

June Newsletter – June 27, 2024

Dear Members of the University Community:

It is summer on campus, so the sounds of the [Sewanee Summer Music Festival](#) can be heard, and readings by the authors associated with the [School of Letters](#) and (soon) the Sewanee Writers Conference can be enjoyed. A full semester has passed since I last wrote to provide you an update on campus developments. The long gap is an indication of what a busy (and productive) semester it has been for the University. Below, I list some of the more important matters that concern all of us.

Strategic Planning Update

Over the last six months, the Strategic Planning Committee held 54 listening sessions that allowed various stakeholder groups opportunities to provide feedback on the emerging plan. Based on the concerns raised in the course of these meetings, the Strategic Planning Committee drafted and revised a strategic plan titled “Elevating Mind, Heart, and Place: The Strategic Plan for the University of the South 2024-2030.”

The process of adopting the strategic plan is nearly complete. In May, the Joint Faculties of the College and School of Theology and the Staff Partnership Council voted to endorse the strategic plan. In June, the Board of Regents and the Growth and Development Committee of the Board of Trustees voted to endorse the plan. The final step entails discussion and a vote by the full Board of Trustees at a specially called meeting in August, which will conclude the adoption process as stated in the University’s Constitution and prior practice. The strategic plan will guide the development of the University in the coming years and create priorities for fundraising efforts.

I want to thank the many members of the University community who participated in the listening sessions and the 46 faculty, staff, trustees, and regents who joined the strategic planning subcommittees in drafting the elements of the plan. In particular, a good deal of credit for leading the process goes to the steering committee, which included the following people:

- Sibby Anderson-Thompkins, Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Deborah McGrath, Professor of Biology and Associate Dean for the Sewanee Integrated Program on the Environment
- Amy Patterson, Professor of Politics and Director of the Office of Civic Engagement
- Rob Pearigen, Vice-Chancellor
- Kevin Reynolds, Associate Provost for Library and Information Technology Services
- Nicholas Roberts, Professor of History
- Betsy Sandlin, Interim Dean of the College
- David Shipps, Vice President for Economic Development
- Jim Turrell, Dean of the School of Theology
- Scott Wilson, Provost

I am working with the Office of Marketing and Communications on a University webpage where the full text of “Elevating Mind, Heart, and Place: The Strategic Plan for the University of the South 2024-2030,” details about the adoption process, and updates on implementation will be available. That website will be available shortly after the vote by the Board of Trustees, and periodic updates will be added over the next six years.

Operational Plan

During several of the strategic planning listening sessions, students and employees noted that the University had a number of needs related to compensation and deferred maintenance, among other things, which required attention. The administration recognized these as important matters but did not believe that they should be a part of the strategic plan. Instead, the administration has drafted an “operational plan” for the next five years, which lays out some of the principal goals for operations. The operational plan, which is attached to this email, emphasizes the following seven areas:

1. Faculty compensation
2. Salary compression
3. Professional development
4. Housing in Sewanee
5. Deferred maintenance
6. Communications and marketing
7. Logistics.

Emphasizing these areas will improve the University’s operations and support the strategic plan. Plans such as these are “live” documents that will be supplemented and revised as they are implemented.

Budgets and Salary Letters

The latter part of spring is a busy time for the administration as it concludes its budgeting process and makes determinations on setting salaries and wages for the coming fiscal year. Many hands contribute to the budget process, which involves leaders of various units on campus, called “budget managers,” submitting budgets to the treasurer and provost. They work with the Budget Priorities Committee, an elected group of faculty members, to review the proposed budget requests and hold hearings with each budget manager. After considering the various requests, the Budget Priorities Committee authors a report with a list of recommendations to the administration. The administration then finalizes a budget, which is proposed to the full Board of Regents. At its June meeting, the Board of Regents approved the adopted budget for the fiscal year 2025 (FY25). I will write more about the budget in a separate communication soon.

Based on the operational plan described above, one of the areas of expansion in the FY25 budget is employee salaries. In the coming days, individual employees will receive letters from their supervisors informing them of their salary or hourly wage for FY25 along with an explanation for how the administration set compensation increases. One of the principal goals of the FY25 budget, which was communicated to budget managers and members of the Budget Priorities

Committee was the need to control growth of non-compensation expenditures in order to focus on employee compensation.

A Change in Signatures

Close readers of my email may have noticed that I have recently dropped two of the Chinese characters (代理) from the Chinese portion of my signature. Those characters are used to convey that I was “acting” provost rather than provost. The characters’ meaning is closer to “proxy” in translation, or what I often thought of as “substitute.” Over the last 30 months, I often mused that I was the “substitute provost,” roused at 6:30 a.m. by a phone call from the vice-chancellor to report to work and watch over the University while the real provost was out sick or on vacation. Taking away the “acting” part of the title engenders in me a different weight to the new role because I no longer have a built-in exit strategy. Over the last two years, I have come to know and appreciate more areas of the University’s operations and the people who work across the University. That appreciation and my desire to assist, where possible, the University’s progress toward its goals embodied in the strategic plan are what motivated me to accept the offer to accept my current position. Each person at the University has a role in fulfilling our vision of the University and the strategic plan, and I look forward to working with people across campus in that effort.

Thank you for all that you are doing for the University.

Best wishes,

Scott