

Strategic Plan for Higher Education: Centers of Excellence

The Vision for Excellence through Mission Differentiation

For the University System of Ohio to be a magnet for talent and innovation, the quality and reputation of the universities must grow. It does Ohio no good to have thirteen universities competing for resources, students and faculty. In a competitive global market for talent, the only way for the system as a whole to raise its quality is for each institution to develop distinctive missions and Centers of Excellence that are recognized by students, faculty and business leaders. If Ohio can boast of thirteen distinct universities, collaborating to help build each other's strengths - while competing globally to bring talent and resources to the state - then the state will enjoy the economic benefits that flow from a world-class system of public higher education. And the choice of thirteen distinctive universities will *give* Ohio's students and businesses a range of options that make the case for staying in Ohio.

The historic strengths and traditions of each of Ohio's thirteen public *university* main campuses will be drawn upon to create distinctive missions for each, which must include a comprehensive, high quality education, as well as the establishment of nationally and internationally-recognized Centers of Excellence that will be drivers of both the regional and state economies and that will complement the comprehensive, quality education available at each institution. The goal for most schools will be to sharpen their focus. Others *have* not yet taken this path. For those schools, this plan will be more difficult and perhaps engender greater concern. But it is a necessary effort, and the state must support it by targeting resources to programs of excellence and linking subsidies to achieving mission-driven goals and metrics.

Centers of Excellence Institutional Report

The Chancellor will, in consultation with the institutions, develop templates for the documents to be submitted by the institutions identifying Centers of Excellence, institution specific accountability measures, and good faith budget estimates. In the report to the Chancellor due at the end of June, 2009, each university will identify and establish goals for their Centers of Excellence. This report, which must be approved by the Board of Trustees, will also specify the externally-recognized standards that will be used to measure progress. The Chancellor, in consultation with the Director of Development, will approve or seek modifications in the reports to guarantee a range of academic strength sufficient to drive the global competitiveness of Ohio's economy.

Enhanced Funding for Centers of Excellence

The strategic plan calls for the establishment of an Excellence Fund under the control of the Chancellor, funded through shared efforts of the state and the University System of Ohio institutions. The Excellence Fund will be used by the Chancellor to support Centers of Excellence that the Chancellor deems to be especially worthy or in need of additional support. The criteria for selection would be developed and published by the Chancellor in an open and transparent manner, with appropriate external review procedures created and followed.

The Excellence Fund would be funded through a combination of institution contributions and state funds. The state would first calculate the subsidy to be provided to each institution under the formula prevailing in a *given* budget cycle. The Excellence Fund would equal one percent of the amount, with half coming from the existing subsidy line intended for the institutions, and half coming from an additional state match. If the state is unable to fund the match, then the institution's share should not be withheld. The Chancellor would also seek non-state funds to support the Excellence Fund.

The Role of the Humanities and Fine and Performing Arts

Where the strategic plan speaks of developing Centers of Excellence, it fully contemplates that these centers can and will be established in fields commonly associated with the humanities, the fine and performing arts as well as the science and engineering disciplines.

The Role of Graduate and Professional Education

Discussions of university quality often center on undergraduate education, but the reputation and impact of universities increasingly depends on graduate and professional education. Graduate and professional education develops the leadership, management, clinical, and research skills needed in the workplace of the 21st century, and is at the core of academic Centers of Excellence that provide nurturing environments where new ideas are incubated, developed, tested, and refined. Where the strategic plan speaks of a comprehensive, quality education, it is meant in the broadest sense to include liberal arts and the humanities. Successful graduate programs are most often associated with academic Centers of Excellence. Accordingly, an important component of each university's response to the development of Centers of Excellence will be the potential of those Centers of Excellence to include graduate programs with a sufficient national and international reputation to attract top students and faculty.

Centers of Excellence Benchmarking Metrics

Colleges and universities have to pay attention to popular ranking systems like the ones developed by U.S. News & World Report because, like the Academy Awards, they are well known, widely promoted, and have influence on student and parent choices. For the purpose of measuring true quality in a given field, however, it is critical to rely on measures of success that are accepted nationally and are externally verifiable.

That is why the report to be developed by each institution regarding Centers of Excellence will include the nationally comparable measurement systems that will be used to track progress. And that is why Ohio's strategic plan for higher education uses, and the Board of Regents will continue to use, the measures of research activity compiled by the National Science Foundation (NSF) as its basic tool in comparing Ohio's institutions to our national competitors. The NSF figures are credible, are widely accepted, and allow apples to apples comparisons between institutions. The Board of Regents will also rely on the project to assess U.S. research doctorate programs of the National Research Council.

Future Funding Definitions

The Chancellor will take the final, approved Centers of Excellence into account in making all future funding decisions and recommendations. The Chancellor is committed to working aggressively with presidents and trustees on achieving the needed focus and definitions of excellence. For the Chancellor to succeed, the state must have sufficient flexible funding to support and incentivize the push for quality and Centers of Excellence at our universities, as well as to encourage the establishment of collaborative relationships between the academic Centers of Excellence across the state.