

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



*Office of the President*

## **University Planning April 2012 Update**

This report summarizes our University-wide planning work since 2006. The intent is both to chronicle progress and to clarify direction as we prepare to take our next steps forward to fulfill the University's mission and our shared vision for UNC.

Planning at UNC is an ongoing, iterative process of taking control of our own future. The process includes multiyear direction setting and priority setting; annual identification and implementation of action steps; and evaluation of both the planning process and its outcomes.

### **I. Developing UNC's Academic Plan**

In November 2007, UNC completed a 20-month process to develop an Academic Plan. The plan envisions UNC as an exemplary teaching and learning community and acknowledges the complex interactions and relationships necessary to do so—the necessity of working together, the extension of learning beyond the classroom, and the need to connect with others beyond the University. The plan was intended to drive University goals, funding decisions and facilities priorities in the coming years.

The planning process was a university-wide collaborative effort initiated by the Provost and facilitated by a steering committee of faculty, staff and administrators. They considered the results of recent planning efforts, including UNC's 2004 self-study report to the Higher Learning Commission and the work of six groups convened in response to the University's "Charting the Future" report to examine the University Experience, compensation, diversity and student services, faculty and staff professional development, graduate education, and student success. The steering committee also collected extensive campus input on UNC's current and future academic direction. In Fall 2006, the committee hosted 29 campus conversations to engage the university community in the planning effort. The initial conversations, as explained in the committee's invitation to campus, were intended "to identify the things we do best at UNC, to pinpoint the most crucial elements of recent planning efforts, to solicit new ideas, and to begin building consensus about our future direction as an academic institution." Subsequent conversations focused on collecting feedback, on draft themes that would be the basis for goals and then on draft goals. In Fall 2007, the committee shared a draft plan with campus, hosted 16 more campus conversations to discuss the draft, and invited comments through an online form and e-mail.

Using the campus feedback to refine the draft plan, the steering committee proposed the goals below, as well as objectives and potential strategies for each. The full plan is in Appendix A.

1. Create an exemplary teaching and learning community
2. Build a superior faculty of teacher-scholars
3. Be a model for transformational learning that integrates all aspects of students' UNC experience
4. Build a staff that is dedicated to the teaching and learning community
5. Engage the greater community as partners in teaching and learning

A number of campus units began to link their own planning to the Academic Plan, and it became a fundamental consideration in the annual budget process.

## II. Responding to Dramatic Changes Around Us

In 2009, in the context of a growing global economic crisis, Colorado saw a dramatic decline in state revenue that necessitated significant budget cuts. Although reductions in higher education funding were temporarily backfilled with federal stimulus dollars, it was clear that the state could not continue to fund higher education as it had for the previous two decades. In fact, projected cost increases for K-12 education, Medicaid and corrections raised doubts that, within a few years, the state would be able to fund higher education at all.

In fiscal year 2008-09, UNC was receiving a total of \$44 million in state funds and federal stimulus funds, which the state used to backfill a precipitous drop in state revenue. Based on what we knew about the state budget, recent allocation models for dividing funds among institutions and the limitations of federal stimulus funding, we estimated UNC's funding would be cut by some \$14 million over the next two to three years. We began preparing for what had come to be known as "the cliff."

Our near-term approach for addressing the cliff focused on generating additional revenue; controlling costs; reducing spending; and building reserves to manage the risks of uncertainty and allow us to smooth out the effect of the funding loss over several years.

To address the long-term, we recognized that we must not only understand the dramatic social, economic and political changes affecting the University, but also the permanence of the changes—that UNC would not survive if we simply tried to wait out the financial storm. There was no question that public resources for higher education would continue to shrink. We set out to adapt to a permanently changed environment and develop our ability to respond to further change without compromising what it means to be UNC.

At the same time, we knew there would be increased calls for institutions to be accountable for how they spend public funds. As the beneficiary of more than a century of public investment, UNC is an unquestionably *public* institution. We are further *public* in that we are absolutely committed to a public purpose. But being a public institution doesn't prevent UNC from taking control of its own future. We began thinking about how we might operate with little or no state funding. (We are currently basing our planning on the assumption that the University's state funding could decrease by half—to \$15 million—over the next five years.) We brought to this work an understanding that even though we did not expect the state to restore higher education funding, we could not simply shift costs to students. In Colorado we had already seen a complete

reversal of the ratio of state funding to tuition since 2000-01, when the average state support per student was more than twice the average tuition at Colorado’s public colleges and universities. But continued significant tuition increases are not the answer for UNC. Given the population we are committed to serving, it is neither appropriate nor feasible to shift from a traditional public pricing model (low-price/low-aid) to a private pricing model (high-price/high-aid). This shift would significantly limit the access of middle-income students to UNC. In addition, because many of our current and prospective students have limited capacity to pay higher tuition rates, such a shift would not be fiscally sustainable.

Knowing all of this, in Fall 2009 we launched a University-wide planning effort to further refine the vision articulated in the Academic Plan. The intent was to be forward-looking and intentional in taking control of our own future at UNC. We agreed that we would no longer allow UNC to be whipsawed by fluctuations in state or federal funding, nor would we wait for legislators or regulators to tell us what we must do.

We deliberately departed from the language and processes typically associated with strategic planning, which can stifle creativity and limit the number of participants. Instead, we set out to design a planning process tailored to UNC’s needs—one that would be inclusive and transparent, encourage collaboration, identify and connect work that was already under way, and avoid unnecessary committees and duplication of efforts. The ultimate purpose of the planning process was to ensure that we had a shared understanding of our vision for UNC, and that we were fulfilling that vision through multiple implementation plans and activities. This work required our commitment to three concepts:

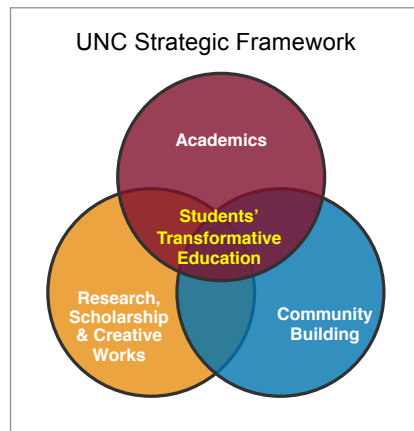
- Respectful shared governance
- Creativity and innovation
- University-perspective decision-making

### III. Refining Our Shared Vision for UNC

To kick off the Fall 2009 planning work, President Norton hosted a series of strategy sessions with campus governance groups and a number of working groups. A shared vision for UNC that builds on the 2007 Academic Plan emerged from those discussions. There was agreement that we should focus our energy on three areas of action:

1. Academics—Serving students and building exemplary academic programs to fulfill our mission in sustainable ways
2. Research, Scholarship and Creative Works—Enhancing our research focus to engage our students and faculty and the public we serve
3. Community Building—Creating a respectful and inclusive campus community that connects with the area around UNC and the global community

The three action areas are the basis for the Strategic Framework depicted by the Venn diagram.



The Strategic Framework helps to articulate UNC's distinctive role among Colorado's public doctoral research universities. Our University is distinguished by the combination of:

- our commitment to working as a community,
- the individualized nature of the transformative educational experiences we offer students,
- our outreach to underserved students, and
- the world-changing research, scholarship and creative works our faculty and students do together.

### **Academics**

The academics component of the Strategic Framework has its foundation in the liberal arts. We provide students with opportunities to pursue a wide array of academic disciplines, to explore the connections among disciplines, to work together with faculty as scholars, and to use what they learn in the broader community. Students develop not only in-depth knowledge in their chosen discipline, but also the capacity to think broadly beyond their area of expertise, and to be leaders and life-long learners. Whether they are earning an undergraduate or graduate degree, what students learn at UNC prepares them to make a difference in the world, regardless of how much the world may change.

### **Research**

Research at UNC has long been interconnected with academics and community, as depicted by the research component of the Strategic Framework. Our students and faculty work together on research, scholarship and creative works that make a positive, lasting impact on society. Working partnerships between students and faculty enrich the experiences of both, and often provide immediate and tangible benefits for our community.

### **Community**

The community component of the Strategic Framework addresses community within and beyond the University. A thriving doctoral research university is, by its very nature, externally focused; awareness of our place in the world must imbue everything we do. At UNC, our connection with the community is an integral part of our history. The pioneers who came to the Territory of Colorado to build a utopian colony in the 1870s not only envisioned but also largely funded the State Normal School that became UNC.

Today, as we prepare students to be contributing global citizens, we have the opportunity to be a catalyst for community development in the broadest sense of the word. In order to do the work that connects the University to the community, we must also build community among ourselves.

### **Transformative Education**

The exemplary teaching and learning community envisioned in the Academic Plan is reflected at the intersections of the three action areas, where we fulfill the plan's goals to: be a model for transformational learning that integrates all aspects of students' UNC experience; build a superior faculty of teacher-scholars and a community of employees dedicated to the teaching and learning community; and engage the greater community as partners in teaching and learning. Through this teaching and learning community, we provide students the opportunity for a transformative education.

The term transformative education is used in the Strategic Framework to convey that education at UNC is about leading out the potential of students by engaging them in a breadth of disciplines and educational experiences. We take an individualized approach with students in this process—not in what we *do to* them, but in what we *ask of* them. We encourage them to think critically, to ask questions, to be creative and entrepreneurial, to work in teams and to be leaders. Evidence of this transformation can be seen in the successful creativity, innovation and resilience of our graduates.

#### **IV. Taking a Systems Approach**

In order to realize the vision articulated in the Strategic Framework in our changed environment, we must rethink how we approach our work. Perhaps the most fundamental change this new environment requires of us is that we begin to think of the University as a complex system rather than a collection of separate units. In our changed environment, we can no longer afford to support multiple independent, sometimes competing, systems. We must take advantage of the efficiencies that result from functioning as one system.

In this systemic view, the University is a dynamic, organic entity that is more than the sum of its various components; its components are defined in large part by their relationships to one another; and change is more cyclical than linear. Effective planning and decision-making in this environment requires a University-centered approach rather than a unit-centered approach.

We have learned over the past two-plus years that thinking systemically is both a philosophical and a practical matter. It is not sufficient simply to agree that we *ought* to be working as a team and making decisions from the University perspective. We also have to establish systems to support this type of operation and develop University leaders' capacity to think and act this way. To that end, in Spring 2010 President Norton began working with her staff to clarify their roles and responsibilities and to reshape how they work together as a team. There is now an expectation that executive staff members act as advocates for the University as a whole rather than focusing primarily on a particular unit or function. The group uses the expertise and experiences of individual members to make decisions collaboratively from a University-wide perspective. Each member brings knowledge, perspective, and individual strengths to the conversation, along with the understanding that regardless of who has the authority to make a decision, it should not be made in isolation. In the coming year, this same leadership development work will continue with our assistant vice presidents and deans.

#### **Thinking Systemically About UNC's Vision**

During the course of the past two years' work to implement the vision articulated by the Strategic Framework, we have identified eight key elements that must be addressed in order to think of UNC as a system. These Key System Elements are not of equal importance, but each one has some bearing on the others. As a result, it is impossible to fully consider the system that is UNC without considering all eight elements and the interactions among them. Because each element has some impact on our ability to fulfill our vision for UNC, all are crucial to our planning. Ultimately, through our planning, we will find an appropriate equilibrium among the elements, but identifying and achieving that equilibrium will be an iterative process.

The eight Key System Elements are:

- UNC mission and identity
- External funding
- Cost of attendance
- Capital
- Cost-saving innovations
- Employee compensation
- Other operating costs
- Reserves strategy

Following is a brief description of each element. In addition to considering the information included in the description, each element should be viewed through the lens of the Strategic Framework.

#### *Mission and Identity*

The mission and identity element is about who we are as an institution and whom we serve. Our mission and identity are reflected in the composition of UNC's student body; our academic portfolio; the research, scholarship and creative works our faculty and students do; our portfolio of student engagement and support activities; and the ways in which we actualize values such as diversity, sustainability and internationalization.

#### *External Funding*

The external funding element includes state, federal, grant and philanthropic funds.

#### *Cost of Attendance*

The cost of attendance element addresses the full cost of attending UNC, including tuition; fees; room and board; need-based, merit-based and membership-based financial aid that is institutionally and externally funded; TA/GA awards; and work-study programs.

#### *Capital*

The capital element includes the building, renovation, replacement and ongoing maintenance associated with facilities, infrastructure, technology, equipment and furnishings.

#### *Cost-Saving Innovations*

The cost-saving innovations element addresses both cost reductions for current activities and cost avoidance for future activities. It is about driving innovative thinking that will lead to doing things more efficiently and more effectively in ways consistent with UNC's values and priorities.

#### *Employee Compensation*

Having the right number of people with the right qualifications doing the right things, and paying them appropriately, is the focus of the employee compensation element. It includes UNC's compensation identity, staffing levels, and approach to supporting and developing employees.

#### *Other Operating Costs*

Operational costs not directly associated with employee compensation and support or with capital are addressed by the other operating costs element.

### *Reserves Strategy*

The reserves strategy element is about how UNC manages the risks of financial uncertainty. It focuses on the types and amounts of reserves we accumulate and how and when reserves will be spent.

### **Systemically Linking UNC's Vision to Action**

As mentioned above, the planning we began in Fall 2009 was designed to be an ongoing, iterative process of taking control of our own future. The diagram on Page 8 shows how UNC's various planning and implementation activities connect with one another. This process includes multiyear direction setting and priority setting (A and B); development of a multiyear University plan and resource allocation strategy (C); annual identification and implementation of action steps and budgets (D); and evaluation of both the planning process and its outcomes (E).

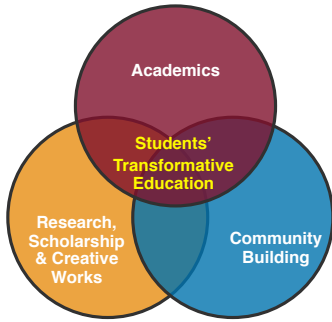
The nine plans addressing UNC's core mission and function (A) are intended to articulate aspirations for fulfilling the Strategic Framework vision, identify priority actions for moving forward, and determine how we will measure success. We have completed several of these plans, which were developed by teams of faculty and staff and shared with campus for comment. In February 2012, the International Advisory Council completed a plan that articulates a direction for internationalizing UNC. In March 2012, the Research Advisory Council completed a plan for enhancing research, scholarship, creative works and grant activity at UNC over the next four years. The Equity and Diversity Council has completed a draft plan and is in the process of sharing it with campus. We are implementing the fourth iteration of our enrollment plan and pricing strategy for Fall 2012. It identifies key undergraduate student body characteristics around which we will manage enrollment (e.g., academic preparation, financial need) and focuses on strategic use of institutional aid to drive enrollment, filling vacant graduate program capacity, and expanding on graduate price elasticity work done in 2008. We have also developed a UNC compensation identity to help us in establishing sustainable practices for providing competitive compensation to recruit and retain faculty and staff. Next year, we will work on several more multiyear plans shown in the diagram, as described in the "Next Steps" section of this document.

We will also take a multiyear approach in setting direction (B) and identifying priority actions (C) for efforts that will support the activities of the nine plans that address UNC's core mission and function. Developing the Multiyear University Plan and Resource Allocation Strategy (C), will help us to further refine priorities by taking a systemic look at them in light of the eight Key System Elements. As discussed in the previous section, all of the Key System Elements affect our ability to fulfill the vision articulated by the Strategic Framework, and we are working to establish an appropriate equilibrium among them. The color coding in the diagram on Page 8 shows the relationship between the Key System Elements and various planning efforts. The elements are not plans unto themselves; rather, they are intended to offer a way of thinking systemically as we plan.

Each year, annual operational planning and budgeting (D) will provide further details about steps we will take to implement the Multiyear University Plan. Then, in the evaluation stage of the planning cycle, we will assess the effectiveness of the planning process as well as our progress toward implementing the Multiyear University Plan and achieving an appropriate equilibrium among the Key System Elements.

# UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO PLANNING

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



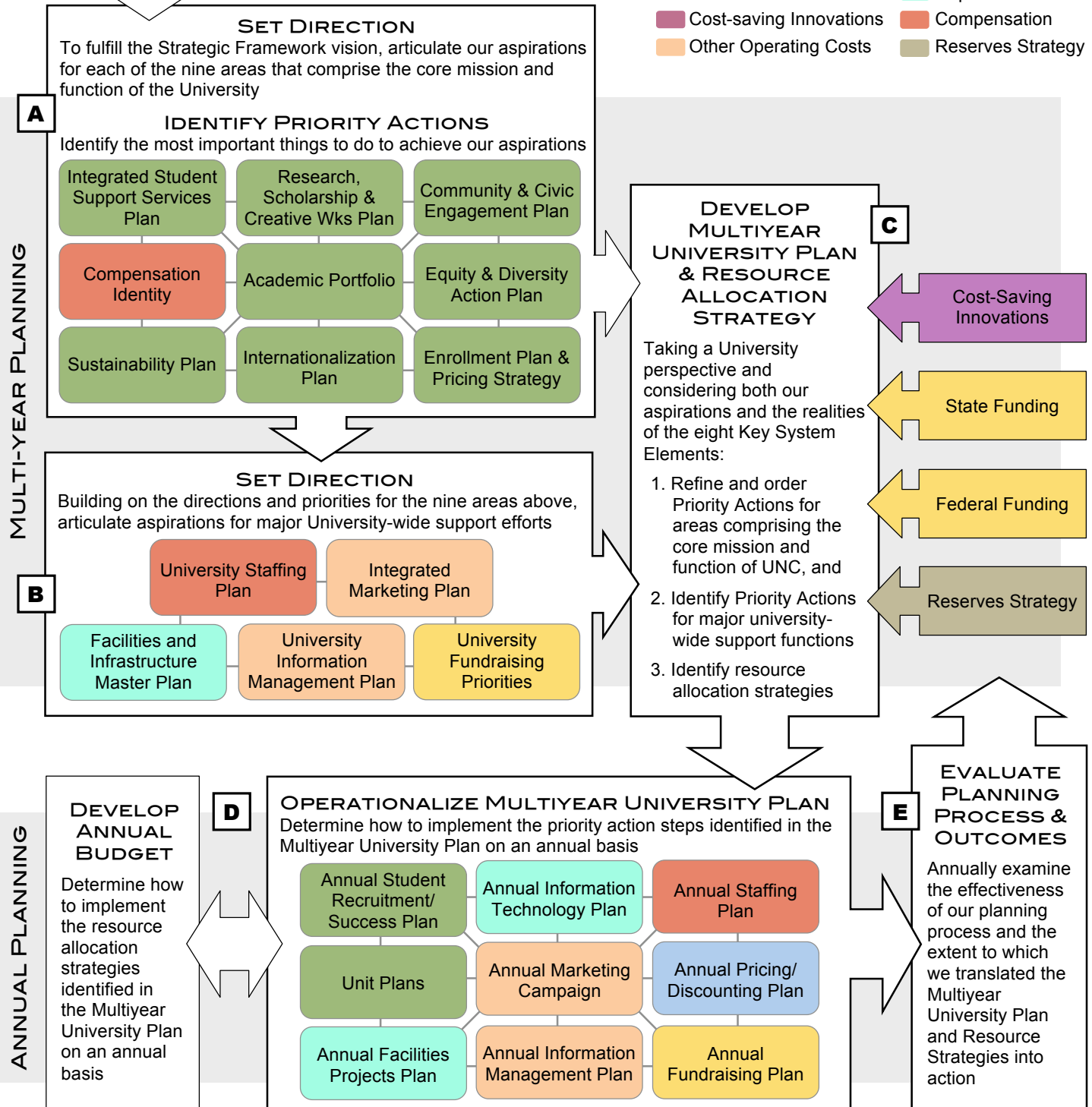
## WHAT PLANNING MEANS AT UNC

UNC planning is an ongoing, iterative process of taking control of our own future in order to fulfill the University's mission and our shared vision for UNC. The process includes multiyear direction setting and priority setting (A and B); development of a multiyear University plan and resource allocation strategy (C); annual identification and implementation of action steps and budgets (D); and evaluation of both the planning process and its outcomes (E).

## KEY SYSTEM ELEMENTS

The ultimate purpose of planning at UNC is to ensure that we are implementing the vision articulated by the Strategic Framework as effectively and efficiently as possible. Considering eight Key System Elements and the interactions among them is a way of thinking about the organic, dynamic nature of the University as we plan. The elements are not of equal importance, but each has some bearing on our ability to fulfill the vision articulated by the Strategic Framework.

- UNC Mission & Identity
- External Funding
- Cost of Attendance
- Capital
- Cost-saving Innovations
- Compensation
- Other Operating Costs
- Reserves Strategy





## **V. Next Steps**

Our next steps in multi-year planning will address our academic portfolio, community and civic engagement portfolio, integrated student support services and approach to sustainability. We will also further refine the enrollment management and pricing work we completed this year. In the meantime, the multi-year planning we have done so far will inform the fiscal year 2012-13 budget and any other annual decisions we need to make.

Our next steps, in addition to the activities summarized in this report, will inform our work to prepare for reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in 2014-15. To prepare for the HLC review team's visit to UNC, we must complete a comprehensive self-study to evaluate the extent to which the University meets HLC criteria. In addition to allowing us to demonstrate that we meet the criteria for accreditation, the self-study process also provides an opportunity to continue our work to shape the University for the 21st century. In this sense, the reaccreditation process is a continuation of our ongoing University planning.

One outcome of our HLC self-study will be to use what we learn during the process to identify ways in which we will continue to embrace, advance, and cultivate UNC's distinctive role among Colorado's public doctoral research universities. The charge to the HLC Self-Study Steering Committee includes the following questions, which the next steps of our planning will help us to answer:

1. How does UNC's distinctive role among Colorado's public doctoral universities position the University to meet future challenges in an evolving higher education landscape?
2. How does UNC create, nurture and use institutional processes and strategies in support of the University's distinctive role? What are we doing to evaluate the effectiveness and the importance of these processes and strategies, given our current environment? What promising things are we doing, and how do we build on them as we leverage UNC's distinctive role to meet future challenges? Where do we have opportunities for improvement, and what have we learned in the self-study process that will help us build our capacity to fulfill UNC's distinctive role?

## **Appendix A: UNC Academic Plan—Final Version—11-2-2007**

### **Goal 1: Create an exemplary teaching and learning community**

In keeping with the University of Northern Colorado's historic mission, we will embrace our responsibility to be a model community of teaching and learning that engages every individual in the institution, values the contributions of all, and seeks continual improvement through evaluation.

Objective 1a: Foster a campus culture of respect, civility, two-way communication, collaborative decision-making and shared governance

#### Potential Strategies

- Develop and implement a systematic approach to campus communication
- Use campus surveys to benchmark attitudes and measure changes
- Communicate accomplishments across colleges and administrative divisions
- Ensure campus policies support all members of the campus community

Objective 1b: Be a welcoming and inclusive campus community that exemplifies and embraces diversity in its broadest sense.

#### Potential Strategies

- Enroll a diverse student body
- Develop campus programming to celebrate and participate in issues of, international, national and local diversity
- Provide training in cultural competence for faculty, staff and students
- Prepare students to work effectively with diverse populations in an evolving global community

Objective 1c: Develop facilities, technology and other infrastructure to enhance teaching and learning

#### Potential Strategies

- Align the facilities master plan priorities with the Academic Plan to provide an environment that enhances teaching and learning
- Establish a process for regularly assessing and coordinating program needs to inform the university facilities master plan
- Identify, prioritize and fund improvements to enhance the quality and utilization of technology and other infrastructure
- Identify and prioritize maintenance needs to enable the university to ensure current infrastructure remains viable
- Provide access to and training on technology that facilitates teaching and learning

Objective 1d: Ensure efficient and effective organizational structures that support an exemplary community of teaching and learning;

#### Potential strategies

- Employ a campus wide process using data to review and improve organizational effectiveness

Objective 1e: Develop an enrollment plan to address student needs, academic programming needs and local, state and national needs

**Goal 2: Build a superior faculty of teacher-scholars**

Building on the strength of our faculty members who are dedicated to teaching, we will recruit, support, reward and retain an exemplary faculty of diverse members who are committed to superior teaching and active scholarship.

Objective 2a: Recruit an exemplary faculty of culturally and intellectually diverse teacher-scholars

Potential Strategies

- Secure funds to enhance faculty recruitment
- Invest in competitive faculty salaries and benefits
- Create a pool of start-up funds for new faculty
- Improve current recruitment strategies

Objective 2b: Retain an exemplary faculty of culturally and intellectually diverse teacher-scholars

Potential Strategies

- Invest in competitive salaries and benefits for current faculty
- Invest in support for grant writing, research, scholarship and creative endeavors
- Implement differential faculty workload plans
- Encourage cross-disciplinary scholarship by developing campus-wide initiatives that bring faculty together for collaborative projects.
- Provide systematic training and support for teaching at all levels
- Recognize faculty excellence in teaching, research, scholarship and creative endeavors

Objective 2c: Ensure alignment of faculty roles, evaluation and rewards

Potential Strategies

- Align faculty evaluations and rewards with differential workload assignments
- Provide training in the use of evaluation systems

**Goal 3: Be a model for transformational learning that integrates all aspects of students' UNC experience**

As a university community we will define student success as transformational learning, integrating academic learning and student development. Our graduates will be skilled lifelong learners capable of working effectively with diverse populations in an evolving global community.

Objective 3a: Improve, coordinate and assess curricular and co-curricular experiences to enrich student learning

Potential Strategies

- Broaden student education through experiential learning activities such as international education, research and internships
- Create a common first-year undergraduate experience

- Develop opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research and experiential learning in the community
- Develop a coordinated co-curricular philosophy

Objective 3b: Support a culture of student-driven teaching/learning opportunities

Potential Strategies

- Promote student created and led courses that bridge academic and residential lives.
- Foster and promote civic engagement opportunities

Objective 3c: Promote access and opportunity for graduate and undergraduate students

Potential Strategies

- Provide competitive financial support for undergraduates
- Provide competitive financial support and assistantships for graduate students

#### **Goal 4: Build a staff that is dedicated to the teaching and learning community**

We will extend our commitment to teaching and learning beyond traditional settings and roles, providing opportunities for and encouraging all university community members to be both teachers and learners.

Objective 4a: Recruit and retain high-quality, diverse staff

Potential Strategies

- Invest in competitive classified and exempt salaries and benefits
- Invest in support for classified and exempt staff professional development

Objective 4b: Support teaching and learning opportunities for all campus community members

Potential Strategies

- Foster connections among all areas of campus that allow campus community members to learn from each other
- Give every campus community member an opportunity for professional and personal development
- Include professional development in performance planning and evaluation
- Facilitate staff involvement in teaching and research
- Develop intellectual growth

#### **Goal 5: Engage the greater community as partners in teaching and learning**

We will continue to build relationships with the greater community in ways that exemplify our commitment to teaching and learning and our role as a public institution.

Objective 5a: Engage in external partnerships that both serve the public and advance the university mission

Potential Strategies

- Form partnerships with other universities, for-profit, not-for-profit, and government entities to address state and regional needs and priorities
- Encourage the creation of community advisory boards for programs on campus and use those contacts to guide development of Community outreach initiatives

- Assess the scope and involvement between UNC and the Greeley community and identify ways to improve the “town-gown” relationship.

Objective 5b: Be a leader in education research and in local, state and national policy discussions about public education.

Potential Strategies

- Establish and fund one or more centers that align with the objective of leadership in public education
- Provide faculty with the resources necessary to conduct cutting edge research on teaching and learning, engage in successful grant writing and write education-related white papers
- Facilitate UNC employee service on education committees and taskforces
- Establish a series of speakers focused on major topics in education

Objective 5c: Pursue opportunities to exercise regional, national and international leadership in scholarly disciplines

Potential Strategies

- Identify and capitalize on areas/disciplines in which we exercise regional, national and international leadership
- Identify and cultivate areas/disciplines in which we could exercise regional, national and international leadership in scholarly disciplines
- Use existing program review and assessment to identify opportunities for leadership in scholarly disciplines

Objective 5d: Promote the University as a model community of teaching and learning

Potential Strategies

- Create an institutional integrated marketing plan
- Pursue certification or equivalent review/recognition for academic areas where appropriate
- Demonstrate the contributions UNC makes as a public institution
- Disseminate faculty scholarship