Strategic Academic Priorities
University of Denver
October 2011

Renew DU

In 2011, the faculty and administration of the University of Denver will begin an intensive, intentional effort to strengthen our academic programs. We will improve learning at DU at every level – as experienced by students, faculty members, and all other members of the University community. Everything we do must answer the question of how it improves learning at the University. Does X promote learning better than what we are doing now? How will learning be stronger at the University by pursuing Y? If Z was done in the past, does it still promote learning today?

Context

Getting the right answers to these questions has never been more important. While the questions may be familiar in higher education, the answers of today are not. Universities now face unprecedented challenges to their very existence. Private tuition-dependent institutions with moderately sized endowments can neither simply grow – nor cut – their way to future sustainability, let alone excellence. It has become a lot more complicated than that.

To mention just a few forces that now define our context:
- Overpowering sensitivity to the value proposition of private institutions, where for decades cost increases have significantly outstripped inflation;
- Uneven global competition for and massive movement of students and faculty that create great opportunities and great challenges;
- Proliferation of low cost, for-profit institutions, some with enormous resources that are now addressing academic quality;
- Academic technology that challenges universities on all dimensions: time (why an academic term?), place (why classroom and residence halls?), and people (why professors?);
- Demographic changes among prospective students with less wealth as universities realize that the inclusion of richly diverse students and faculty members is a powerful academic imperative that promotes learning.

What matters less in this environment are disciplinary boundaries, organizations of academic departments, traditional hiring protocols, national borders, and familiar pedagogies. What matters more are the substantive questions. *What are the dimensions of robust learning in this new environment? How can we create an institution that promotes learning in this new environment? How can the University of*

Denver not just survive but become a leader in this new environment, where students want to learn and faculty want to teach and research?

DU is well positioned to answer these questions, but they require us to experiment, pilot-test, embrace, and discard. They require imagination, risk-taking, ultimate agreement on priorities, and University resources. In this environment, what is familiar is no longer an adequate filter for us.

In 2011, the University is nonetheless ready to answer these questions. We have great facilities (with a couple of exceptions), the best undergraduates and graduate students whom we have ever enrolled, the best faculty the University has ever attracted (and sometimes struggles to keep), administrative offices (e.g., admission) that are entirely focused on academic quality, an energized Faculty Senate, and adequate one-time funds to allow experimentation with what works and what does not. It is now time for the University to embrace this challenge head-on, not piecemeal and incrementally, but as a powerful bloc of teachers, scholars, researchers, and creative artists, and administrators who will demand of ourselves the highest standards of academic achievement – and to do so in an environment that has never been more challenging to U.S. higher education.

Process

How do we do this? We often answer these questions from our own academic sense of the appropriate, from our discipline's standards of academic practice, or from a sense what we have always done at DU. Those references are no longer adequate. We must add to them a much more informed view of challenges that universities are facing nationwide and how the University of Denver must renew itself academically in response.

We launched the University's strategic positioning exercise in February 2011. That followed on the heels of the University's successful reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission for the next ten years – an outcome achieved after a comprehensive two-year self-study of every aspect of the University's operations. Six themes were chosen, six committees were seated to address the themes, and each committee was charged with producing no more than three strategic priorities for each theme. Each priority needed explicitly to increase the value of a DU education, and each priority needed to have a University-wide reach.

The six themes are *internationalization, interdisciplinary programs, academic research, academic technology, undergraduate academic experience, and faculty enhancement.* Over four months, these committees – consisting of faculty members and academic administrators – met, discussed, engaged the rest of the University community, and produced their academic priorities. Those were shared with a steering committee of the provost and the deans and synthesized during the month

of July. Following that, the steering committee met with the committee co-chairs for further refinement. In mid-September, a draft was presented to the chancellor for his input. In mid-October, the chancellor gave his approval for moving forward. This document is the product of an expedited 9-month process. Along the way, over one hundred faculty members and academic administrators participated.

A few things emerged from this process. For one, many of the committees' recommendations are of the enabling kind. They are not specific recommendations to create X interdisciplinary program, to adopt Y technology platform for teaching, or to establish an international relationship with university Z. At this stage, that is entirely appropriate.

In a number of instances (Priorities I – V below), recommended instead was a series of "incubators" where faculty and administrators could come with good programmatic and research ideas, where those ideas could be quickly reviewed by knowledgeable colleagues, where the best of them could become pilot-projects with adequate one-time funding to test their value, and from which successful projects would be sent for appropriate University approval, adoption, and base-budget funding.

These reviews need to be both timely and decisive. DU has had success with this method in the recent past (with the Marsico Initiative), and it plays on our strengths of moderate size, lack of entrenched bureaucracy, and an institutional ethos of experimentation and innovation.

The University will set aside $2 million in venture funds to run pilot programs on proposals that come before these incubators. For those that are successful and consistent with the University's mission and goals, base budget funding will be forthcoming.

In other instances (Priorities VI – VII), base budget funding will be provided immediately to begin moving the priority forward, sometimes in a multi-year manner. These include the Center for Quantitative Reasoning and all of the Faculty Enhancement initiatives.

Academic Strategic Priorities

I.   *Interdisciplinary Development Incubator*

We have talked about the importance of interdisciplinarity at the University for some time, but we have little to show for it. Our professional graduate programs are particularly ripe for select programmatic integration. Both our researchers and our extramural research volume especially in the sciences and engineering would

benefit from much tighter interdisciplinary collaboration. Envisioned are both research and curricular collaborations
Administrative Responsibility: Associate Provosts for Research, Graduate Studies, and Undergraduate Academic Programs.

II.   *International Research and Education Incubator*

To embed internationalization more deeply at the University, this incubator will explore and fund pilot projects that link DU and international universities, foundations, and businesses. Those could include research and scholarship collaborations, internship opportunities, and industry education/training arrangements. Permanent funding already budgeted in OI will also leverage these efforts.
Administrative Responsibility: Vice Provost for Internationalization

III.   *Office of Teaching and Learning*

The University will expand the Center for Teaching and Learning and create the *Office of Teaching and Learning* with two foci: faculty teaching development and the exploration and adoption of academic technology. While related, it is important at this juncture to devote stand-alone resources for the exploration of appropriate academic technology. Permanent funding already budgeted in the CTL will also leverage these efforts.
1. *University Teaching Incubator*
   This incubator will explore and fund broad-based pilot projects to improve teaching at the University. The scope must be significant and informed by national best practices.
   Administrative Responsibility: Director of Teaching and Learning
2. *Academic Technology Incubator*
   This incubator will explore and fund pilot projects to investigate, acquire, and train faculty members on technology platforms and applications to improve teaching and research. University Technology Services will collaborate closely.
   Administrative Responsibility: Director of Teaching and Learning

IV.   *Inclusive Excellence Incubator*

This incubator will implement the recently completed strategic plan for inclusive excellence. Increasing compositional diversity and creating a positive and inclusive campus climate are linked to improving academic outcomes across the campus. The incubator will provide pilot funding to assist academic units in enhancing curricular content, teaching methods, and scholarship devoted to inclusion and diversity. It will also address the best methods for recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty and

student body. Permanent funding already budgeted in CME will also leverage these efforts.
Administrative Responsibility: Associate Provost for Inclusive Excellence

V.   *Faculty Research Incubator*

Linked with but separate from the interdisciplinary and internationalization initiative, this incubator will explore and support pilot projects to increase the volume of extramural research funding at DU. Permanent funding already budgeted for PROF and FRF will also leverage this effort.
Administrative Responsibility: Associate Provost for Research

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VI.   *Center for Quantitative Reasoning*

The University will create a quantitative reasoning resource that is modeled on, in part, the successful Writing Center. It will serve as a resource for students in their coursework as well as for faculty members in their teaching, research, and scholarship. It will work closely with the Office of Teaching and Learning and be staffed mainly by the Department of Mathematics.
Administrative Responsibility: Dean, Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

VII.   *Faculty Enhancement Project*

The improvement of learning at the University of Denver pivots on the academic quality and activities of its faculty members. Faculty hiring, development, and promotion must acquire greater University-wide importance.

- *Faculty Salary Initiative*:
  The University will implement a multi-year merit-based plan to close the faculty salary gap with peer and competitive institutions.
  Administrative Responsibility: Provost
  Permanent funding to be determined

- *Fund for Faculty Excellence*:
  This will attract and help retain extraordinary faculty members who are nationally and internationally competitive. This is not a "counter-offer fund."
  Administrative Responsibility: Provost
  Permanent funding to be determined

- *Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure Faculty Guidelines*:

Topics for review and amendment include the mid-tenure review, faculty appointments and titles, and the role interdisciplinary research, among others.
Administrative Responsibility: Faculty Senate, Deans, Provost

- *Graduate Research Assistant Tuition Expense*
  Continue the multi-year plan to reduce the expense of graduate research assistant tuition charges against extramural research grants.
  Administrative Responsibility: Associate Provost for Research, Provost
  Permanent Funding to be determined

- *Enhanced Faculty Sabbatical Awards*
  Increase to a maximum of ten each year and augment those awards with either a stipend or one extra term of release from University responsibilities.
  Administrative Responsibility: Faculty Senate, Deans, Provost
  Permanent Funding to be determined

- *Untenured Faculty Teaching*
  Encourage the "stacking" of teaching responsibilities to free up one academic term per year from teaching responsibilities for untenured tenure-line faculty members.
  Administrative Responsibility: Department Chairs, Program Directors, Deans

- *Faculty Lifecycle Contracts*
  Create flexible contracts for faculty members at different times of their careers. Senior faculty members, for example, might opt for more teaching responsibilities depending on their research productivity.
  Administrative Responsibility: Department Chairs, Program Directors, Deans

- *Faculty Transition Project*
  Create an explicit, transparent, flexible, and generous transition program to facilitate faculty retirement.
  Administrative Responsibility: Faculty Senate, Human Resources, Deans, Provost
  Permanent funding to be determined

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There are of course a number of other on-going University initiatives that are not part of these academic priorities, e.g., increasing year-round enrollment with a larger summer term program, and these will continue to be pursued. Other significant operational issues are also being addressed, e.g., class scheduling during the week, credit-hour harmonization (now required by the federal government), and types of textbook availability.

Next Steps

The *Renew DU* initiative will be discussed in, and submitted for approval by, the Faculty Senate in the fall quarter. If successful, then the following steps will be taken.

During the budget development process for fiscal year 2013 (the fiscal year begins July 1, 2012), permanent funding for Priorities VI & VII will begin to be built into the University's budget. The faculty salary initiative will be a multi-year budget project.

By February 1, 2012, the incubators will be formed with a core group of facilitators of 6-7 faculty and staff members. These facilitators must be knowledgeable, interested, and committed to the initiative. Nominations for each facilitator group will be made by the *Renew DU Committee* and recommended to the provost.

The *Renew DU Committee* will consist of the deans and the twelve co-chairs of the original six strategic positioning committees. This committee will be chaired by a faculty member and make recommendations for permanent funding of successful specific pilot-tested initiatives to the provost. All University approval processes for initiatives will remain intact (e.g., review by the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils for curricular initiatives).