Robbins Calls on Campus Community to Help Shape the Future of the UA

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Everyone who cares about the University of Arizona can and should participate in the strategic planning process, President Robert C. Robbins told classified staff and others during a meeting last week.

"Most people roll their eyes when you talk about strategic planning," Robbins said during an hourlong Q&A held by the Classified Staff Council on Jan. 9.

But he thinks it's going to be fun.

"It's going to be fantastic," the president said in his opening remarks to the attendees who had gathered in the Center for Creative Photography auditorium.

Robbins asked everyone to be part of the effort, noting that there will be multiple ways for employees to share their thoughts — ranging from in-person events to an online feedback form on the strategic planning website.

"Everybody's going to get a chance to participate," he said.

Robbins began calling for a new strategic plan since shortly after he became president in June. In several open forums on campus, he has reiterated 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.

One example he gave was the use of drones to analyze crops. Another was the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to aid in a medical diagnosis, such as comparing a scan of a lung with millions of other scans.

"Those kinds of things are going on now" and are not just futuristic ideas, he said.

The UA already excels in many areas that are shaping the future, Robbins said, such as human health, space, optical sciences, students/education and environmental science.

He also emphasized the importance of a broad range of fields including the arts, humanities and social sciences. More than ever, students need emotional intelligence along with competencies in critical thinking and leadership skills, he said. The world, he added, will need scholars to examine the impact that a tech-driven existence has on society and humanity as well as the legal, ethical and business issues that will arise.
Faculty, staff and students are invited to a universitywide campus discussion about the strategic plan on Jan. 29. RSVPs are required. Visit the strategic plan website to register.