Phoenix Strategic Planning Event Draws 200

Nearly 200 people shared their thoughts about the University of Arizona's future during an interactive strategic planning event held on the Phoenix Biomedical Campus last week.

"Your input today is going to be really important to us," UA President Robert C. Robbins told the faculty members, staff, students and community members who gathered at the College of Medicine ? Phoenix, which is located on the historic Phoenix Union High School campus.

Robbins began calling for a new strategic plan shortly after he became president in June. The Phoenix event, held March 6, was part of his commitment to an inclusive process that draws on feedback from people inside and outside the University to create a roadmap for the next 10-20 years. Robbins also has emphasized the potential for the UA to be a leader in what is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is characterized by a convergence of the digital, biological and physical sciences.

The president was joined at the Phoenix event by the co-chairs for the strategic plan, Elliott Cheu, associate dean and Distinguished Professor in the College of Science, and Lisa Ordóñez, vice dean and professor in the Eller College of Management.

In the past few months, Robbins, the co-chairs and others involved in leading the strategic plan process have connected with more than 4,000 people, including members of the UA community, alumni, donors, civic leaders and others throughout the state.

"We have done a lot of listening," Ordóñez said, adding that there are many people who are very passionate about the University and "all the amazing things that are going on."

The Phoenix event was modeled after an interactive session held on the UA's main campus on Jan. 29, with participants using their smartphones to give real-time feedback to a series of questions.

Research, innovation and community figured prominently in the responses that participants gave to these questions: What word best describes the strengths of the University of Arizona? What word should define the University of Arizona 10 years from now? In a word, what makes you most proud to be a Wildcat?

Participants also were asked to work in groups to collectively create a vision for the UA. Each table was asked to agree on a single idea. The ideas were then posted around the room, and participants voted by placing stickers next to the ideas they liked most.

The event ended with a Q&A with Robbins, Ordóñez and Cheu, who shared more context about the strategic planning process.
Previous Plan

The UA’s most recent strategic plan, known as Never Settle, had many good outcomes, such as 100% Student Engagement and cluster faculty hires, Ordóñez said. Unlike that plan, she said, the new plan will "drill down" to the college and department level.

Undergraduate Education

The plan likely will call on the UA to think "big and bold" when it comes to undergraduate education, designing core courses to emphasize those skills that are in increasing demand, such as leadership, problem solving, critical thinking and digital literacy, Cheu said.

Phoenix Biomedical Campus

With students from the UA's medicine, nursing, pharmacy and public health colleges, the UA already has a strong presence in Phoenix, Robbins said. The UA also partners with Northern Arizona University, whose Phoenix programs include occupational therapy and physical therapy.

More collaboration around cutting-edge research is needed "for us to be on the map" and create an environment that attracts Fortune 100 companies in the biomedical sciences, Robbins said.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The plan will be presented to the Arizona Board of Regents in November.

Once it is finalized, "we will be measuring on a quarterly basis" and allocating the resources needed to achieve the goals outlined in the plan, Robbins said.

Student Experience

Another area that will be addressed in the plan is increasing the number of freshmen who return for their sophomore year, Ordóñez said.

"We need to focus on not only getting them to the University of Arizona, but keeping them here," she said.

Next Steps

"Meetups" [2] are being held this month to delve into the ideas that have emerged in the focus groups, campus visits and meetings held thus far, as well as the feedback submitted via the strategic plan website. One will be held on the Phoenix Biomedical Campus, where participants will consider how the UA can create solutions that help people age with dignity. For more information about the March 22 event, or to register, click here [3]. Virtual meetups also are being planned.

Also coming up are visits to colleges, where faculty and staff will be invited to share their thoughts about the strategic plan. The dates for the visits will be posted on the strategic plan website.

In addition, feedback is being collected on the strategic planning website, which is being
updated regularly with questions and prompts. Click here [5] to share your thoughts.

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