

A Few Points on Strategic Plans **Matt O'Donnell –6/22/2006**

I've read a few strategic plans so far and they have been too vague. A great strategic plan should be specific yet flexible. It should be very concrete and articulate priorities among several excellent alternatives, but the overall plan must be updated regularly so you don't lock yourself into an older world view. Here are some points that may help as you put documents together.

I Need to be Bigger

We all know the best departments in any discipline tend to be among the biggest as well. However, there are medium size departments in every discipline competing at the top level but virtually no small departments at the top. Getting bigger is necessary, but not sufficient, for most departments in the college. The following argument does not hold a lot of water:

UW Department XYZ has 15 faculty members. The average faculty count in top ten departments is 25. Therefore, we need 10 new faculty members to compete with the top tier.

A different but parallel argument is a strategy:

UW Department XYZ has 15 faculty members with strengths in areas A, B, and C. Top ten departments average 25 faculty and typically hold leadership positions in 5 areas. In area A, we need a theoretical faculty member working with Joe Bagodonuts and others in Applied Math to help move us into the top tier. In area B we have true leadership and should work hard through salary incentives and targeted facilities upgrades to keep everything we already have. In area C, we need one new junior faculty member who can bridge computational and experimental strengths in the department to bring us to true national leadership. We will clearly need to upgrade the QRS lab for this recruit. Based on local strengths in the B-School, SoM, and School of Public Health, we believe we can build on the recent success of Sally Dynamite to grow in area D. This area has the potential to be a paradigm shift for the entire field and can help define XYZ in the 21st century. It will take a senior hire with a large experimental program to kick start these efforts, but we think it is the highest priority to move the department up a tier. The senior hire will clearly need to bring along at least one other person to work with Sally and her team to take this program to the top. Finally, we cannot move to national prominence in area E, but we think there is an opportunity to leverage large developing programs in A&S to initiate a solid program that could give us some national prominence. Overall, we look to hire 5 new faculty members in the next few years, partnering with the B-School, SoM, Public Health, and A&S to bring us to national prominence in areas A,B,C, and D and launch a new program in the important field of area E. We will need significant facilities upgrades for Area C. To launch areas D&E, we need new space for the recruits and Sally. Since the program will be highly experimental, we will look at facilities outside the department core (e.g., Fluke, R&T ...). Clearly, growth into areas D&E are our highest priority and will take the most resources. (THEN GO ON TO TALK ABOUT POTENTIAL WAYS TO GET THE NEEDED RESOURCES).

Obviously, this is greatly simplified and must be fleshed out, but I think you get the idea.

COMMENT: This was the first page of a several page document to engineering department chairs at the University of Washington regarding strategic plans. It specifically addresses faculty hiring, only one component of an overall departmental strategic plan.