

Dear Campus Family,

Some of you may remember my inaugural address. In it, I mentioned that my mother often read to me or recited poems at bedtime. One poem that I particularly remember was Eugene Field's "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod"—a children's poem that is familiar to many of us. The part I remember most vividly was:

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe,
Sailed on a river of crystal light into a sea of dew.
"Where are you going and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.

The line that says, "Where are you going and what do you wish?" captured my imagination. It still does, not just on a personal level as president of this University, but also on an institutional, local community, and state level.

Where is MUW going and what do we wish to be?

MUW has been sailing for nearly 125 years but, during that long journey, our destination and focus has changed with the times and with the needs of Mississippi and the changing needs of each generation of students.

Since the end of October, the MUW community has been in the process of focusing on our future. Such thought seems particularly important when one considers that, in 2009, we will be celebrating our history as we celebrate our 125th anniversary.

This process began with a day-long, professionally-led focus group of all MUW constituents from many walks of life, some on-campus and some from farther away. Then came twelve focus groups composed of the campus community and several focused discussions with alumni. All of the information and opinion then went to a Task Force charged with producing a *White Paper* that would offer recommendations for moving the process forward. That *White Paper* (as well as all the materials connected to this process) is on this website. The idea under-girding all these efforts is that the process be transparent and collaborative.

The purpose of what you are reading now is my opportunity to respond to the *White Paper* but, before I begin, I want to sincerely thank the members of the Task Force who took this on and did such a beautiful job. I truly appreciate their hard work.

In the *White Paper*, the Task Force reviewed our major challenges and then suggested some actions in response to those challenges. The four major challenges that they identified were "lack of unification, a poorly defined identity, the difficulty in recruiting and retaining students, and financial concerns." In addition, "communication, collaboration, community involvement, morale, name of the university and resistance to

change are other challenges facing the university.” I will, in turn, respond to the various suggestions in each section in blue letters and italics so that they can more easily be seen.

To ensure complete participation, several committees will need to be established in order to address specific tasks and then to bring that information back to me for evaluation and action.

Unification

Under the title “Unification,” the Task Force wrote about three things: Communications, alumni relations, and community relations.

Communication: The Task Force suggested 1) evaluate current mechanisms for internal communication to determine how they can work more effectively; 2) as often as possible, provide information regarding potentially controversial issues prior to public announcements, so that individuals can be appropriate representatives of the institution to members of the community; 3) rebuild a climate that fosters a safe and secure environment for communication; 4) provide transparency in university decisions, processes, and procedures; 5) provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students in different departments to interact with one another; and 6) develop a regular schedule of professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.

In any organization, communication is extremely important and rarely achieved to everyone’s satisfaction. While we have worked hard at improving communication, we can do better.

In order to evaluate current mechanisms for internal communication and determine how to make them work more effectively, I will appoint a Communications Committee to study this issue and to offer specific measures for improving communication on campus. This group will have several tasks:

- *Review current internal University communication vehicles (newsletters, email, listservs, eblasts, etc.) and determine the best way to share information on a campus our size.*
- *Study other institutions of similar size and scope to determine how MUW can improve its internal communication.*
- *Ascertain whether there are roadblocks in our communication pathway where information has been shared but not passed along. All committees and all campus offices should also be examined in how they handle information that needs to be communicated. How can we do better?*
- *Examine the perception that our campus climate does not foster a safe and secure environment for communication.*
- *What is the best way to improve communication to the campus on issues that may be perceived as “controversial”?*
- *Should we have annual or twice-a-year campus-wide meetings and, if so, what would make them most useful to all?*

I am tasking our Provost, Dr. Sandra Jordan, to work with the deans and department heads to continue and enhance initiatives already begun that will enable us to further develop faculty members.

I am tasking the Staff Council and our Director of Human Resources, Ms. Melanie Freeman, to recommend training or educational opportunities for our staff.

Alumni Relations: “To build a foundation that will unify alumni in support of institutional goals, MUW must clarify the role of alumni and identify strategies to promote positive engagement. Five suggestions for action are: 1) develop additional mechanisms to honor and to promote alumni contributes and successes; 2) support alumni involvement in promotional activities; 3) promote mentorship/internship programs that pair current students with successful, accomplished alumni; 4) provide regular updates to alumni regarding the changing nature of MUW and higher education in general; and 5) implement strategies to support active engagement of all alumni, to include women and men, long-standing alumni members and recent graduates.”

The IHL Board of Trustees and MUW are continuing to work with both the Alumnae Association and the Alumni Association to unify and have one, strong, vibrant alumni association that will work closely with the university in a way that the university can best use the many talents of our alumni. I am personally dedicated to see the conflict end and for all to work in harmony.

To take advantage of the recommendations in the White Paper, I will ask our Director of Alumni Relations, Ms. Mary Margaret Roberts, to put together a group of alumni to consider some of the following ideas as part of that office’s action plan of the year, asking them to include other items or exclude some of the following in favor of better ideas:

- *Highlight an alumnus of the month, perhaps by posting an email or message on the internet.*
- *Develop a procedure by which faculty and staff can regularly notify the Alumni Office of graduates’ significant achievements.*
- *Develop an orientation session for new Alumni Board members to re-introduce them to the campus as well as to give them information about the campus and its students, a look at educational trends nationally and more locally, higher education issues, etc. Continue that effort by periodic updates to those board members.*
- *Establish and advertise professional internships with qualified alumni.*
- *Revisit the Alumni Relations website and decide how it can be most helpful to our alumni.*
- *Involve alumni with recruiting by asking them to attend certain recruiting events with our Admissions team.*
- *Involve alumni with legislative lobbying efforts coordinated by IHL and the University.*
- *Determine a way to follow up with new graduates in order to stay in touch with them.*

- *At the end of each academic year, the Director of Alumni Relations will prepare a report detailing what has been accomplished during the year for the Vice President of Institutional Advancement.*

Community Relations: White Paper recommendations: 1) enhance relationships with the community by partnering with local businesses and community/civic groups; 2) promote and publicize collaborative efforts between the campus and community; 3) increase community awareness of the economic impact of MUW and its involvement with local economic development efforts; 4) develop service learning initiatives to address community-identified problems; and 5) work with the community to identify mechanisms for demonstrating support of the university; 6) expand and enhance the work of the university's centers; and 7) increase collaboration with the Columbus Air Force Base and the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science.

As an institution of higher learning, part of what we do is to work with the community. While MUW has begun to make strides in our relationships with other entities, we can engage in a coordinated effort across functions of the institution—faculty, staff, and students—to improve our efforts; therefore, I will formalize MUW's community relations efforts through the Office of Institutional Advancement. I am appointing our Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Dr. Gary Bouse, (assisted by Mr. Perry Sansing who serves MUW as our legislative and congressional liaison) to head up a community relations effort. They will develop a plan that will allow us to organize and coordinate the University's relationships with the local, regional, and state communities.

Working with Mr. Sansing and a committee, Dr. Bouse will draw up a plan for action for MUW and then implement that plan that could include the following:

- *Create a University/Community Advisory Board to explore opportunities for more interaction.*
- *Put our current economic impact study on our website and commission another study to bring us up-to-date.*
- *Identify community, civic, and statewide groups where MUW is not represented and try to identify MUW employees who could be of use to those groups.*
- *Seek business partnerships that make the area surrounding the campus more attractive to students.*
- *Establish relevancy with the community through our commitment to significantly increase enrollment in a way that would provide a strong, positive impact on the local economy.*
- *Develop and promote more campus events that provide opportunities for community participation.*
- *Schedule regular meetings with the City Council and Board of Supervisors to bring them up-to-date on MUW and invite them to campus.*
- *Encourage campus participation in Town and Tower.*
- *Provide civic groups with an updated list of MUW speakers on various topics.*
- *Post information about other groups regularly meeting on campus so that people on campus realize how many community groups are using our facilities.*

- *Produce an annual report due at the end of the academic year, detailing what has been accomplished that year.*

Our Provost, Dr. Jordan, will:

- *Work with the faculty, deans, and directors to consider adding Service Learning across the curriculum.*
- *Seek to formalize “outreach” with K-12 through a MUW version of “America Reads” and “America Adds” programs.*
- *Working with relevant persons, seek to increase our formal involvement with Columbus Air Force Base and apply for Air Force Friendly status.*
- *Re-task our Centers to include outreach and collaboration including setting goals and measuring their success.*
- *Along with our Vice President of Student Services, Dr. Bucky Wesley, look at establishing an Alternative Spring Break that would involve community service.*

Dr. Wesley will:

- *Coordinate the collection of the number of student hours spent annually in community service, including the areas where they have been able to be of service to others. This will be sent to the campus and also to our greater community as a news article.*

Identity

The *White Paper* recommends: 1) identify a unique niche; 2) use a branding process to clearly define institutional identity; 3) enhance strategies to promote academic excellence in teaching and learning that will attract well-prepared, motivated students; 4) promote and enhance the emphasis on leadership development; 5) develop a process to clarify what the women’s emphasis means to University constituents and to determine how to best incorporate the institution’s historic commitment to women’s education within its current mission; 6) work with an outside consultant to guide the identity development process; and 7) ensure that the process is collaborative and inclusive.

Here, the Task Force considers both identity and name, suggesting that there is significant confusion about both, not only on our campus but also in our greater community, across the state, and beyond our state’s borders. The Task Force recommends deciding first who we are (including examining whether our current name still fits) and then engaging a professional marketing firm to help guide us so that we can recruit and retain more students, including better prepared students.

Ever since my arrival here in 2002, I have been aware of the identity crisis which was strongly brought home at the all-day MUW 20/20 meeting in October. As a result, we have opened a dialogue with a marketing firm about ideas for helping us recruit students as well as discussing how to establish a brand for MUW. (A brand, as I understand it, means that everyone knows what your name stands for, such as Volvo’s brand being safety.)

Working in a collaborative and inclusive way, a diverse Identity Committee from the campus and the community will be formed. They will review the materials posted on the website from MUW 20/20 and particularly the White Paper on this topic, before taking part in a day-long meeting with the marketing firm. They will seek to clearly define our institutional identity in a way that will ensure that our identity allows for future growth of the University. After that session, the marketing firm will provide us with a report of the findings of the Identity Committee.

After that session, the Identity Committee will continue to consider these questions, among others that they may also wish to add:

- *What is our unique niche?*
- *What can we offer to our students—particularly well-prepared, highly motivated students—that is different from other institutions?*
- *What is our brand and does it reflect who we are today and what we want to be for the future?*
- *How does our current name play into this brand and into our unique niche? Does this name support the image that we want to and need to project? If we should change our name, how should we involve everyone in the process?*
- *How do we promote and enhance our emphasis on leadership development and is this the something special we want to be known for?*
- *How do we clarify our women's emphasis in today's climate where women form the overwhelming majority of college students across the nation and in Mississippi? What makes our emphasis different?*

The Identity Committee will prepare a written report by May 31. At that time, I will determine whether our current name supports our brand and identity. If a name change is warranted, a further committee will consider the recommendations contained in the White Paper on that topic.

Recruitment and Retention of Students

The White Paper Task Force also considered both recruitment and retention issues.

White Paper Recommendations for Recruitment: 1) implement a targeted marketing/recruitment strategy once identity has been clearly defined; 2) develop recruitment strategies to attract well-prepared students; 3) redesign the university website so that it can serve as a more effective tool for recruitment and marketing; 4) strengthen relationships with high schools and community colleges; 5) create a climate in which student recruitment and retention are shared responsibilities of all constituent groups; 6) strengthen general recruitment by sponsoring targeted recruitment through academic affairs and other university offices; 7) develop strategies to minimize turnover in admissions and to ensure that staff have adequate information to effectively promote all programs; 8) work with IHL and the Mississippi Legislature to provide tuition reciprocity for out-of state students in bordering counties; and 9) refine efforts to recruit students beyond the immediate geographic area.

Dr. Wesley and Dr. Jordan will co-chair a Recruitment Task Force that—taking into consideration our identity after it is defined by the Identity Committee—will:

- *Address IHL's Strategic Initiative to increase the number of baccalaureate students.*
- *Create a climate where student recruitment and retention are shared responsibilities of all constituent groups.*
- *Develop more on-line programs to recruit beyond our immediate area and provide opportunities for students that we don't currently provide.*
- *Develop a plan for international student recruitment.*
- *Develop a plan to attract well-prepared students.*
- *Establish measures of accountability related to University recruiting goals.*
- *Supply funding to support recruiting efforts such as recruiting events handled by Academic Affairs or other units.*
- *Develop a plan for all campus units to strengthen relationships with high schools and community colleges in order to recruit students.*
- *Strategically build enrollment to enhance opportunity for better retention success.*
- *Now that the Webmaster is part of the Student Services team, capitalize on that by redesigning web pages so that they are effective recruiting tools.*
- *Use a marketing firm to review current recruitment materials and the website, particularly in light of a more focused identity.*
- *At the end of each academic year, a report detailing that year's accomplishments will be submitted to me and shared with the campus.*

White Paper Recommendations for Retention: 1) develop additional strategies to support the success of under-prepared students; 2) develop a comprehensive early intervention program; 3) adopt course redesign and other strategies to promote student engagement and active student learning; 4) develop an effective alternative to academic suspension which would build students' knowledge and skills to support their successful completion of college-level work; 5) design additional learning communities; and 6) develop a general studies major to support students' degree attainment.

Dr. Jordan will expand the existing Retention Committee that will:

- *Implement the strategies listed above and developed by Academic Affairs this year.*
- *Ascertain what additional resources will be needed—both financial and personnel needs as well as perhaps such things as juniors and seniors doing service learning by assisting the under-prepared students).*
- *More deliberately set up a consistent way to measure retention within units and establish accountability for academic units to retain current students.*
- *Establish attendance policies of freshman level courses.*
- *Establish a more aggressive early warning system to students at risk that go beyond grade performance.*
- *Consider other ideas to be put into force to improve student success and retention.*

- *A report detailing accomplishments will be provided to me at the end of each academic year to be shared with the campus.*

Funding

The White Paper's authors clearly identify funding as a major area of concern for us as it is for all the eight IHL institutions as we face a downward turn in state-funding and an upward turn in costs to operate our institution.

White Paper Recommendations: 1) Increase external funding; 2) increase enrollment; 3) conduct a capital campaign; 4) collaborate with other IHL institutions to petition for greater flexibility in setting tuition; and 5) conduct an academic program review with examines program enrollment and program development. In addition, specific recommendations for generating grant funding include: 1) grant writing workshops for faculty and staff; 2) clear and consistent communication about the availability of grants; 3) dissemination of resources for locating and managing grants; and 4) additional staffing of the grants office.”

For the following, particularly in a year when our state allocation will be further diminished and prices are going up, we will need to become very creative and also will need to shift some budget funds in order that the University will prosper in the future. At this time in our history, it is extremely important that we find as many income streams as possible such as increased enrollment, innovative programs and services, grant writing, and donor support.

Since hiring a grant writer several years ago, we have had good success with grants and that position has become well developed. Now, it is time to move that function from its incubator to an area where most universities house their grant-writing function.

- *The grant writer will move to Academic Affairs under the guidance of our Provost, Dr. Jordan.*
- *Dr. Jordan will consider expanding that function by a second person, a part-time grant writer.*
- *Faculty development programs on grant-writing will be instituted on a regular basis.*
- *Dr. Jordan will collaborate with Mr. Sansing and Dr. Bouse in developing some of the farther-reaching requests including the national ones.*

Other items connected to the topic of developing income streams will include:

- *Dr. Jordan is authorized to move aggressively into online learning, mentioned above in the Recruitment section. Dr. Jordan will establish an E-College by hiring a director and at least one e-learning support person to create a “shadow university” of online courses/programs staffed by faculty hired per course.*
- *Dr. Bouse, working with Dr. Jordan, will determine how we can enhance faculty development funds to provide predictable and meaningful faculty and staff development.*

- *Dr. Bouse will begin to identify sources of funding to increase his staff and budget necessary for a successful comprehensive campaign. He will also identify opportunities for the creation of mini-campaigns if desirable.*

Finally, I am tasking our Provost, Dr. Jordan, with the review of MUW's strategic planning process to make sure that the goals outlined here are integrated into the total institutional planning process. This is particularly important as we approach our next SACS review.

Conclusion

The 20/20 process has helped chart the course for us. Clearly, a great deal of work is ahead for us, but I am counting on everyone to get involved, stay involved, and help MUW focus itself for the future. So much can be lost if we don't work hard together on this; so much can be gained if we do work hard and together on this. This is a worrisome time in many ways but we have had worrisome times before and have always come out the better at the end of it all. I feel confident that some fine things lie ahead of us. I am committed to doing my very best for MUW and I know that you are too.

As this process continues to move along, I will keep everyone updated.

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