December 16, 2016

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students:

Thank you to all who were able to participate in last week’s strategic planning meetings and activities. We are grateful that so many of you, as the semester drew to its frenzied close, took the time to attend and contribute thoughtfully to the planning process. Our collective engagement in the strategic planning work is an investment in both our future and the future of the college.

In addition to preliminary telephone interviews conducted by Keeling & Associates (K&A), our strategic planning consultants, with eight members of the faculty and staff during the week prior to their campus visit, our on-campus activities included the following:

- Six open forums—two each for faculty, staff, and students—which were attended by nearly 140 people in total.
- An idea wall exercise on Tuesday afternoon in Dahl Centennial Union, which was visited by students, as well as faculty and staff, over the course of more than four hours—drawing many responses to the eight questions (numbers coming soon).
- Small group interviews facilitated by K&A, which were attended by more than 150 faculty, staff, and students.
- Participation in the forums included about 25% of the faculty and 21% of the staff. Although there were smaller numbers of students at the forums, those who attended were very engaged and thoughtful, and several smaller sessions for representatives from Student Senate, student athletes, residence assistants, transfer students, students of color, international students, and LGBTQAI students were well attended. The students who joined those small group conversations were deeply engaged and shared valuable insights. We will continue to encourage other students to contribute their time and thought.

K&A will be preparing summaries of these activities, and the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) will upload them to our website for your review in January.

In the meantime, K&A prepared an initial, very preliminary summary of the most common themes that are emerging from our planning discussions. These themes reflect the open and candid observations and thoughts participants shared about the college and its future, and we share them with you in the spirit of continuing transparency about this process:

- Institutional Sustainability: Discussion about the need to determine the “right size” of Luther’s enrollment; to acknowledge, embrace, and find inspiration in the changing demographics of our student population—and implement systems and structures to ensure their welcome, retention, and success; to effectively define and communicate the college’s identity; and to ensure that faculty and staff are supported in doing their best work in the face of current uncertainties and challenges.
- Diversity and Inclusion: The inter-related goals of (1) serious, authentic, and empathic attention to our campus culture and climate, including creating spaces for open and honest discussion across the college about where change is needed; (2) increasing the number and proportion of
diverse students, faculty, and staff; and (3) ensuring that we systematically and consistently support the inclusion of diverse students and full participation on campus.

- Articulating our Distinction: Communicate the strengths of Luther’s academic and co-curricular programs and explore connections between them to discover new areas of distinction; link our understanding of the college’s changing student demographic profile to our programs—and, conversely, look at programs in terms of how to attract and retain new students; and explore opportunities to highlight the college’s sense of “place”—sustainability, physical plant, connection to the Decorah community, etc.

- Investments in Faculty and Staff: Students praise the mentorship and support of faculty as the aspect of the college they value most. To support their work, faculty expressed the need for more mentorship and support structures and to attend to the professional development, policies, and resources that will help faculty continue to grow and thrive as teachers and scholars at Luther. We heard similar concerns about investment in staff professional development.

Of course many other topics arose in K&A’s interviews with campus constituents during their October and December visits and in telephone and conference calls; the themes listed above are only the most prominent ones, and this preliminary summary is therefore exactly that, preliminary and necessarily incomplete. Later summaries will benefit from additional discussions and will include both greater detail and other themes that may rise to prominence or challenge the importance of one or more aspects of the preliminary ones. There will be many more opportunities to contribute to the planning process during the next semester, and the themes will certainly evolve in response to the observations and ideas you share then.

Next steps include the following:

- During January term, the SPC will meet regularly to discuss the initial findings and consider what additional information-gathering activities and interviews will be helpful to add to the emerging planning themes.
- K&A will return to campus during the second week of the spring semester for additional open forums, idea walls, and small group interviews—please stay tuned for communications at the start of the semester to find out when and how to participate. These events will take place on **February 9 and 10**, early enough in the semester to enable strong participation. Please save the dates!
- In addition, during mid-February we will launch a confidential online survey, open to all members of the campus community.

We hope you will take advantage of these opportunities; the more who contribute, the stronger the college’s strategic plan—our strategic plan—will be.

If you would like to share feedback on last week’s activities, or the planning process in general, please feel free to contact the co-chairs or a member of the SPC, or submit your comments via our website.

With best wishes for a restful winter break,

Brad Chamberlain and Terry Sparkes  
Co-Chairs, Strategic Planning Committee