

18-Month Update from President Nowaczyk

I recently completed my first 18 months as Frostburg State University's president. This is a good time for some reflection and sharing of our accomplishments and my future goals. Let's look first at several of our collective accomplishments.

Accomplishments

Accreditation

When I arrived in May 2016, we had just completed our Middle States self-study, and it was clear that we still had some work to do. In addition to recommendations the University community proposed, Middle States asked us to provide better documentation in two areas: 1) our assessment and planning processes, and 2) assessment of our general education process. I am pleased that, through the efforts of many, we have provided our regional accrediting agency with the necessary information. During this time period, our College of Education faculty also secured NCATE reaccreditation of our teacher education programs.

Communication

The self-study identified a need for better internal communication on campus. I have made better communication a priority during these first 18 months. We have taken steps to improve our governance structure. We now have a Staff Senate joining the Faculty Senate and Student Government Association as leadership groups on campus. The University Advisory Council includes leadership from these three groups, along with the University vice presidents. In addition to posting minutes of leadership groups electronically, executive leadership is expected to meet with faculty and staff in their divisions regularly. I post biweekly emails and will continue to hold listening sessions across campus.

Strategic Plan

We are wrapping up a very successful and inclusive strategic planning process. Our old strategic plan needed updating. Through a year-long process that included comments from over a 1,000 individuals, a strategic planning task force of over 50 individuals recast our institutional vision, identified six strategic themes, and developed four strategic goals to guide us through our 125th anniversary year in 2023. Those four goals are:

- 1) **Focus learning on both the acquisition and application of knowledge.**
- 2) **Provide engaging experiences that challenge our students to excel.**
- 3) **Expand regional outreach and engagement.**
- 4) **Align University resources – human, fiscal, and physical – with strategic priorities.**

We are finalizing the action steps now. I believe every person at FSU should be proud of this process and resulting plan.

Connecting With the Region

Enhancing our external relationships within the region was one of my priorities upon arriving at Frostburg State University. I am pleased to report that the region holds this institution in high regard. There is a recognition that Frostburg State University is an essential asset to the success of Western Maryland. There are FSU representatives on many local boards in the region, and people in the community know that we are open to their involvement and partnerships with us. In recognition of these successes, the governor recently announced additional funding for FSU to do more in regional development and engagement. Our role as an economic and cultural hub for Western Maryland will translate into a higher quality of life for everyone.

Executive Team

Lastly, when I arrived, we had several “interim” leaders on my executive team. Developing a cohesive leadership team was also a priority for me during the first year. While executive teams in higher education often experience change because of retirements or opportunities for advancement, I believe we have a team in place committed to FSU and its success. I am very pleased with Dr. Liz Throop joining us as provost. We will be conducting campus interviews for our next vice president for Administration and Finance shortly. I want to personally thank Dave Rose for his leadership and commitment to FSU for the past 32 years.

Challenges Ahead

Enrollment

Let me shift our attention to four challenges I see facing us. The first is enrollment. Like many rural state institutions, enrollment is a challenge. We face increasing competition from private institutions. Reductions in state funding have made public tuition higher, and private schools are discounting their tuition to levels that make those schools attractive alternatives to many students and their families. Also, many students are looking to community colleges as their entry school upon high school graduation. Add the declining number of high school graduates in Western Maryland and you can understand the challenge we are facing.

To address that challenge we need to:

1. ***Ensure that our academic instruction and student advising is of the highest quality.*** I include student advising for several reasons. First, quality advising is essential for improved student persistence and timely graduation. Second, student advising goes beyond academic advising and course selection to include career assistance and advising. For example, identifying and reaching out to students who may be at risk of dropping out is a component of advising. Also, advising includes career development services once a student has selected FSU. Third, again going back to the self-study, the FSU community itself recommended we enhance our advising services.
2. ***Focused and intentional recruiting.*** We need to be smarter in recruiting students in a much more competitive environment and using our resources, including scholarship dollars, to recruit the best students to Frostburg State. We also need to use technology more to stay in touch with prospective students and their families. For instance, the use of a glossy viewbook as the primary recruiting piece has been supplemented with frequent short messages to students and their parents. Lastly, we need to recognize that there are at least three student markets out there – the traditional high school graduate, the college transfer student, and the adult learner. That brings me to the third action item.
3. ***Ensure we are offering academic programs that meet student and workforce demands.*** The provost, as academic leader, the deans, and the faculty must take the lead in this initiative. The educational landscape continues to change. I ask the faculty and academic leadership to join together to examine our program offerings. I'll return to this point later.

Keeping the Train on the Tracks

A second challenge is keeping the University moving forward. Or as I might put it, "Keeping the train on the tracks." Some have talked about right-sizing the University as another way of expressing this need. Others, have talked about identifying priorities in that we can't keep doing everything we've done in the past. The strategic plan theme on "Facilities and Resources" speaks to this challenge. We have begun the process of looking at a performance-based funding model rather than the traditional incremental budgeting model that assumes a steady state in University operations. The steady state in higher education, if it ever existed, is clearly not today's model. Changing our model will happen in stages. I commit to everyone that we will use data to inform the process and be transparent. The decision to set aside funds this year for strategic planning is one such example. That decision was reached after a day-long joint meeting with the University Advisory Council and the University assessment committee.

Marketing and Institutional Reputation

The third challenge involves marketing and our institutional reputation. When I interviewed, the comment was made that FSU was a "hidden gem." We need to lose the adjective "hidden" and brag about our accomplishments, faculty, staff, and students. Our alums have great stories and wonderful accomplishments. When graduates leave FSU, they are on the path to success. I also believe high school guidance counselors need to know more about today's FSU. It is on my executive team and

me to take the lead in being intentional about what we do to market this great University. Your help in telling and living our successes is essential. I hope you agree marketing without quality makes no sense.

Campus Climate

The fourth challenge is campus climate. In talking with alumni, I realize this campus is much more diverse than it was for past generations of FSU graduates. That diversity is not only in terms of ethnic and racial background or gender identity but also region and academic interests. The one constant is that Frostburg State University continues to serve many first-generation college families from Maryland and the surrounding states. Student diversity provides a wonderful learning opportunity for today's students who will be engaging in a global environment. At the same time, inclusion and a sense of belonging do not occur automatically. We have the opportunity to create something special here because of our diversity. But that will not happen without our being intentional in creating an inclusive and respectful environment for all on campus.

What's Next?

Improving Retention in and out of the Classroom

So where do we go next? The strategic plan will guide us as we move forward. In that context, allow me to offer two thoughts. The first is improving our retention and graduation rates. This is an area under our direct control. As many of you know, especially those who are parents of college-age students, one indicator of an institution's reputation is its retention and graduation rates. Parents want their students at schools where the likelihood of graduation is high. We need to look at all of our services and operations to examine critically whether they are helping students succeed or are obstacles to success. This is not a matter of reducing standards. If anything, we should be increasing our standards and then providing the resources for students to meet those standards. And, yes, the students bear responsibility for their performance as well. We are all in this together. From my end, I am working with the FSU Foundation to reduce financial issues as a barrier. I would like us to set a target above 80 percent in first- to-second year retention with a graduation rate in the mid-60s. That will not happen overnight, but unless we start working on that today, we will never achieve those targets. And I can assure you the budget model with those performance metrics will go a long way to eliminating our revenue challenges.

What Programs Are We Offering?

The other thought, again consistent with our strategic planning priorities, is a careful examination of our academic program offerings. Our academic programs should address two criteria: There should be student interest as well as workforce career demand. I use the word "career" instead of "job." We are educating students for future success, not training them for a job. I hope we all believe that many of today's graduates will be engaged in careers a decade or two from now that are different from today's careers. So the challenge to faculty and academic leadership is to provide

breadth and depth during the students' studies here. I ask we consider four aspects of our educational offerings for the immediate future.

The first focuses on general education. One of the Middle States visiting teams suggested that, "Working with multiple institutional stakeholders, including students, FSU should endeavor to find ways to make the general education curriculum distinctive as one of its institutional strategies." I focused on the word "distinctive." What can we do that would make FSU unique and a leader in ensuring students have the prerequisite skills and knowledge to become career-ready, liberally educated, and engaged citizens? This is consistent with one of our strategic planning priorities.

The second aspect deals with examining academic majors and minors that have seen a decline in student interest or workforce demand. Instead of automatically saying we should eliminate the program, I ask the faculty to consider recasting the program to generate greater student interest or address specific workforce needs. This may entail looking for interdisciplinary partnerships.

The third focuses on new opportunities that fit within our mission and faculty expertise. For instance, we continue to see growing student interest and workforce needs in technology and health care as two easy examples. There may be other areas we should be considering as well. We need to be careful in our approach on expansion, but we should not limit our thinking in the earliest stages.

The fourth area to consider is the development of certificates that address specific workforce demands. These certificates, which can be at either the undergraduate or graduate level, should be designed to permit the credits to be used toward a future degree.

In all cases, time is an important factor. In today's competitive environment we should act thoughtfully and with a commitment to lead rather than follow. I ask the Provost to be the lead person in this area and to engage faculty leadership through the deans, Senate and department chairs.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to lead Frostburg State University and look forward to helping make a positive difference in the lives of our students, faculty, staff and alumni. I thank you for your support and encouragement and the welcome you have provided to my family and me. I encourage you to reach out to others and me with your thoughts, ideas, and, most importantly, your actions.

Thank you, and Go Bobcats!