportunities for education abroad, embed internationally focused topics and experiences into instruction, increase international student enrollments, and make better use of the talents and perspectives of international visiting scholars and our own Fulbright faculty and graduate student scholars.

- **Maintain access and affordability and enhance diversity.** With 24 campuses Penn State plays an important role in providing higher education access to the Commonwealth’s diverse citizenry. The University should continue to re-emphasize its 2+2 enrollment model, allow the campus tuition differential to grow, and evaluate student housing options, critical facilities needs, and student services availability at our Commonwealth Campuses. We must sustain our investment in the For the Future campaign. This will allow for the identification of new sources of need-based student financial aid, critically
important to the mission of the University. Also of equal importance is the need to continue to make progress and build on the Framework to Foster Diversity.

- **Serve the people of the Commonwealth and beyond.** The University should continue to selectively pursue advanced delivery technologies and strategic alliances among multiple units and programs—including Cooperative Extension, continuing education, the World Campus, conferences and institutes, public broadcasting, and the colleges and campuses—to position the University to serve Pennsylvania and the world. Strategies will include using the campuses as key delivery nodes, sharing faculty, staff, and programs, expanding programming for non-traditional students, re-missioning some campuses if necessary, consolidating specialized services, taking a more entrepreneurial approach to service delivery, and developing a more internationally oriented concept of service. We know that the trend toward globalization in all areas—economic, political, social and cultural—will continue; service will increasingly involve local, national, and international dimensions as more of life is influenced by global-scale events and interactions.

- **Use Technology to Expand Access and Opportunities.** Penn State’s IT infrastructure is now the foundation for almost every aspect of teaching, research, service, and outreach. As the University sets priorities for excellence, smart and effective decisions about (and investments in) technology will continue to be crucial. The University will grow the World Campus, invest in a robust and flexible IT infrastructure for teaching, research, and administration, rebalance centralized/dispersed services, protect the integrity and security of the IT system, and continue to support the central role of University Libraries in the educational enterprise.

- **Control costs and generate additional efficiencies.** Penn State is one of the most efficient universities in the nation and remains strongly committed to maintaining excellence in a time of limited resources. Quality will not be compromised, nor will our high standards of excellence and service. Understanding that the University is its people, we will continue to support the professional development of our faculty and staff and remain committed to fostering a workplace that values and respects the contributions of all its members. This commitment to make the best use of our resources will involve innovative and flexible strategies such as improving instructional productivity, better utilizing instructional and research facilities, reducing the rate of increase of health care costs, developing frameworks for greater budgeting and staffing flexibility, modifying central recycling and introducing investment models for new initiatives, capping University allocations to Outreach, and promoting Continuous Quality Improvement and rewarding innovation. Penn State will embrace the many dimensions of sustainability that will position the University as a national and international leader.

Pursuit of these goals using the strategies outlined in the plan, with strong leadership from those in positions to promote change, can produce success in achieving an even more student-centered educational process, an enhanced reputation for innovation and discovery, a global presence, and a more efficiently operating University that will continue to be accessible and affordable to a
large segment of the populations we serve. Improved productivity and effectiveness across all segments of the University, working smarter and innovating, will be absolutely essential if Penn State is to achieve its own vision and provide a model for higher education in the future.

**Implementing the Plan and Measuring Progress**

A matrix in the strategic plan identifies the prospective leaders responsible for pursuing the actions required to implement the strategies associated with each goal, the projected start date for various strategies, a general indication of the prospective fiscal impacts of strategies, and selected measures of performance. Progress will be monitored and reported to the Board of Trustees, President’s Council, the Academic Leadership Council, the Faculty Senate, and other key stakeholders on a regular basis as appropriate.

When the goals of this plan have been achieved, Penn State will be closer to realizing the vision of being a global university, committed to excellence, with a passion for creating knowledge and educating leaders for a better tomorrow. We will have thought boldly and set priorities for excellence; we will have become a more student-centered University, we will have invested and built upon our areas of strength in fields of societal importance. We will have expanded access to knowledge and education to the citizens of Pennsylvania, the nation, and the world. We will have streamlined processes, increased productivity, and become even more efficient and better stewards of our fiscal and physical resources. We will have met the challenges and will have emerged a stronger university.

“Priorities for Excellence” The Penn State Strategic Plan can be viewed at: [http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/strategic_planning/strategic_planning_brochure/index.htm](http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/strategic_planning/strategic_planning_brochure/index.htm).