Minutes*

Senate Committee on Finance and Planning
November 24, 1992

Present: Fred Morrison (chair pro tem), David Berg, William Gerberich, Karen Geronime,
              Michael Hoey, Julie Idelkope, Craig Kissock, Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, Richard
              Pfutzenreuter, Paul Sackett, Jason Schmidt, Thomas Scott, Mary Sue Simmons, Susie
              Torgerson

Guests: Ken Janzen (Regents' Office), Patricia Kovel-Jarboe (Academic Affairs), Acting
              Assistant Vice President Michael O'Connor

[In these minutes: CUFS, briefly; discussion of development of a vision statement that could drive the
planning process; supercomputing, very briefly]

Discussion of Cross-Cutting Planning Issues

        Professor Morrison convened the meeting at 3:15 and explained that the entire meeting would be
devoted to a discussion of cross-cutting planning issues.   First, however, he turned to Mr. O'Connor for a
brief comment about CUFS.

        Mr. O'Connor explained that he was at the meeting because he said he would be available.   The
Regents heard basically the same presentation that the Committee had heard about the need for remedial
action; they agreed that the problems must be dealt with and support the plans.   They have a large task
ahead of them, he said, and acknowledged that the amounts called for may not be enough.

        Professor Morrison said it would be helpful, for users, to have a statement indicating when they
could expect various services from the system--pessimistically stated. For many users the situation is
becoming frightening because they do not know the state of their accounts. Mr. O'Connor agreed.

        The discussion then turned to planning. The Committee must address the most important topics,
University-wide, for the planning process, it was said. The Committee, for example, could take a position
on Dr. Infante's statement that there will in the near future be only 20 major research universities and that
the University of Minnesota will be one of them. (One concern is that he may be half right. . . .) Even
if the exact number is wrong, it does appear likely that the number of such institutions WILL shrink.

        Does the University wish to focus its planning so it remains in that group of major research
institutions, or is it prepared to accept the possibility that it will become more marginal--or not a research
university at all? The answer to that question will give units direction in planning: how will their efforts
help the University remain a top 20 research institution?

Another possibility is a focus on the role of the University in the urban community in which it exists, which would drive planning in a different direction, with an emphasis on massive undergraduate education and not focussed on research and graduate education.

The relative priority of those two propositions can be given concrete form in the matter of tuition policy. If the University is to remain a high quality research institution, what is to be done with tuition policy? If the University is to become an urban teaching institution, what is to be done with tuition policy? The two questions would not have the same answers.

On the question of remaining a top 20 research institution, another Committee member observed, the answer has consequences for the deployment of resources. On the other side of the coin, a lot of institutions that promise research may be pulled back and directed to emphasize teaching. Also a consideration is the role of the University in the Minnesota higher education system: What the University does affects the other systems.

Professor Scott then distributed to the Committee a list of planning topics generated over recent months from a variety of sources. (The list is as follows: finance, how we teach and learn, research, outreach, human resources, infrastructure, information technology, management and accountability, organization/structure, creating community, ethics, reward systems, benchmarks/outcomes/measurement, distance education, diversity, international, enrollment, inter-system relationships, preparation requirements, treatment of open positions and retirements.) There are a lot of questions buried in these topics, he observed, and it may be useful to group them where meaningful and to suggest priorities. Some of them, moreover, will be discussed in terms of a University-wide perspective (and they need to be identified); some will be addressed more appropriately at the campus or college level.

In some cases, Professor Scott reported, discussion and planning is already well underway, or even close to completion. These include research, outreach, information technology, distance education, internationalizing the University, and enrollment. Mr. O'Connor outlined briefly for the Committee the status of the information technology planning process that will take about a year to bring to completion.

One Committee member said the issues needed to be categorized to be usable, but that one fundamental issue was not on the list: the relationship of the University to the state and to state funding. The state now pays about 28% of the dollars that flow through the University; does the University wish to consider becoming an "independent" institution? A second fundamental issue, it was said, is the role of the University in serving the state and the world, in serving the urban and agricultural parts of the state. Is it to become the University of Minneapolis? The role of the University in the state, GIVEN the developments in higher education over the past 20 years, must be considered; could the University decide to no longer play a significant role in undergraduate education?

Another set of issues are operational--finances, human resources, the reward system, ethics, etc. The role in the state, Professor Scott reported, will be addressed by the Outreach task force; that is a central theme in its draft report. The matter of funding is embedded in both the financial issues and the inter-system relations. He said the Outreach task force, however, is not addressing what the University should be doing beyond the borders of the state. Universities can affect their local areas, their region, or the world--the University, it was argued, should be in the last category, although that approach seems to be absent from the planning process. Professor Scott agreed that the University has a clearer responsibility to the state and nation, through its land-grant mission, than perhaps other institutions do.

Human resources are a big item, another Committee member commented. The planning process or mission statements should define faculty, professional/administration, and civil service functions and the value of each group. One concern is being driven by the wholesale conversion of civil service appointments to the P&A category so that they can be put on one-year contracts. People holding jobs are invited to apply for their own position, often at a lower salary and with less job security, which undermines both the intent and the professionalism of the P&A system. It does not create a healthy employment climate when the director of one unit declares with pride that he is moving fast to convert employees to P&A slots so that if they do not produce they can be fired.

The list provided by Professor Scott, commented one Committee member, includes five or six human resources issues, and a number of people see them as big problems. They are fragmented in planning, with different groups dealing with each, and the groups can produce contradictory recommendations. The issues on the list are generally second- or third-order issues, it was argued, and do not respond to the question "what do we want to be?" A university IN Minnesota? OF Minnesota? Of the world, with services to Minnesota and the world? FOR Minnesota, focussing inward? The answers will drive planning. What will happen, again, is that the planning issues on the list will be fragmented, so outreach people are dealing with outreach--and will argue that outreach is more important than instruction or research. Teaching and learning people, and research people, will each make contrary recommendations--and the result will be that we get 20% of each report adopted, the authors are made unhappy, and the University left with no direction.

Professor Scott agreed, and said the Committee should think strategically about the topics and the appropriate questions. In some cases, the questions and answers may depend on the answer to the question about "what do we want to be?" There will, however, always be staff, so those topics which fall into the human resource category could be grouped and considered. The treatment of open positions and retirements, for instance, could be recaptured centrally or left to the units.

The Committee member who raised the "what do we want to be?" question expressed exasperation at the continued return to what were said to be these second- and third-order issues. Another responded by saying the strategic questions had to posed so they answered the "strategic for whom?" query: the legislature? research providers? the public? Washington? The question of "what do we want to be" must be answered before these can be addressed.   All of these groups are included, Professor Scott said; each department can be asked about directions for research funding, for instance, and the implications for graduate education and post docs, and what they would need for the department to succeed in a top-20 research university. Each department/faculty member might have a different view, it was said, but they could draw up a list of issues for those in research to consider--and that, Professor Scott rejoined, is what the planning process is supposed to do. Doing so, however, is a waste of time, it was said, if the University decides to become an urban undergraduate institution, so the earlier question has to be answered first. Professor Scott agreed that some statement is needed so departments know they are not wasting time.

It is more than not wasting time, said another Committee member; the statement is needed so that they can ACHIEVE something. Without a long-term plan and overall direction, the University will merely seek marginal improvements. There needs to be a sentence like "the University will be among the top 20 research universities so it can provide high quality undergraduate and graduate instruction."

Otherwise, it was suggested, the University could run a streetcar company.   It needs SOME guiding statement, which in turn drives who does the work, how it is delivered, and so on.

The President, it was said by another Committee member, needs to provide a vision statement for the next 10-25 years, with outcomes identified, or the planning process is spinning its wheels.   This same problem occurs in every planning process, observed another: getting to the highest-order question. Arraying what the institution might do, in order of importance, is VERY hard to do.   The University need not do all that it is now doing, and it could be doing other things it is not doing.

Resources are limited--they will ALWAYS be limited--and until that ordering is accomplished, the topics on the list are second-order issues.

What kind of statement, Professor Scott inquired, must be devised to permit planning to proceed? A statement that is meaningful from the standpoint of how units think about issues, that provides direction but doesn't answer all the questions. One version was proposed earlier: The University will be among the top 20 research universities so it can continue to provide high quality undergraduate and graduate education and service to the state and international community.   That statement, it was urged, says QUALITY rather than quantity of students will be the standard, and it provides some guidance to dealing with second-order issues. The reward system must promote the objective, as must the organization and structure. Alternatively, the University could decide to maintain an urban campus with broad access, as the only major institution in the metropolitan area, with some research and outreach. It is DIFFICULT to make the decisions about ordering priorities, but it is not IMPOSSIBLE.

Some of the decisions are easy, said one Committee member; the University is clearly doing things it has no excuse for doing with state subsidies. Some things NO ONE will argue the University should STOP doing--who is going to argue that it should not be among the top 20 research universities? And if the University decides it is putting state money where it should not, then hard decisions will have to be made.

One way to proceed, suggested a Committee member, would be to appoint a set of working groups to respond to questions such "where do we go?" and "who should be doing it?" and "what should we stop doing?"   Such groups could develop visions about the two-20 question, undergraduate education, community service, and bring them to this Committee and the Consultative Committee.   They, in turn, could try to seek consensus on the priorities so that the process could get onto the next steps and the units could begin to plan.

Asked how important consensus is, it was said it more important to the process than the outcomes.   Within the institution there should be a fair amount of agreement, said another--the faculty can tear apart anything they don't like, and consensus would prevent the institution from being "jerked around" because of administrative turnover.

The consensus should also involve the state and its government. it was said.   That involvement would not necessarily "constrain" the University, however--the University should have a view of itself and should bring the state along with it.   And the different circumstances of higher education in the state must be recalled: there were no technical colleges, the state universities are very different from what they once were, as are the community colleges. A second-level question is how the systems cooperate.

Does the President have a vision? Asked recently, he spoke of quality and the institution as a "treasure" of the state.   That isn't a term we apply to other institutions, it was noted, and the President has tried to distinguish the University from other organizations in Minnesota.

In terms of process, Professor Scott inquired, must there be broad consensus inside and outside the University? The significant majority of the Committee appeared to think not.   If so, why is it important at all, he then inquired? Because without it, any plan is doomed.   Why not say so? Because it is understood.   Professor Scott expressed doubt about the last proposition.   The problem with consensus, one Committee member elaborated, is that it carries the message that if any "not insignificant" (not "significant") group wants to block development of policy, it can do so--and the planning process becomes a replication of the status quo, adjusted across-the-board by a few percentage points. There cannot be "broad consensus" that a unit will be closed down--the unit will never agree.   The Committee appeared to agree with the observation of one of its members that "consensus" means 55 or 60%.

Discussion next turned to the term "land grant." It WILL be talked about, Professor Scott said; what does it mean and how should it guide planning? The President has redefined it to include urban responsibilities, one Committee member observed.   Another said it was now an invocation put in statements that means nothing.   Maybe it needs to be included, but in modern terminology, it may be talking about outreach. Another Committee member pointed out that the term means different things to different people; for some, it means the University will strive to charge no tuition and open its doors to any student in the state.   Others see it as related to the agricultural community.   If the President is to approve any statement from the Committee, it was said, the term better be in the mission or vision.

Unless the Committee defines what it means, said one Committee member, it could be invoked by anyone to claim the University should go in a particular direction--so the definition cannot be left open.   But the Committee may also be unable to define the term satisfactorily.   One Committee member suggested the Committee "just declare victory"--it means what the Committee finally agrees on as the mission or vision statement.   Another problem, observed another Committee member, is that when the University advanced Commitment to Focus, it said that a lot of institutions now share in the land-grant mission--and if that is true, it is a mission that does not differentiate the University from other schools in the state. More recently however, the University has wrapped itself in the land-grant mission--a turnabout that can make one slightly uncomfortable.

Another alternative is to look at the statutes defining the missions of the systems; the University is to be the sole deliverer of doctoral education and extension services.   Those two items certainly distinguish the University; they also permit it do anything, because while it excludes others from certain activities, it excludes the University from nothing.   The doctoral education, moreover, said another, certainly speaks to the importance of research.   Asked if there is a risk of defining the mission in terms of statutory provisions rather than constitutional language, it was said that the University could defy the statutory definition if it wished--it is no more binding if the University chooses to follow than if it does not.

Words like "treasure" and quality and the role of research gives the University a different role, it was said--and that the University cannot reach out to all people. It was agreed that each Committee member would try to draft--by Monday--a one- or two-sentence statement that could guide the planning process; the statements will be collated and provided at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the Committee would return to the list of topics Professor Scott provided at the meeting and that it would be necessary to order them and to group them by institutional perspective or unit perspective (or a mixture of the two). Some must be addressed before colleges can begin planning; others need not be.

2.   Supercomputing

One Committee member raised the issue of supercomputing: However advantageous it might be, it will cost the University more in the legislature than the University is gaining from it.   There needs to be a hard look to determine whether or not the University is "backing a loser." These are not issues related to academic freedom or constitutional autonomy, they arise because of University arrangements with a commercial enterprise.   The entire arrangement invites great suspicion from the state, and will as long as secrecy pervades it.

It was agreed this topic would be taken up at the meeting on December 8.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota