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Reflections on Staff Review from BOG on Draft Work Plan

OVERVIEW

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) appreciates the feedback provided by Vice Chancellor Ignash on the Draft Work Plan submitted by the University. The comments have caused us to reconsider some of the goals and they have been adjusted in the final Work Plan that we are submitting. In addition, we wanted to share with you some of the considerations that shaped our thinking on various metrics.

Our Metrics are data driven. We have set our goals based on certain realities; important among these is the continuing impact of a large cohort of Access and Opportunity Students (BOG refers to them as “profile admits”). The metrics reflect the challenges these students face, as well as FAMU’s challenge in meeting their needs in a time of declining or flat support. FAMU is committed to fulfilling its mission of helping these students meet their educational goals, and enhancing the educational and financial status of their families. FAMU’s success in this effort advances the state’s workforce and financial development goals.

At the same time, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University is deploying strategies to attract more students, and restore its status as a college of choice for merit scholars, transfer students and high-achieving graduate students. We continue our efforts to promote STEM and other strategic fields in our pipeline programs, and we are undertaking realignment of our degree programs to ensure they continue to keep abreast with changing industry needs.

We are also putting in place initiatives intended to improve student outcomes, in particular initiatives that allow us to continue to make progress in our student retention rate and to make significant improvement in our 6-year graduation rate. We keenly appreciate the importance of faculty engagement in these efforts; faculty vitality and faculty development figure significantly in our strategies. We are also developing new mechanisms to support faculty research and innovation efforts.

Even as we undertake these ambitious strategies we are cautious about their likely short-term impact. We have set responsibly aggressive goals with the expectation of adjusting metrics for the out-years as we appreciate the impact of these efforts and adopt new strategies.

Having set this context, we now address the comments offered by the BOG staff.

Comments Regarding Strategies related to Undergraduate Education and Research

Improving undergraduate education, particularly as it relates to retention and graduation rates, is FAMU's highest priority. Many initiatives are underway to accomplish this including the establishment of the Student Success Center last year and the launch of Residential Living and Learning Communities in fall 2015. Increasing research activity and standing as a Doctoral Research University (DRU) is an important strategy that also supports undergraduate education. Research-active faculty can engage undergraduate students more vigorously. FAMU is already providing research experience to many undergraduates, which enhances their college experience and is particularly useful for STEM students; this will be enhanced with greater research funding, opportunities and support that research-active faculty and doctoral students can provide. A vigorous research program also attracts to FAMU the best graduate students as well as new faculty who are of the highest quality, which also enhances the educational and research experiences of undergraduates.

Comments Regarding Metrics related to Graduation of Undergraduates

Metrics relating to graduation of undergraduates, such as six year graduation rate, excess hours and time to degree, are determined to a great extent by student actions that have already occurred in past years. This includes the cohorts with high numbers of profile admits (FAMU refers to them as Access and Opportunity Students) through fall 2012, whose impact will continue to be felt for approximately 8 years after entry as they graduate. University data analyses indicate that these students have significantly lower graduation rates, longer time to degree and higher excess hours. However, we are already seeing positive results the many enhanced and new initiatives outlined in the Institution's Retention and Debt Reduction Plan presented to the BOG in 2012. For example, we have made significant progress in reducing time to degree from 5.3 years in 2009-10 to 4.8 years in 2013-14. We acknowledge that more work remains to be done in these areas, and fully expect that additional initiatives identified by President Mangum and Provost David will take effect and improve graduation rates more significantly in future years. We have increased goals where we thought appropriate and maintained goals that are realistic. If the new strategies being implemented bear strong results we will increase the targets in future years.

In regard to STEM degrees produced, the University already performs at a level of excellence in the related performance metric. We do plan to increase STEM and health degree production even more, but we also believe that production of other graduates such as those in business, broadcast and music industries are also important for the economic vitality of the state.

Comments Regarding Metrics related to Graduation of Graduate Students

The conservative projections of degrees awarded at the graduate level reflect the national decline in law school applications. Since law school enrollment is a significant portion of our graduate enrollment, while increases in other disciplines will enable us to maintain graduate enrollment, substantial increases in production of degrees in the next five years may not be realistic.

Comments Regarding Metrics related to Academic Programs

In regard to licensure examination pass rates, the four programs below the national/state benchmarks in calendar year 2014 were: Nursing, Law, Pharmacy, and Physical Therapy. Occupational Therapy has made a dramatic improvement in pass rates and, at 92%, is now above the benchmark. All programs have improving licensure examination pass rates as a key strategic goal, and they have implemented a variety of initiatives and interventions including enhanced screening of applicants, curricular revisions, intermediate and end-of-program tests to help students prepare for the examinations; many of the programs have made progress in the past four years. The reality is that FAMU provides opportunities for disadvantaged, underrepresented students who may not gain entry into similar programs at other institutions; therefore we must work harder to exceed the benchmarks compared to these other institutions. We anticipate that three programs will exceed benchmarks in the out years and the remaining programs will continue to work to meet this goal as well.

In regard to specialized accreditation, FAMU has a very high percentage and number of accredited programs. FAMU will seek CAEP accreditation for the new MS Curriculum and instruction. There are a number of programs in the arts and humanities for which the institution does not plan to seek accreditation in the near future. Due to financial constraints, low enrollment, and the fact that accreditation of such programs has little to no impact on employment, FAMU has elected to forego accreditation of these programs.

The University plans to take the pre-proposal for a Bachelor's in Digital Media through the CAVP Academic Coordination process in 2015-16. The doctoral programs that FAMU proposes for the period 2016-18 are part of a long-term plan dating back to discussions with the Board of Regents in the 1990s. In 1999-2000, FAMU proposed to then Board of Regents and Chancellor, the concept of a Center of Excellence in Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Technology to offer graduate programs to increase the representation of African Americans in these disciplines. The concept was accepted, in part based on FAMU's success in graduating African Americans in STEM fields; as a point of information, FAMU awarded PhDs in physics to two African-American women in May 2015, representing an estimated 25% of all physics PhDs awarded to African Americans in the nation. The need to increase African Americans in STEM, particularly at the PhD level, still exists and it is this need we seek to address with the proposed programs. We will seek these programs only after thorough review to ascertain the need and demand, the capacity of the institution to offer quality programs, and financial feasibility.

Comments Regarding Enrollment, Cost and Student Debt

FAMU's enrollment declined significantly in 2013, undermining the growth experienced in prior years. The University is now building back the enrollment strategically, with students who have strong academic preparation. The University is pleased that the number of applicants continues to grow. In addition to increasing FTICs, the University is building partnerships with community colleges and plans to increase support for graduate students to attract greater numbers of well-qualified students.

In the Enrollment Planning section, the percent of 40.9% Access and Opportunity Students (BOG refers to them as "profile admits") reflected for fall 2014 is the percent of total undergraduate enrollment that entered as Access and Opportunity Students, not the percent of new profile admits entering fall 2014, as stated in the commentary. FAMU has significantly decreased percentage and number of Access and

Opportunity Students, which in fall 2014 was 310 compared to a high of 1,495 in fall 2009. The University's leadership is setting a limit of 200 fall Access and Opportunity Students ("profile admits") moving forward.

Enrollment at the University is directly linked to the increase projected for the Cost per Degree performance metric, which is a four-year rolling average. The year of data that will be dropping out includes much higher fundable student credit hours than we anticipate for next year. This is a result of the decline in enrollment as the University has become more selective, admitting far fewer profile assessment students. We are prepared to discuss this reality with the Board of Governors.

A high percentage of FAMU students do carry student debt, related to the fact that 62% of enrolled students are Pell grant recipients and 60% come from families with income less than \$40,000. The University has embarked on initiatives to reduce student debt including hiring debt counselors. These initiatives are already having an impact as demonstrated in the significant decline in loan default rates from over 18 percent to under 15 percent in just one year. A new scholarship program, "Strong Finish," was initiated in 2014. This debt reduction program, awarded at graduation, pays down up to 50% of the debt of high-achieving students with family income less than \$40,000, who entered FAMU without merit scholarships, and graduated in four years. In 2015 the value of the Strong Finish program is approximately \$700,000.

Comments Regarding Research Metrics

The current projections for research funding and other metrics are predicated on two important facts. First, the newly appointed Vice President for Research (January 2015) is still conducting internal assessments of the institution's research capacity and activity. Second, Federal research budgets are experiencing either stagnation or reduction across all sectors. As FAMU develops a new strategic vision for research activities, research thrust areas and key client targets, the University will be in a better position to revise research goals in the next Work Plan.

SUMMARY

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University is implementing strategies to cement our standing as a best-in-class doctoral university with an international presence, and fulfilling our mission of providing a student-centered learning environment infused with excellence. The 2015-16 Work Plan sets realistic yet aggressive benchmarks for our path forward.