DATE: April 19, 2006

TO: Deans and Directors

FR: Strategic Planning Implementation Team
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RE: College Responses to Strategic Goal 1

Thank you for the comprehensive reports we received relative to Goal 1. Collectively, you forwarded a total of 80-pages that represented the work taking place across 12 colleges and programs. Each of the reports outlines in rich detail the many opportunities available to WVU students and provides a way to recognize existing strengths.

Major Themes in Response to Goal 1

While we cannot capture all of the unique strengths that characterize WVU's colleges and programs, we do want to share three recurrent themes that emerged from the reports.

1. Advising. Many colleges have created advising programs specific to their colleges or major programs. Unit-based advising seems to play an important role in increasing student retention and timely progress to completing their degree. One college is putting a new emphasis on pre-major advising within departments; another college is trying out a system of group advising as a way of ensuring that the advice given to students is consistent while also helping the faculty advisors manage large numbers of advisees (50+ per faculty member) in a timely and productive way.

2. Academic Mentoring. Many colleges recognize the importance of tutoring and other forms of academic mentoring to support student success. Tutoring programs often originate within departments to support a specific class or a specific goal (e.g., improved academic performance for "at risk students"; improved professional exam scores or qualifying scores in some disciplines). Such tutoring programs also are often used to foster a sense of community and a positive learning environment. These programs frequently rely on peer tutors or mentors, so they also provide an experiential learning opportunity for many exceptional students.

3. Career Placement and Professional Development. Many colleges are justifiably proud of the placement rates of their graduate students. These same colleges tend to support programs within their units or departments that focus on professional development and career services for both undergraduate and graduate students.
The recurring themes of advising and career placement will be highlighted in a forthcoming task force on these topics. Our goal is to examine these themes more closely and look for best practices that will help ensure student success across all programs of study.

Additional Ideas

In addition to the major themes of advising, academic mentoring, and placement that we saw in several colleges' reports, we also want to mention a few other ideas and approaches that might generate action and expansion:

- **Direct Admits.** Direct admit undergraduates enter a major in their first year, which makes possible a host of first-year programs including a major specific UNIV 101 course. These students often have a higher academic profile than pre-majors since they need higher high-school GPAs and ACT/SAT scores to be admitted directly into a major.

- **4+1 Degrees.** This idea extends the principles of direct admission to graduate level study by attracting strong undergraduates in their junior year into a direct Master's track that uses summers, the senior year, and one additional year to complete a master's degree.

- **Flexible Completion Options.** A few colleges noted the increasing demand for flexible programs that allow students to complete undergraduate and graduate programs through summer courses, evening courses, weekend-only courses, online courses, and other such options that vary from traditional schedules and delivery methods.

- **Web-based Marketing of Programs.** Many colleges noted the use of the Web has become critical for delivering information about faculty strengths, success of graduates, opportunities for students, employment/professional opportunities, etc.

- **Collaborative Programs.** Collaboration between colleges was identified as a new opportunity to develop joint programs.

- **MDS Major within Colleges.** Colleges should take the existing multi-disciplinary studies major, which builds upon three minors, and market this program as a degree of choice, thus encouraging interdisciplinary programs within a College as well as across colleges.

- **Advisory Boards.** Many colleges use advisory boards and/or professional accreditation audits as part of their feedback loop when assessing their programs, determining growth, and establishing development plans.

Looking ahead to Goal 2

We hope this brief overview of the college responses to Goal 1 has captured some of the richness and variety that emerged from these reports. We will share a similar synopsis for the college responses to Strategic Goal 2 so that we can collectively learn from each other’s successes. If you are willing to provide specific strategies for assessing progress, we would like to share those strategies, too.