

Provost's Overview

DELAWARE WILL SHINE PLANNING TOMORROW'S UNIVERSITY TODAY

“The wonders of modern technology have inspired much speculation over the prospects for radical change in the nature of higher education. Some commentators envisage a world dominated by a limited number of famous instructors teaching millions of people via the Internet while rendering superfluous the tens of thousands of professors who continue delivering their lectures to steadily dwindling student audiences ... Nevertheless, predictions of empty classroom buildings and vacant dormitories overlook many of the subtler benefits that a campus-based undergraduate education can provide.”

Derek Bok
President Emeritus, Harvard

The Rapid Pace of Change in Higher Education

Writing a new chapter for the University of Delaware warrants a healthy dose of daring, as well as a clear-eyed scan of the social, economic and educational environments in which we operate. While many speculate about the future of higher education—particularly in view of technology, competition and rising costs—universities have the means to adapt to the rapid pace of change.

UD has a strong foundation upon which to build, a history of more than 270 years along the paths of social and technological change—from a single-race, single-sex college, to a fully integrated, co-educational, modern university at the vanguard of knowledge generation that transforms the world. While traditional models of academia and education delivery remain, they are rapidly shifting, requiring us to think more strategically, adapt more quickly and perform much differently than we have in the past.

Formal residential education was once considered the only way to access information and knowledge, but that has all changed. Public research universities are being challenged by new online educational technologies and models, as well as by declining state appropriations and federal research support, increased dependence on philanthropy, changing demographics, new for-profit competitors, and a public willing to question bedrock institutions. How should we prepare Delaware to shine in this new landscape?

Innovation and Competition at the Campus Gates

“Knowledge is a form of capital that is always unevenly distributed,” writes Harvard Professor Louis Menand, “and people who have more knowledge, or greater access to knowledge, enjoy advantages over people who have less.” While many online, for-profit

education firms promise to reach underserved populations all over the globe, using technology to reduce the price point, they have largely missed the mark.

In this age of technology, we cannot presume that simple access to information yields knowledge or understanding. While formal education is no longer considered the only way to access information, education is a tool to transform information *into* knowledge.

Further, a recent article in *The Atlantic* warns, “no one yet knows whether reducing a university to a smooth-running pedagogical machine will continue to allow scholarship to thrive—or whether it will simply put universities out of business, replace scholar-teachers with just teachers, and retard a whole generation of research.”

Our educational and research mission must not be lost or minimized in the name of progress and innovation.

Embracing Change for the Greater Good

Higher education is learning—as the financial industry and Silicon Valley discovered—that historic or current success might not be sustainable.

However, the experiential learning modules and real-world, hands-on teaching UD offers today simply cannot yet be replicated online. A profound advantage we have over the online for-profits is a keen understanding that learning takes place in many venues and during myriad interactions across campus, not just in the classroom. Specifically, student engagement with a diverse world-class faculty and student body—in both formal and informal settings—shapes how students see themselves, their career path and the world.

UD’s core belief that diversity and inclusion are necessary conditions for student success is reflected in Bok’s writings: “Students frequently gain most in tolerance and understanding of other backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs from casual conversations and experiences with fellow students, either in residence halls or through extracurricular activities. The growing presence of minorities and overseas students continues to enrich these opportunities.”

However, for-profit educational enterprises may offer lessons we can glean, among them a renewed focus on entrepreneurial approaches to teaching and student learning.

The Delaware Difference: Why We Shine

Change is also afoot among our neighboring competitors. As the Big Ten has extended its reach into Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland, UD is now surrounded by the once-Midwest-based conference. We all compete for the same students, and these schools, basking in the academic and athletic cache of the Big Ten, are a strong threat to our student pipeline.

Refining and articulating why Delaware shines is our opportunity to differentiate UD as the first choice for potential students and their families. Critical differences include:

- we are smaller in size compared to many of our competitors, yet have a similarly robust research enterprise;
- we are well-balanced in our commitment to teaching and research;
- we have world-class scholars and researchers *teaching in the classroom* and interacting with students;
- our students and faculty contextualize their work in the grand challenges and great debates that define our times;
- our curriculum not only prepares our students in the traditional areas of education, e.g. critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and communication, but also emphasizes innovation, creativity, design, and authentic grasp of complexity and uncertainty;
- we have an engaged, successful and accomplished alumni network ready and willing to assist our students; and
- we have a beautiful residential campus and a vibrant college town, with easy access to the major metropolitan centers of the east coast and to the nation's most beautiful beaches.

These form the pillars of our strong value proposition.

Strategic Planning for a Stronger Future

Our previous strategic plan, *Path to Prominence*, was developed seven years ago. To its great credit, it has been our roadmap to tremendous accomplishments, and it continues to inform and inspire us. Today's landscape is much different, however. Remaining an educational leader requires us to adapt to the pace of change—by setting a new strategic platform that enables us to work more collaboratively and make decisions more quickly. Our planning can no longer be an occasional or periodic process, but rather should be continuous and ubiquitous.

We must continue to be effective in our efforts to define and leverage the Delaware Difference, and craft a strategic plan to guide us in our relentless quest for excellence.

Our new planning initiative, *Delaware Will Shine*, is aimed at addressing how UD can remain transformative on a global stage. In short, it's not enough to strive to be an elite institution of learning; we also have to become an elite *learning institution*—an organization that asks “Why?” often, that actively seeks efficiencies and that learns to become better at a faster pace.

Our future is bright, even in the face of change and the challenges we will encounter in this new landscape. *Delaware Will Shine* will be our map to embrace change, and will guide our focus and energy toward endeavors that align with our values, support our long-term goals and help UD become a better UD. We value your partnership during this exciting time and together we will write a new chapter for UD, demonstrating an unyielding commitment to excellence.