**UND Strategic Planning**

**Meritorious Staff Focus Group Questions**

**May 26, 2022**

**12 participants**

1. **UND’s Mission is “*to provide transformative learning, discovery and community engagement opportunities for developing tomorrow’s leaders*.” What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this statement?**

* I like that it talks about developing tomorrow’s leaders, but I think the first part of it is too vague.
* I was confused with ‘transformative learning.’
* I found myself wanting to look up the word ‘transformation’ to know what it means
* What we do is teaching and service, so this confusion is understandable
* This is completely geared towards students, but no mention of staff or faculty. Some mission statements (U of M) mention faculty and staff working as a team.
* **What do you think should be in the mission statement? What would make it stronger?**
  + I like the discovery aspect. Sparking lifelong learning. I feel this gets lost in this statement. Needs to be expanded on.

1. **Who does UND serve, and do you believe we are currently meeting these needs?** 
   * Students. Right now, it is hard to get ahold of some people directly (some working off campus). So, right now we are not serving students in the way we ought to be
   * We are here to serve the students. With more departments working remotely this does not serve them the best- I agree. We need to always have somebody in the office- it cannot be that people just see signs on doors saying ‘sorry we missed you’
   * On webpages we need to make sure a contact is listed for every office. We need to be easy to reach. More personal, less automation. We need to keep that aspect of the personal touch
   * Agree, some departments do not have numbers listed and that is stressful to people.
   * I think it is hard to get ahold of people and with so many people working from home it makes it difficult. Sometimes students need to meet with us in person.
   * I think we also serve Grand Forks, the Red River Valley, and the state of North Dakota. We owe it to those people to make sure that our programs align with the demands of the people in our state and region and the content of our programs needs to be at the forefront of discovery for our region as well.
2. **Who do you believe UND should be serving and what do you think needs to change for this to happen?** 
   * Do we have programs here that meet the industry needs of this state? If we don’t- we should be looking at this. Are our programs not capable to meet the demands of those fields (i.e. health care, education- we cannot meet the market demand right now).
   * Maybe our students could be serving the community more. I know we are still not completely out of the pandemic and things have been disconnected, but if that could come back or be started it would help students moving forward and connecting. Seems to be a disconnect and lack of belonging and it is becoming concerning.
3. **The Core Values of UND are Community, Discovery, Diversity, Inclusivity, Liberal Arts and Lifelong Learning. What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of these Values?**

* Community is important. When people/students reach out to us we need to be able to help them. This is part of being in a community.
* The value of community is being challenged by the reality that of the last few years. It is hard to have community when you don’t have people gathered in a community. I love the aspirational nature of community, but it has taken a back seat to managing projects, various tasks and ‘getting things done’ mentality. As such, the sense of community has suffered in last few years.
* This is a hard one, because the values, as listed, are strong. Community is lacking because of the pandemic. All listed are strong core values to have and should be the center of what a liberal arts higher educational institution should stand for
* **To what degree do you feel these Values are part of UND’s culture?** 
  + We are not doing a good job living up to what we say we value. This was true pandemic as well. Organizations get siloed and people work in their small area of responsibility and don’t think about how ‘Action A’ relates to ‘Action B.’ We can do better with community, diversity and inclusivity
  + There is a minority that uphold these values, but not all of us. I like the book reads to support DEI initiatives- we needed that for a long time. I have appreciated that focus.
  + With the MU coming back, we are getting better with gathering spaces but more we can do. When I first started here the tag line was “a remarkable sense of family.’ If we can bring that ‘feeling’ back, we would be a better institution.
  + I like that line: ‘a remarkable sense of family’. I remember back in the 80s there was a video made with a tag line of ‘at UND it’s the people’ You can’t say that if you don’t have that sense of community. We have struggled with that lately. Hard to find people with the community mindedness.
* **How would you describe the culture right now?**
  + Judging from the climate when I first came to UND (seven years ago), with the past administration, and being part of staff senate and hearing what other staff are saying I would say right now our climate is better than previous years. A different leadership team has breathed some fresh air into the UND climate. I know of faulty and staff that were thinking of leaving several years ago and have now stopped looking. They remark that they have not felt this well about the campus in a long time. This is what I am hearing.
  + I think President Armacost’s mantra of ‘love your people’ is really welcomed at UND. The climate is changing for the better and I hope this keeps up.
  + President Armacost is the first president since Baker who I feel has his values straight and is working for the right reasons. Have not felt that since Baker.
  + I know he will keep up with this because it is his personality, so I know things will continue to improve. If we can get people back to campus that will help
  + Agree. I think we are on upward trajectory when it comes to campus culture.
  + I think there is still pockets of people that have pandemic PTSD. I am seeing people being terse with each other and using inappropriate professional behavior or words and the pandemic was a huge cause of stress that people didn’t realize they were experiencing. We need to help support each other.
  + One of the things that has impacted the culture is the number of changes and turnover (budget reduction, voluntary separation, etc.). If you have a campus culture that is affected by people leaving who had a long history it will change things. We have lost a lot of institutional connections and that changes the culture of the institution. Those connections are not there the same as they used to be. People and expectations have changed.
  + Agree- I don’t have the same network that I once did. Contributes to the feeling of belonging, connectedness, and the overall culture
  + Couldn’t agree more. I have been here 20 years and I have been through 3-4 presidents, several provosts, VPs, Deans, and people have cycled through. That network is gone. Coming back to campus is a different world now. It is not bad necessarily, but it is different. People who have been here for a while who understand the institutional way of doing things are gone in many cases. New ideas are good, I’m not against that. It is just a different feeling.
  + Want to reestablish these networks, or create new networks.
  + In past 6 years I’ve had 3 presidents and 4 supervisors. Because I work across the university I have gone through multiple deans in each college. Building networks is tough with so much change. Some continuity would be great.
  + So much change in the last few year that the foundation of these networks has been shaken in every corner of the university.
  + What UND needs to try and do is retain their people. Living in new world where employees are looking for certain things in an employer. A good example is flexibility- UND needs to pivot an adjust to the new reality.
  + If UND can try to be dynamic and pivot when we need to and make UND a place that people want to work for. If they cannot physically be on campus or in Grand Forks that may work too. You can do a lot remote- not everyone. If we can be in the forefront of this and lead that would set us up well.
  + More support for staff and faculty. If we are not supported, we cannot support students, which is why we are here. If people are unhappy, they cannot make students happy and that is our goal.
  + The young workforce does not seem like longevity is a priority –not interested in the benefits as much. It might be beneficial to offer a different option where they can opt out of some benefits for a bit higher wage: an ala cate option.
  + I’ve noticed that people not from the area can’t see family as easily as those of us can who are from here. It is hard for them to get away so offering more flexibility to take time to see their loved ones might be helpful.

1. **What do you see as key differentiators of UND as compared to other institutions? What are our strengths, potential areas of growth, or areas which UND should focus for the next decade?**

* Prepare students for the jobs that will be available in 30-40 years- we don’t know what those are yet, but we need to keep an eye on what is changing and what programs we need to develop so we can continue our mission to keep serving the region.
* Agree, it is hard to predict what changes are coming to higher education.
* Our attention to our students. If we give our students personal attention it is important. I have seen students drop out of other institutions because they don’t have the connections to people, but at UND we offer that personal touch.
* Communication is really a big thing. In the past we have not seen a lot of communication or been asked for our input. With this new strategic planning committee, we are seeing a lot more communication and being asked for input and keep us involved. If we keep those lines of communication and more transparency it helps us feel part of the campus environment. We will have better collaboration and it will make the on-campus climate that much better.
* I enjoy President Armacost’ s weekly videos. They make you feel somewhat connected.
* As staff members, what can do to help rebuild the culture to help with the things we **have talked about today?**
  + We used to have better ways to collaborate, but this does not happen anymore. Something like this would be great to bring back. Get people together and being able to throw ideas around.
  + More spaces where we can all get together and interact. Snack bar, or other places where those different communities can interact with one another
  + The event that was done for staff and faculty that helped with Covid response would be a great thing to do for all staff. We used to have a carnival when my grandmother worked here. Just a way to get people together and out of the office that are more lighthearted.
  + I think having campus leaders (all of us) realize how important it is to help cultivate a culture that is positive and asks good questions of each other.

1. **What does it mean to feel valued and supported as an employee at UND?**
   * It is always the same people that are here on Friday afternoons, ones that go the extra mile. How can you serve students when you are not here? We need our people to be here and acknowledge that the ones that have kept the doors open. This is a morale thing. We need to have people here so we can serve our students.
   * When people notice/recognize that you are doing a good job that matters and makes you feel valued and want to work harder.
   * There has to be a personal touch to the working relationship. I got a handwritten card from my supervisor thanking me for my years of service which is a personal touch that says they notice what I am doing.
   * This goes back to question of culture. I find it when people ask meaningful questions and take the time to listen to my response. It doesn't mean that my answers/advise needs to be followed but it engages people in a more meaningful way. Ask us questions and get our thoughts and perspectives. When we can do that on a somewhat regular basis this is meaningful.
   * I agree. I enjoy when people call and asks for my institutional knowledge on things and then ask for my thoughts. This is meaningful to use my brain to think back and use that knowledge to apply to current problems.
2. **What would be your vision for UND’s future? Do you have any ‘big dreams’ for the institution?** 
   * I want to see that ‘caring for students’ come back more strongly. We still have that, but if we can continue this and strengthen this, I think that we can really differentiate ourselves from other colleges. That sense of community, sense of family, and sense of caring for each other.
   * Higher education is changing very fast. We are seeing declining enrollments and some institutions closing. We must be one step ahead of the game in meeting the future needs. We must be willing to know we have to change and make those difficult decisions.
   * We must keep the humanity in our institution but also invest in technology and provide training. We must keep growing and changing. This will only speed up. We must keep people centered university. Reason why student come to UND vs. a university like the U of M. They are huge and impersonal, where we offer a smaller family feel.
   * I would like to see UND remain the premier flagship institution within ND that can retain top notch faculty, staff and students. It would be able to provide an affordable education for our students. Some universities are getting so expensive- a strong point for us is that we are offering an affordable education for a high caliber education. The key would be to recruit and retrain top notch faculty, staff, and students. Good once we get them here, but we need to keep them here too.
   * Research- we have to increase our research.
   * Yes, research is a key piece of this.