



**Arkansas State University Strategic Planning Project
Steering Committee Launch Meeting
March 6, 2019**

Summary Notes

Arkansas State University – Jonesboro launched its new strategic planning project at a Steering Committee meeting of university leaders representing faculty, staff, students and the administration. Chancellor Kelly Dampousse, who assumed office in 2017, convened the planning effort as a critical initiative that will create a vision for the next decade and strategic goals, implementation plan and supporting budget framework for the next five years. This is a pivotal time for the university, the second largest in the state, at a time of notable growth in research and online education, other new administrative and academic leadership and regional economic expansion; however, declining on-location enrollment and state funding as well as other demographic trends present challenges to be addressed. University stakeholders have indicated their enthusiasm for a planning process that brings focus, direction and differentiation, strengthens the institution's identity, is well-communicated and builds community. The last strategic plan was adopted in 2004.

The chancellor appointed a 16-person Steering Committee, which will make recommendations for the plan's new framework in an inclusive, transparent and highly engaging process in which faculty, staff, student, alumni and community stakeholders will help shape the future through a variety of activities (such as focus groups and town halls) as the plan is developed. Len Frey, CFO, is the chair of the Steering Committee. Other members are: *Lynita Cooksey (Provost), Thilla Sivakumaran (Executive Director of Global Engagement and Outreach), Terry Mohajir (VC of Intercollegiate Athletics and Athletic Director), Bryan Terry (VC for Enrollment Management), Maurice Gipson (VC for Diversity and Community Engagement), Jason Penry (VC for University Advancement), Martha Spack (Dean of Students), Tom Risch (Vice Provost for Research), Rob Gordon (President of Staff Senate), Loretta McGregor (President of Faculty Senate), Bill Smith (Associate VC for Marketing and Communications), Will McLean (Chair of the Chairs Council), Susan Hanrahan (dean of the College of Nursing and Health Professions), Russ Hannah (Associate VC for Business and Finance) and Drew Roberson (Student Government Association).* (Terry and Loretta were unable to attend this meeting.) The



project is being facilitated by The Napa Group, a Northern California-based firm specializing in higher education strategy, leadership and organizational design.

During the launch meeting, the Steering Committee participated in a series of interactive exercises and discussions resulting in overarching themes that will provide the framework for further discussion and engagement with the university community. In small group and general discussions, members evaluated the changing educational environment and expectations of students and employers, particularly in the state and region; conducted a situational analysis; envisioned the “possibilities” for A-State; and engaged in a “design thinking” exercise to identify “big ideas” and scenarios for growth. The six strategic themes will be shared with the campus community over the next several weeks for additional input and feedback. A website documenting the plan’s discussions and activities is also being developed so that stakeholders can follow the highlights and details of the planning process, which is expected to wrap up in December 2019. Implementation of the new strategic plan will begin in January 2020.

In following up to the Steering Committee after the meeting, the chancellor cited these high-level takeaways for future conversations:

1. The world is changing and A-State needs to evolve along with it (or even in advance of it). There is also a desire among A-State faculty/staff to actually change.
2. The university has substantial assets (gifted faculty/staff, ASUCQ, hotel, online, NYIT, plentiful housing, etc.) that should have further investment and be promoted to highlight what makes A-State distinctive.
3. Planning will require some hard decisions along the way – by adding new programs it will also be necessary to consider how the institution might reduce/eliminate programs (academic and non-academic).

Following is a summary of the Steering Committee discussions.

Session 1 - Opportunities and Risks (by individual)

Opportunities	Risks
Wonderful foundation	Much happening – need to focus
Define a solid path	Enrollment-driven so health of the institution depends on competitiveness
Serve students in this region	Not distinguishing us from our peers
Gain a deep understanding of where we fit – at our core and regionally	If we attach too much to our past, we won't change, and if we attach too much to our region, we won't be aware of other things we need to do
Growth of new academic programs and what's unique to our campus	Not being nimble and responsive enough
Not trying to be everything to everybody – narrow focus	Not trying to be everything to everybody – missing opportunity
Take advantage of intellectual capital on campus through research and create good policies	Being afraid of risk
Define programs of excellence	Tuition driven/declining enrollment
Show that faculty and staff are appreciated and valued	Demographics are arguing against us (because number of freshmen are declining)
Build on being a university with a personal touch and feel	Not keeping up with the quality of life on surrounding campuses
Establish a vision to decide who we are and pursue that with vigor	Continue to pursue a growth model that increases debt and hinders our ability to do what we should be doing
Entrepreneurial spirit and enthusiasm to rise to the next level	Fear of making that leap because we know we need to be intentional
Define a vision over the next 5 years	Not doing that puts our financial model at risk
Potential to grow on the modalities we have	Not willing to leverage them and make a leap of faith
Location	Not understanding our uniqueness and not aligning student recruitment accordingly

Session 2 - Situational Analysis Exercise

(Individuals were asked to identify the top 3 most critical factors to A-State's future in the following areas key to the university's future, then engaged in small group discussions to consolidate and prioritize them.)

- **University, Population, Industry, Automation, Economies, Disruption, Education, Stakeholders**

University:

University: *Top Three Factors* -> (1) financial sustainability/what's our business model going forward, (2) developing areas of distinction and (3) responsiveness to change

Discussion points:

- Need to define who we are as a university in Arkansas
- By strategically selecting areas of distinction, we may also deemphasize others
- Must be data-driven in those decisions (because we've often chased growth)
- Areas on campus that are currently immature that with focus and investment could be robust

Population: *Top Three Factors* -> (1) changing composition of students – demand and attitudes (different paths to degrees), (2) pipeline and (3) innovation

Discussion points:

- Education is more accessible; people aren't that place bound and we're competing in that; Delta has changed vastly – the "regional" definition must get bigger (e.g., more online)
- We're also in a state with 50% of students going to college so need to reach out to show these students our opportunity

Industry: *Top Three Factors* → (1) what do businesses need from us, (2) partnerships and (3) automation – how will automation impact the industry in our region

Discussion points:

- Industries potentially coming here need the right talent for their workforce
- Inconsistent academic quality of high school graduates
- Industry in flux – from conveying systems to robots – rapid pace of change

Automation: *Top Three Factors* → (1) positive opportunity to create new types of jobs/flexibility/workforce development, (2) embrace the rapid pace of change – it's here and (3) use automation to drive our curriculum, responsiveness, adaptability

Discussion points:

- One degree isn't going to fulfill a graduate's entire career, so continuing learning and micro-credentialing as re-occurring business
- Smaller institutions have greater capacity for change

Economies: *Top Three Factors* → (1) less fed/state funding, (2) college affordability and (3) job market

Discussion point:

- Core question – “is college worth it?”

Disruption: *Top Three Factors* → (1) political, (2) devalued degree and (3) technology

Education: *Top Three Factors* → (1) demand, (2) pipeline and (3) innovation and competition

Discussion points:

- Students are shopping and looking for what degrees we are offering that are job-related
- Pipeline question affects a lot of things – preparation of people in the pipeline, financial issues

Stakeholders: *Top Factors* -> (1) students/learners, (2) alumni, (3) government/ state legislators, (4) local/global (employers), (5) faculty and staff and (6) who's next?

Session 3: Design Thinking Exercise

(On a worksheet, individuals described in words and pictures their concepts of A-State in 5 years, then in small groups discussed and aligned their thinking around the top 3 characteristics of that future view.)

(Team Howl – Susan, Russ, Lynita, Bill) Agile, sustainable place focused on relevant education

1. Areas of distinction – data analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital literacy
2. Responsive budgeting
3. Creative-focused curriculum

(Team Reng – Will, Drew, Len, Martha) A comprehensive university supporting the traditional and online modality education

1. Program evaluation and alignment based on need and data
2. Commit to the vision
3. Resource alignment
 - Staff/faculty
 - Community
 - Funding
 - Facilities

(Team Kays – Thilla, Jason, Bryan) We will be a nimble institution with a core mission to meet the needs of a diverse, global society

1. Embrace risk takers
2. Increase connectivity outside university walls
3. Design and execute plan
4. **Be Bold**

(Team Scarlet – Rom, Rob, Kelly) Educational and economic driver for the state and region that attracts/retains people

1. Excellence/distinction – academic programs
2. Create wealth for community
3. Community (home)
 - Arts

- Athletics
- Diversity

Session 4: “New Thinking” Discussion (Full Group)

In reviewing the common themes and topics across all these discussions today (as summarized on flipcharts), the Steering Committee developed the following high-level strategic directives for A-State. These themes will be shared with the campus community for feedback and perspectives over the next several weeks, and the results of these discussions will be considered when the Steering Committee next meets in summer to build the plan’s strategic framework. It was agreed that an overarching objective of this process is to clarify, develop and promote “*What Arkansas State will be known for*”—

Description: Len will describe the focus group process.

Template review and discussion.

- ***Review the questions and be prepared to share your perspectives.***
- ***Janis will walk through the focus group dynamics.***
- ***Following the discussion, Napa will complete a template for each focus group.***

1. Student Success (core to ASU’s mission)

- Recruit
- Retain
- Employ
- Alumni
- Diverse
- Nontraditional

[to note: the reality of state funding formula]

1. **We envision a shifting profile of students at Arkansas State including more non-traditional or lifetime learners. Comments, thoughts?**

2. As we think about different student profiles, what are some of the things we need to ensure that these students are successful (e.g., more internship opportunities with regional businesses, interdisciplinary studies, other)?

2. Boldly invest in programs that create academic differentiation supported with financial practices that flex as needs change

- Reimagine General Ed
- Other specific areas (e.g., AI) including how to achieve them via partnerships
 - Programs in engineering & computer science are “early wins”
- Online (global) or residential identity
- Identify and prioritize other existing areas of differentiation

1. Share your perspectives on how the undergraduate curriculum should balance online vs place-based learning.
2. How market driven should we be?

3. Increase and effectively communicate ASU’s critical economic role and impact on the local community

- Gaps in careers/graduates
- Opportunities for growth and messaging
- Rethink (IP policies) → enhance entrepreneurship and transform the region (e.g., agribusiness) to attract investors

1. Share perspectives on Arkansas State’s economic impact on the community and what are the most effective means to communicate this?
2. Should we consider a more progressive entrepreneurship culture?

4. Invest in research activities that leverage ASU’s capabilities and provide solutions to changing labor and economic markets

1. Facilities
 - Computer science/AI (engineering)
 - Biological science/agriculture
 - Undergrad research → philanthropy
2. * Agribusiness <--> biotech <--> AI – mutually reinforcing interdisciplinary opportunities

3. [need to address teaching loads to promote more research time/innovation]
1. Should ASU have a role in solving the grand challenges – e.g., labor, economics, wind, water, and if so, what areas of research should we prioritize?

5. Position the University in both global and regional markets

- Leverage “Mexico”
 - Expansion in Malta, China, Japan, India, Sri Lanka
 - Study abroad – sell better to students and raise dollars to invest strategically
 - Online students can participate one time a year
 - Internship + study abroad + research – a rich mix
 - *Relationship between Gen Ed, global citizens and philanthropic support – how these can be mutually leveraged and sustained through fundraising
 - “Humanics” (a new educational focus that prepares students for careers with a combination of skills blending humanities and high-tech)
1. What’s the balance between global and regional positioning? During the next 5 years where should we be focused?
 2. Should we leverage our current global positioning in Mexico to expand to opportunities in Malta, China, Japan, etc.?
 3. Should study abroad be a key component of every ASU graduate’s education?

6. Continue to buildout ASU’s important cultural leadership in the community

- Cultural center for community
 - Continuing ed (short courses) -> lifelong learning
 - Cultural leadership — art museum (only one in Arkansas)
 - Quality of life in Jonesboro
 - Key signature events – and more selectively
1. As ASU contemplates its continued cultural leadership in this community, we’re thinking about a culture center, cultural leadership and signature events. Where does this region need to be to remain relevant as a cultural center for the region?

Consultants Observations: *In assessing these priorities and opportunities, it might be important to further define and increase and communicate ASU's critical economic role and impact on the local community and its current position in the global space, rather than adding numerous new initiatives to these themes. The discussion about AI at the retreat underscores that some of the university's assets are not universally understood or optimally leveraged.*

Next Steps:

Between now and the end of May, the following activities are scheduled on the project plan:

1. **Prioritize the strategic themes:** Kelly and Len as co-leads of the project should prioritize the strategic themes. Conduct an exercise mapping these the 6 themes and perhaps some of the associated elements against an “impact” and “feasibility” grid. In other words, make an eyeball assessment of which of these are high impact and high feasibility as well as those which would be low impact and low feasibility. Identify which of these directives and associated elements are building on existing institutional assets and which of these are building out entirely new capabilities.
2. **Communications:** Following this Steering Committee meeting, a community-wide update from the Chancellor and “go-live” for the strategic planning website (March-April 2019)
3. **Stakeholder engagement:** Conduct a series of internal discussions/focus groups and town hall meetings (with faculty, staff, students, administrators and others) facilitated by Steering Committee members to further develop the strategic themes (April-May)
 - These activities will center on key questions for each theme.
 - Facilitators will be provided material and coaching by The Napa Group consultants.
 - This strategy of focus groups and town halls delivers opportunities for dialogue in which moderators solicit feedback, but do so in a way that asserts established direction.
4. **Steering Committee #2** to be scheduled (late May-early June)
 - a. Stakeholder engagement reports and input will be integrated into a revised document that will become the core focus of this meeting.

