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President's Monthly Report to Campus February 2018

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February 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back, and whether you are faculty or staff, I hope you enjoyed time with family and were able to reflect a bit on the events of the past year and directions for the coming semester. I know I was able to experience the peace and reflection that comes with five feet of snow in three days. I also now know the meaning of cabin fever. Seriously though, as we move into this year we are really going to be focused on implementation of the strategy that we have spent the last two years discussing and framing. In that respect, I believe it will be one of the most exciting and challenging years yet. It is clear that in the move forward and given our timetable, we need to be succinct about our primary objectives, how all the pieces fit together, the structure we want to build and the mechanism we will use to be inclusive, and coordinate, communicate, and assure progress toward our goals. As such, in discussions with the Transition Leadership Team (TLT) and Cabinet, we have settled on five overarching objectives: (1) Movement to a flatter, integrated, cluster-based organizational structure and implementation of the Four Tools, (2) Retention and Persistence, (3) Sustainability/Thriving financially, academically, and reputationally, (4) Recruitment and Enrollment, and (5) Equipping our students to lead and thrive in the 21st century global economy. These objectives are interrelated but are highlighted individually because they are foundational to our success as a university and we would like to structure our activities around these common goals. All this is really an outgrowth of discussions across campus and the desire for a manageable approach to organizing and prioritizing our activities.

In that light, it is important to establish a project-based approach (selection, definition of the challenge, current process analysis, data evaluation, desired process analysis, and implementation) that tracks and communicates these ongoing activities across the campus and operationalizes our transformation timeline. With the recent launch of Cluster Connect and ongoing developments in MS Office365 Teams, we believe, with some additional development and integration, that we have the tools to track and coordinate these endeavors. As part of this process, the recent January Jubilee, with discussions around the 6 themes (learning, relationships, expectations, alignment, improvement, and leadership) from the book The Undergraduate Experience as well as the ongoing discussion around the four habits of mind (purposeful communication, problem solving, integrated perspectives, and self-regulated learning) provide some context for making decisions holistically as a University as we move forward in pursuing these five overarching objectives. So it is planned that for the next few years my report each month will be organized by these objectives (starting in this report).

Aligned with all the changes we are undergoing, there are strategic actions being taken across the system. If you are not already aware, we recently received a letter from the board of trustees (addressed to all USNH institutions) noting that due to “inevitable and pressing financial challenge” (System-wide) we are to “optimize (our) own resource allocation and to engage in a strategic review of academic and administrative synergies across the System.” Our review is to “be inclusive of all academic programs”... to “efficiently and strategically reallocate resources” to assure “long-term financial health.” In addition, we should “identify academic programs with low enrollment and no significant net financial contribution” (net of overhead and associated costs).

Fortunately, we are well ahead of the curve in responding to this request, but this is suggestive that the sooner we bring together programs synergistically through clusters, the better positioned we will be to address their strategic/financial goals. This also suggests that if we think of clusters as only collections of departments (now discipline-based communities) we will be substantially off the mark. In case you are wondering, this does not
mean we plan on cutting programs and personnel based on the financial data you all have received. While that is always a possibility, I think we are on a good path if we can get everything we have discussed fully implemented with creativity and innovation. One of the steps we have taken though, is to ask the Board to approve SIPs for tenured faculty positions that may be disrupted by System-wide and University specific reallocations.

To assist us, we now have a permanent vice president for finance and administration (VPFA) and will have a new provost (hopefully starting in July). I am told there are quite a few great candidates for provost and both search committees are and have been doing an incredible job. The search for VPFA has concluded with comments from all of you, and pros and cons from the Search Committee. While there were several exceptional candidates, my conclusion was that the individual with the best skills for what we need now is Tracy Claybaugh. So I hope you will join me in welcoming her as a permanent member of our community.

Finally, as we are moving to clusters and leadership teams, you might consider whether you need a team leader. That is not always the case, but if you are concerned about having sufficient leadership and administrative support, a team leader might be part of your approach. Remember, departments are going away so the leadership and administrative support that was there will be moving more to the cluster level.

Now let’s get started on this exciting (and challenging) new year. As promised, this report is detailed based on our five objectives.

Movement to a flatter integrated cluster-based organizational structure and implementation of the Four Tools

Launched in the fall, the reinvented First Year Seminar (FYS) introduced students to the concept of “wicked problems”. Students in all sections of FYS worked to address an aspect of a “wicked problem” through a themed seminar culminating in a final project. Students presented their projects in a symposium of nearly 200 posters held in the Lamson Library during finals week. Posters were on display through the first week of January. On February 2, groups of FYS students presented their projects to the USNH Board of Trustees. Our thanks to the faculty involved in all these great seminars.

A reflective retreat was held for FYS instructors on January 8. Participants discussed alignment of current course goals with the habits of mind as Gen Ed outcomes, other outcome goals regarding information literacy, and the role of the general education coordinator in reviewing student feedback. Logistics for upcoming fall seminars were also discussed in terms of: scheduling – whether each section will consider a different “wicked problem” or if multiple sections will consider the same problem; the potential move to a four-credit model; and the effectiveness of Open Education Resources (OER). Participants discussed the best model for FYS fellows in order to accomplish structural, assessment, and delivery goals.

On January 22, faculty and staff leaders came together for a half-day of training in Lean. Introduction to Lean was provided by Dagmar Vlahos and Paul DeMello from UNH along with Josh Jarvis from Keene State. Lean is a philosophy and set of tools for redesigning processes that integrates principles of design, systems thinking, sustainability, and leadership. It is a way to focus process improvement efforts on satisfying those we serve— for us, that’s students. It fits well with the core themes covered in The Undergraduate Experience during January Jamboree. The training was attended by 35 members of the President’s Cabinet, Extended Cabinet, and TLT. This training is just the beginning; we plan to make it available to as many others as we can and we will also seek to cultivate our own set of PSU trainers in the year ahead. If you are interested in participating in future training, please contact Kristen Hersom in the Academic Affairs office.

The Provost Search Committee is receiving a very dynamic pool of applicants. The timeline for applicants was extended through January 26, 2018.
The University Reinvention Initiative (URI) process continues with the intent that we all think about our various roles on campus and consider how our various programs and Integrated Clusters can work together to further the integrated cluster vision. This effort is to support the University goals of student recruitment, retention, persistence, and graduation, and University financial sustainability. While the process was announced on November 21 with a dedicated site for data and supporting information, a revision was shared on December 29 to simplify the process for communicating strategies for innovating programs. This revised process includes a form submission relating innovative strategies to the University goals. As faculty and staff continue to plan for how innovative strategies for programs will support University goals, collaboration is strongly encouraged as we move forward together.

Since the URI process was announced, data resources have been added to the URI site, including market research data, low-enrolled course data, graduate admissions data, and graduate financial data. Throughout December, cluster faculty and staff had the opportunity to meet with Finance & Administration (F&A) staff to explore program-level financial data. As a reminder, if future clarification or discussion is desired, please reach out to F&A to schedule a follow-up session with your cluster team.

For those interested in following the overall progress, see the updated Transformation Timeline.

**Recruitment and Enrollment**

In Undergraduate Recruitment, Admissions kicked off the new 2018 calendar year running ahead in New Hampshire new first-year student applications and is working to keep pace with nonresident, new first-year student applications when compared to last January. Furthermore, while the northeast sector of the country experiences continued demographic challenges, recruitment efforts launched last spring in California, Colorado, and Virginia combined have helped to make up for a few out-of-state regions in New England experiencing a decline in application volume. In International Recruitment, a return trip was made back in the fall to Zhengzhou University in China to formalize 2+2 agreements that will aim to bring enrollments for the fall 2018 semester. PSU also made visits to other schools throughout the province of Henan and met with officials at Henan Normal University and Xinyang Normal University to continue discussions developing partnership agreements. In the works for this calendar year, PSU will host the Zhengzhou University Folk Orchestra Ensemble and Faculty and is coordinating to host a delegation from Xinyang Normal University to finalize an agreement of Education Cooperation. As for upcoming recruitment event dates, a February Open House (similar to a Fall Open House) will run on Saturday, February 24, and the Accepted Students Day events are scheduled for Friday, April 6; Monday, April 16; and Friday, April 20. This is the second year that Admissions will run the Panther for a Day visit program throughout the month of March, through which an admitted student can visit and shadow a current PSU student.

In Graduate Recruitment, registrations for fall hit 1587 compared to 1334 last fall, which represented the highest registration count observed since the 2015 Academic Year. As for spring enrollment, both the new incoming student headcount and first-semester retention will be actualized at R+30, which falls at the end of February.

In Financial Aid, the team continues to respond to requests from current student for additional resources in an effort to reduce financial barriers faced. Furthermore, an e-mail was sent to campus detailing our plans to begin offering the Granite Guarantee to eligible new first-year New Hampshire students beginning this upcoming fall in the 2018-2019 academic year. As you may recall, this program was started last year in late February by the University of New Hampshire (UNH). In mid-January, the University System of New Hampshire extended the program to both PSU and Keene State College. This program allows us the opportunity to assist even more New Hampshire students in obtaining a life-changing degree from Plymouth State University.
Furthermore, this initiative represents our commitment to remove financial barriers that may get in the way of a student’s ability to persist, succeed, and graduate from PSU.

Marketing Communications and Creative Services (MCCS) continues to work closely with the Enrollment Management team as fall and winter recruitment travel, open houses, college fairs, and financial aid awards unfold. MCCS provided new materials and social media support along with launching a redesigned, multi-part mailer to prospective students.

Retention and Persistence

The Retention-Persistence Working Group and the "Boots on the Ground" Retention Group have been working together to blend initiatives already happening on campus (sharing retention data with the campus community in January), and to help the campus community focus on high-impact retention and persistence efforts. It is clear that one-on-one efforts are the most effective; any direct or indirect contact you have with students are part of campus retention efforts. Broader current efforts are focused on changes to orientation, scaling the summer bridge programming, creating first-year cohorts for academic programming and residential hall living, increasing the number and training of student workers (and supervisors), changes in financial aid policies, and the organizing principle of the cluster initiative, which pulls them all together.

Two searches are underway for positions in Student Affairs that will advance our programmatic efforts supporting student retention and persistence. In Residential Life, a search is currently underway for assistant director of residential life, who will aid in leading our Residential Life Program and implementing our residential learning model. Additionally, a search is underway for a coordinator of student programming, who will provide leadership and advisement to the student programming board (PACE) and partner with campus stakeholders to design and implement largescale campus-wide programming for the student body.

MCCS spearheaded two campus-wide initiatives: the annual First Fire event with over 1,200 student participants and first-ever Swipe It Forward campaign, a philanthropic opportunity for students to donate a meal swipe to a fellow student in need, from the donor-funded Student Support Foundation and Sodexo.

Sustainability/Thriving Financially, Academically, and Reputationally

PSU is undergoing a monumental change; one in which we have already reaped considerable financial and recruitment benefits though the full benefits may not be realized until FY22 when we graduate the first class under the new cluster model. PSU’s commitment to making the ongoing changes necessary to become financially stable and sustainable brings numerous opportunities through URI with campus-wide program reviews, restructuring from 26 departments and three colleges to seven clusters, continuation of the consolidation of administrative services, and working collaboratively with the other USNH institutions. As for the FY18 projection update, early indicators are that we will meet the USNH Board-approved budget with a -3.1% margin after incurring the one-time strategic investment expenditures. This is in alignment with the original goal established with the Board when PSU first requested the $10.6M in strategic investment funding. Much of the BOT investment is allowing us to make structural changes while dealing with long-delayed deferred maintenance issues, thus leveraging both funding sources while increasing efficiency of space utilization. Net Tuition and Auxiliary Fee Revenue is projected to be down $2.7M from budget, due in part to undergraduate enrollment down by 75 students and graduate enrollment down by 39 students. This retention issue is currently being addressed on campus by a task force and the move to clusters that builds a stronger sense of community. This revenue shortfall is projected to be balanced this year by holding some positions open and a projected reduction in supplies and services expenses.
In Development and Planned Giving, Col. Craig Souza ’87 formalized his bequest intention, including a “green dream home” with stunning views of campus and the White Mountains—present value of $822,450. Craig is also funding an annual scholarship for students who have demonstrated a selfless or heroic act. Bonnie Still, widow of alumnus Charles Still ’78 ’80G created a named scholarship for students who are majoring in accounting. Guy Wisinski ’85 created an endowed scholarship in his family’s name in honor of John P. Clark ’71 and the five members of Guy’s family who are PSU alumni. We are pleased to welcome Gene Martin ’09 to the University Advancement team in the role of major gifts officer.

Alumni Relations is partnering with Career Development to develop a first-year mentoring program, connecting alumni with students in a collaborative effort to boost retention and student success. A volunteer strike force of alumni convened on January 19 to provide input on the planning and roll-out. Alumni chapters play a key role in recruiting first-year mentors and in assisting spring and summer anti-melt efforts.

Equipping our students to lead and thrive in the 21st century global economy

January Jamboree, as noted earlier, continued to build capacity to teach and learn in the new cluster model, developing faculty and staff to further equip our students. This year’s Jamboree focused on concepts described in the book, The Undergraduate Experience, which identifies six core themes that are common to all effective higher education institutions providing a framework for focusing both individual and institutional attention on what is most important in higher education. The campus considered and ideated opportunities to enhance the PSU student experience. Other sessions included Cluster Connect, Snow Day Teaching Strategies, Growing as a Leader through High Impact Learning, and strategies for using Open Educational Resources (OER) in courses to help reduce student debt and enhance learning. The day ended with excerpts from the performance of Hairspray by the Educational Theatre Collaborative. Sessions not offered due to the snow day will be rescheduled through the Center for Transformation for this spring. If you participated in January Jamboree, please take a few minutes to visit your schedule in Sched and click on the sessions that you attended to provide a rating and open feedback.

The Little East Conference (LEC) announced that a total of 248 student-athletes competing in the LEC’s seven fall championship sports (men’s and women’s cross country, field hockey, men’s and women’s soccer, women’s tennis, women’s volleyball) have been named to the 2017 LEC Fall All-Academic Team. To be named, a student-athlete must be at least in sophomore standing both academically and athletically, have a cumulative GPA of 3.30 or higher through the previous semester, and have been at their current institution for at least one full academic year. Plymouth State had 42 student-athletes on the list, more than any other institution.

Looking ahead, we are considering moving the start of the school year ahead one week and shortening the period between fall final exams and the start of the spring semester. We would still plan on having a winterim. There are many reasons to do this, including retention/recruiting and the current closeness of exams to our winter break. We are also exploring a scheduling approach that will allow us to implement a four-credit course model alongside three credit courses for Fall 2018. The TLT faculty have recommended that we move expeditiously to create the scheduling format for three and four-credit courses and implement it this coming Fall. They have suggested three options to accomplish this including: designating a significant number of classrooms as “on the 4-credit model”; potentially using designated buildings such as Rounds, Memorial and Hyde; and running a pilot of some type for one semester. I support all the approaches and believe we can implement one approach this Fall with faculty concurrence.
Planning further out, the undergraduate commencement ceremony for the class of 2019 will be held on Friday, May 17, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. This year’s graduation will be split with the undergraduate ceremony on Saturday morning and the graduate ceremony on Thursday night. For the undergraduate ceremony, I would like faculty to sit among their students and for faculty and staff to be particularly vigilant about alcohol consumption/abuse.

I am looking forward to seeing you at Town Hall meeting on Wednesday, February 21 in Merrill Place to elaborate on the above five overarching objectives with a focus on retention and persistence. More details to follow. Again, welcome back.

Sincerely,

Don Birx
President