

Discussion Draft: Planning for the Future of Case Western Reserve University

In 2007, Case Western Reserve University celebrates the 40th anniversary of the federation that brought together Western Reserve University, dating to 1826, and Case Institute of Technology, founded in 1880, into a single institution. The University today encompasses the contributions and achievements of thousands of alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends whose experiences often link them primarily to one or another unit of the institution. At the same time, all of these constituencies are united in encouraging Case Western Reserve University to reach the highest levels of achievement in the future. It is to these friends and colleagues, including the members of the University's Board of Trustees, that we address this statement of purpose and direction.

How We Developed

The 1967 merger that formed Case Western Reserve encompassed the two dominant cultures in American higher education: that of engineering, technology, and applied science, as represented by Case, and the arts and sciences and professional school orientation of Western Reserve. That both should exist in one institution is not of itself unusual. What is notable is that each had developed largely in isolation from the other, even though the schools had shared adjacent campuses since the 1880s, and that they coexist here in an unusual balance, with engineering as the intended major field of concentration for approximately 40 per cent of our incoming undergraduates. There was collaboration in specific program areas for many decades before 1967, of course, but only when there was clear mutual interest.

Effective immediately, the new institution became one of the nation's thirty or so major independent research universities, which collectively account for a disproportionate share of the nation's capacity for discovery and advanced education. The University has subscribed to a broad mission, supporting excellence in a wide array of disciplines and featuring leading programs in selected fields. National and international trends of the last half-century have led to emphases in applied science, engineering, and health in our education and research programs. Meanwhile, our location in University Circle and the institution's values and those of higher education generally combine to reaffirm the importance of the arts and sciences and of the professions in fields other than health.

For many years, the University has struggled to balance this broad mission with the need to focus our resources to achieve and retain leadership stature in key fields. Along with other private universities, we have important work to do to strengthen relationships among the fields of study in which our students and faculty excel, and to nurture growth and excellence among all of our programs. In these efforts we find not only our most difficult challenges but also the issues around which we believe our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other friends will coalesce.

What We Bring

Since the late 1800s, Case Western Reserve and its predecessor institutions have been among the nation's leading research-oriented centers of advanced education. In practice, this means that the University's faculty members contribute in both education and discovery – research, scholarship, and other creative endeavors – and that students arrive here expecting that the learning environment we offer will reflect this complex mission.

In support of these activities, the institution has over its history developed a set of competencies, characteristics that help it address its mission, achieve its goals, and fulfill its several roles. Notable among these characteristics are the following, including suggestions that some of these strengths are under stress:

- The University has excellent students, faculty, and staff, who together create and deliver educational and research programs widely recognized for excellence and innovation. The costs associated with maintaining these programs are significant, and in some fields early advantages have eroded before promising initiatives could reach their full potential. Further, the number of traditional college-age students will stop growing in the years ahead, to be supplanted by less traditional students, often older or from lower-income families, to whom this institution has typically not been as attractive.
- Our location in University Circle, and particularly our affiliations with neighboring cultural, artistic, and health care institutions, are remarkable if not unique in higher education and help us develop strong ties as well with the broader community. Our single, compact campus, where all of our programs are located together and accessible to each other, is also a very important strength. Success in the Circle environment requires a willingness to share risks and resources with other institutions, however, a potentially stressful matter when resources are scarce.
- Case Western Reserve is unusual among institutions of higher education in having broad, deep, and well-developed commitments to both health and technology. The strengths of these focus areas make it possible to compete globally in selected fields, but they can also be seen as competitive with opportunities to develop leading programs in other disciplines, as well as in interdisciplinary areas that are of growing importance.
- More than many of our peer institutions, we have strong partnerships in research and education, some based nearby and others spread around the nation and the globe. Because of our heavy investment in health education and research, relationships with hospitals and other clinical institutions in the region have been

key. In more recent years this pattern has also been extended to include relationships with organizations in other fields and in other countries.

- We have notable international ties, with approximately 1,200 students here from about eighty-five other countries, making for a richly diverse learning setting for our students. Our faculty are also engaged in education around the world, and in research partnerships with universities, government agencies, and other organizations in many other countries. Recent world events have complicated the movement of students and scholars across borders, however, and the U.S. has become somewhat less attractive as a host nation for international students. In addition, for many years our undergraduate programs have been less successful than our graduate and professional programs in attracting international students.

Despite the suggestions that several of these characteristics are accompanied by obstacles, they remain impressive and largely effective in supporting the University's overall mission. In the years to come, they should be targets for refinement and for selective investment as the institution seeks to achieve even higher standards of performance.

In addition to these competencies, the University has a well-established tradition of decentralizing both responsibility and authority within the institution, creating particularly strong leadership opportunities for the deans of the schools and colleges. At the same time, this system seems to some to hinder development of collaborations across disciplinary lines, and to limit opportunities for investments in truly innovative programs. We need to develop stronger university-wide systems without eroding opportunities for leadership in the academic divisions.

Priorities and Challenges

As we consider planning options for the University, we do so in a specific context: a time, a place, an economic environment. The last six years have seen considerable change at the institution, and the past year has been particularly tumultuous. This is not an entirely new phenomenon here, as our prior history suggests, but it means that the years immediately ahead will require unusual efforts across the campus – and among our friends – to sustain quality while generating the further growth and development we all seek. Priorities to be addressed in these efforts include the following:

- *Retain highly accomplished faculty, while recruiting new members needed for growth and increased diversity.* A highly competitive international environment and an imminent wave of faculty retirements require us to act promptly. A steady institutional focus on this priority will help clarify decisions to be made at all levels and in all disciplines throughout the University.

- *Identify and nurture the next generation of leaders, especially women and minorities in fields where they are under-represented.* As this is written, the University has begun a search for a new president. This is a crucial step for the institution, one that will help define its future, but there are other aspects of leadership equally in need of work. Among these is the lack of internal avenues through which the University can more effectively identify and develop its future cadre of academic and administrative leaders. We should not wait until a vacancy is available to begin comparing internal candidates against external counterparts, but should rather *anticipate* needs and help early-stage prospects to learn and grow. This is particularly important in developing faculty-based leaders – department chairs, center directors, and deans – as well as administrators to support academic programs. This effort must begin with an honest appraisal of leadership capacities at all levels, along with the recognition that collaborative, peer-to-peer leadership skills are just as important to the University as the more traditional hierarchical variety.
- *Develop and sustain interdisciplinary programs.* Strong core programs are necessary but insufficient in the 21st century, a period in which enhancement of academic programs requires investments in interdisciplinary, multi-site collaboration in most advanced areas. While interdisciplinary collaborations regularly arise from the work of individual faculty members and their counterparts in other units, too often they fail to thrive beyond their initial bursts of energy. The University needs to develop systems to identify and nurture collaborative opportunities while removing barriers related to financial accounting for cross-school collaborations.
- *Improve governance and communication.* Trying to make change at a pace or in a manner inconsistent with our processes and systems has lessened trust and optimism on campus and beyond. Faculty may see both central and divisional administrators as less supportive than before, for example, and staff employees may view senior administrators as unsympathetic. Students may have concerns about the effects of this alienation on their own experience here. And for some alumni, these changes are only the most recent they have experienced over several decades of change, often making it hard for them to see the institution they knew and loved as students. We need to strengthen mechanisms for shared governance, and to communicate more effectively on all fronts.
- *Make realistic strategic plans, using processes that connect goals with operational plans and resources.* The University struggles with the tension between what it seeks to be and what it perceives itself to have attained within the limitations of its systems and resources. This is not a useless or self-defeating struggle, but rather one that can lead to a stronger and more unified campus community. A key step toward realizing our goals is to ensure that each school and college engages in a realistic, faculty-intensive strategic planning effort, to be followed by a broader process leading to a

University-wide plan under which the institution can effectively move toward its goals.

There are other challenges before us as well, in some cases closely related to the five tasks outlined above. Among these are:

- *Research competitiveness.* We need to ensure that the University retains and strengthens its ability to compete effectively for external funding for research.
- *Nurturing selected recent initiatives.* The start-ups financed since 2002 by investing reserve funds include some excellent programs. We need to see that these are not sacrificed in the interest of short-term cost reductions.
- *University Circle relationships.* Coexisting with our neighbors in the Circle requires a commitment of time and energy to reach agreement on important questions.
- *Regional economic growth.* The Cleveland area continues to lag the nation in the development of new enterprises, although it remains an extraordinary environment for the University.

To address these priorities, we must stabilize the University's leadership and strengthen its financial base. Investing all of our reserves in new initiatives has led to operating deficits that were expected to be offset within a few years by increases in gifts and grants. As a result of overly centralized decision-making, inadequate monitoring, and weak communication systems, however, this recovery plan stalled. Federal research funding has ceased to grow, and some mid-career faculty with successful research programs have departed. Recent, difficult expense reductions, achieved through lay-offs, not filling open positions, and other cuts, have moved the University toward balance. Further movement needs to come from the revenue side, primarily through fund-raising, along with continued vigilance over spending.

Complicating the path toward greater financial stability is the tension that exists here and at many institutions between competing patterns of investing in programs. On the one hand, the traditional notion of a research university suggests a comprehensive plan to include virtually all fields of study. On the other hand, a focused investment approach calls for targeting those areas where the institution can have its greatest impact, attract the best talent, and contribute most to society and to raising the University's stature. Similarly, there are questions about how best to invest in infrastructure, and how to plan for growth in quality if expansion is a less attainable option than in earlier years. The fundamental features that have helped nurture truly outstanding research and educational programs here over the past decade remain in place, however, and they should be sustained, but permitting a "silo" mentality to rule could be counterproductive. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with the effort to

identify and nurture new opportunities to produce innovative programs that place us at the leading edge of research-oriented universities in the future.

The University We Seek To Be

As a research-intensive university, we seek to provide renowned leadership in cutting edge research and education, building on our historically strong areas of excellence as well as on groundbreaking initiatives in emerging fields. Case Western Reserve's transitional status over the past year has ruled out a formal, long-term, University-wide strategic planning effort during that period, however. To ensure that we emerge from the current situation as a strong, well-directed institution, it is essential that individuals across the campus responsible for guiding us through more immediate issues maintain a clear sense of our longer-range goals.

We offer two perspectives here on directions for the future. The first, which is most immediately important, is this description of key characteristics of several of the groups who constitute the University, traits that we believe are essential to the institution's continued development:

- *Students*: A diverse student body of well-prepared, engaged, and critically-minded individuals who understand the importance of intellectual achievement, personal integrity, and social responsibility – and the complexities inherent in developing all three.
- *Faculty*: A set of professional learners with diverse backgrounds and interests who passionately pursue discovery, create context, and value wisdom. They enhance learning at all levels, using educational programs that link experiential, active approaches to cognition with more traditional methods. These outstanding, outspoken men and women are willing to engage in spirited debate and to take forceful action to contribute to their fields, their institution, and society as a whole.
- *Administration and staff*: Responsible and responsive men and women guided by a deep respect for learning and by the notion of service as the key to effective academic and administrative leadership. In close collaboration with students and faculty, they shape our human, technological, and physical systems in ways that advance growth and improvement in programs and the engagement of all the people who constitute this community.
- *Alumni*. Men and women who share among themselves and with their *alma mater* a lifelong relationship of enduring and mutual benefit. They are the institution's strongest supporters, but they are also its most trusted and respected critics.

- *Trustees:* Board members who understand, promote, and support the fundamental values of academic life and the unique role of a research university in society. Their decisions reflect clarity of motives, commitment to the concept of shared institutional governance, and dedication to the University's goals and objectives.

Looking at programs and practices, there are four overall goals, presented only briefly here, that consistently dominate discussions as representative of the values and approaches that will describe the University's trajectory in coming years. While these are less immediate than the qualities we have described above for key constituencies, they remain central to our long-term view of the University:

- *Enhance learning at all levels, in all of our disciplines.* We will be known for truly innovative educational programs that engage learners – students and faculty alike, as well as staff, alumni, affiliates, and others – throughout the institution by linking experiential, active approaches to cognition with more traditional methods. This is already an established system in many of our advanced and some undergraduate programs. We seek to extend this approach to all fields of learning where it can be beneficial, and to share these techniques and related findings across traditional disciplinary boundaries.
- *Emphasize discovery as a standard for institutional quality.* We will be known for the intensity as well as the internal and external impacts of the discovery process: research, scholarship, and creative endeavor in disciplines across the campus. We seek greater focus in these activities, greater integration with learning, and further collaboration among scholars in our several schools and departments and with counterparts in other organizations. Our priorities emphasize discovery that addresses the most pressing issues facing our society, and the capacity to share the results of this work through scholarly communication, technology transfer, and other appropriate means.
- *Shape our infrastructure and physical environment to match our academic aspirations.* We will continue to develop our human and technological infrastructure and our campus in ways that support and stimulate growth in programs and the stronger engagement of the people who constitute this community. We remain committed to our remarkable location in University Circle, despite its constraints on horizontal expansion, because of its unique concentration of artistic, cultural, and health care institutions and its proximity to a diverse, urban community. We therefore accept the obligation to face questions of density, design, and collaboration with others in planning for the physical environment.
- *Reinforce our financial base.* In the years immediately ahead we will invigorate the effort to achieve the full potential of the University's program investments; strengthen and where necessary mend relationships with alumni and other key

audiences; identify new sources of external funding; and seek additional economies in the operating budget. Our purpose in these efforts is to ensure that the institution can proceed with confidence and with the full participation of its constituencies, both internal and external. It will take both wisdom and discipline to introduce spending constraints that help achieve long-term goals while not undercutting recent advances in key areas.

Moving Forward

A new planning document from a university typically trumpets programs to be launched, buildings to be constructed, and people to be recruited. That approach often fails to produce program improvements commensurate with initial expectations, however, and leaves unstated – or perhaps ignores entirely – matters of a more fundamental nature, such as building relationships and systems along with new campus facilities. This document is different -- more realistic and incorporating internal as well as external considerations – but it reflects no lesser aspirations. We have focused on processes and perceptions, presenting a distillation of campus views of the challenges before us at this time. Several of these issues can be addressed without large expenditures: fixing processes related to shared governance and transparency of communication, for example, may be the fastest way of bringing about substantial improvements in our institution. We believe that a new strategic plan that addresses these priorities and challenges will be eagerly embraced by the University community, and we suggest the following guiding principles be used in that planning process:

- Build on strengths that offer comparative advantages, while supporting other excellent programs that add value to our academic mission.
- Make the capacity to nurture and support interdisciplinary activities a hallmark of the University.
- Integrate the full costs of sustainability into plans for new programs.
- Embrace diversity as a foundation for academic and administrative improvement.
- Seek continuous feedback from all constituencies, and adopt transparency as a basic characteristic of planning.

Achieving the University's long-term goals depends on this combination of self-awareness, imagination, and dedication.