The strategic planning process, the search for two senior vice president positions and branding were among the topics discussed at Monday's Faculty Senate meeting.

"I want to thank many of you personally, and you as a group, for participating in the strategic planning process," UA President Robert C. Robbins said.

Hundreds have signed up to attend the strategic planning kickoff event on Jan. 29, but some spots are still available, he reported.

"The process is at the pre-crystallization phase, which basically means there's a lot of stuff happening, a lot of ideas are swirling around," said Lynn Nadel, Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology and chair of the faculty.

During this first phase, which will continue for another month or so, feedback and information are being collected, he said.

"It is going forward in exactly the way it should be going forward ? quite energetically with a lot of buy-in on campus from lots of groups," Nadel said. "It's still wide open for input."

During the following phase, he said, the process will "crystallize around some key, bold initiatives that should distinguish this institution going forward."

The co-chairs of the strategic plan process ? Elliott Cheu, associate dean and professor in the College of Science, and Lisa Ordóñez, vice dean and professor in the Eller College of Management ? will submit a written status report for the Faculty Senate's meeting on Feb. 5. Both are scheduled to speak about the process at the March 5 meeting.

Also on the agenda was a presentation by Tony Proudfoot, interim senior vice president for marketing and communications.

With growing public skepticism about the value of higher education, along with more competition for undergraduates and limited resources, branding for universities is more important than ever before, he said.

Branding is not about "making things shiny," but rather defining the relationship between the UA and its stakeholders in order to build long-term value, he said.

A strong brand not only helps bring in resources, but also protects the University’s reputation, Proudfoot said.
While the UA community has a sense of what the UA is, there is no single definition shared by everyone, Robbins said.

"I don't think collectively we know what the brand is," Robbins said. "I think we do need a brand."

A new brand platform for the UA will be built in a separate but complementary process as the strategic plan takes shape, Proudfoot said.

The brand, which will be finalized a few months after the strategic plan, will be an expression of the plan, he said, adding that the key to a successful brand is doing the hard work to ensure that it takes hold and lasts for the long term.

"That's what we are committed to doing."

After Proudfoot invited faculty to be part of the branding process, Nadel suggested that a few faculty members could volunteer to be engaged in the effort and make regular reports to the Faculty Senate. (Those who want to be part of the effort, or would like to share feedback, are asked send an email to brand@arizona.edu.)

In other business:

- Robbins gave updates on two searches. Two candidates are being considered for the position of senior vice president for health sciences, he said, while there is a "robust pool of candidates" for the senior vice president for communications and marketing position.
- Robbins also reported that he will meet with a few dozen state legislators from Southern Arizona and representatives from the Southern Arizona Business Caucus on Feb. 5. The following day, the president said, he will testify at the Arizona Legislature about the state of the University and expectations related to the forthcoming strategic plan.
- Provost Andrew Comrie announced that he is stepping down and will return to the faculty. Comrie, who has served as provost since August 2012, said he has enjoyed being part of the UA's system of shared governance. Comrie was given a lengthy standing ovation after concluding his remarks.