

## **Personal Reflections and Forecasts, 2000 to 2015**

### **Robert A. Scott, President, Adelphi University**

For my penultimate Board of Trustees meeting in March, I was asked to reflect on the past fifteen years and to offer some comments about the future. I was pleased to do so as part of my transition to President *Emeritus* and University Professor on July 1 of this year.

In July 2000, I arrived as the sixth president in 3 ½ years and soon faced a clerical worker's strike due to a misunderstanding between the union leadership and our staff. I called a former colleague in New Jersey who was president of the AFL-CIO Chapter there and asked to be introduced to the International Union whose local members were on strike. He did, and the union president and I met. We were able to resolve the issues, but after a strike of almost 80 days

Since two previous presidents had undertaken major strategic planning activities, I knew that another such effort was neither needed nor desired. The lesson clearly was that, as a sage said, "Culture eats strategy."

In my experience, strategic planning is about principles for decision making, priorities for action, and metrics for monitoring. Hence, I began a listening tour to learn about Adelphi's principles, purpose, and heritage, and also read three books about the people who made Adelphi significant over the years.

Before becoming president, and while I was a candidate, I visited campus and talked with students. I asked how they would describe Adelphi to siblings, cousins and neighbors in contrast to other institutions in the region. I was pleased and inspired by their answers. I also talked with former Interim President Dolph Norton, who had contacted me about Adelphi and whom I knew from an earlier search.

What I learned from these experiences is that the heritage of Adelphi had either been ignored or discarded by previous administrations. For example, Lantern and Flambeau, the Adelphi-specific, long-time honor societies for men and women had been eliminated, with nothing to replace them. So, we chartered a chapter of O.D.K., the national leadership honor society, to begin again and included alumni who should have been inducted into Lantern and Flambeau.

I also believe in strategic planning as a visual art. I took a tour of the campus with Professor Nicholas Petron, chair of the theatre department, to discuss the grounds and buildings as a stage set, and asked him to comment on the impediments to the energy flow. I dictated the notes and this helped inform the facilities master plan underway. More than one-half of the people arriving on campus each day entered from Cambridge Avenue, yet that was the site of garbage dumpsters and a neon Sbarro's Restaurant sign at the back of Post Hall.

I enrolled in a freshman class, talked to students about their lives on campus and found that, as one student said, car trunks were used as lockers. I called the vice president for administration and student services, and we toured campus to identify numerous places to build lounges and lockers.

I also undertook what I called "brown paper wall" exercises and had the staff outline the curriculum and frequency of course offerings, with the rank of faculty indicated; chart space utilization by day and hour; and identify staffing and understaffing in various offices on campus. We continue to review class sizes for optimal size, efficiency, and effectiveness; positions for necessity and location; and expense ratios to compare our results with other institutions as well as with our past.

We continue to influence our planning by asking students, faculty, staff, and alumni the following questions: "What is going well?" "What do you wish we had fixed, deleted, or added last week?"

We also ask employers, school superintendents, hospital executives and others what our graduates do well and what we need to do better. Advisory boards help in this endeavor, as well.

Some years ago I developed a graph entitled, "Institutional Development in Phases," which we have used at board meetings. It is a way of thinking about the various stages of progress and to identify important transition points in each period.

For example, in the 1997 to 2000 period, a significant decision was to hire an expert in admissions to build an enrollment management program. During the same period, the board was considering renting out empty residence hall rooms to

Polytechnic University's Long Island Campus, merging with Long Island University, and cancelling degree programs in Chemistry, Anthropology, Sociology, Physics, and Philosophy. I told the board when I was interviewed that, if they wanted a new president, they should not take any of these actions.

Soon after I started in 2000, I initiated an aggressive and systematic review of academic programs and administrative units. It was through this academic review process that we improved the Physics program, for example, and built it into one of the largest per 100 students in the country. We have changed and deleted programs through this process. We also had to add new residence halls.

It was during this period that we decided not to spend the unrestricted income from investments, but to reinvest it to build the endowment. We never changed the policy that allows us to spend up to 5% of the rolling 5-year average of unrestricted income from funds functioning as endowment each year, as virtually all institutions in the United States do routinely.

We also began an effort to find alumni and add records to our files. Over the years, we have found contact information for over 45,000 alumni who had been thought of as "lost" due to inadequate recordkeeping and communications between the Office of the Registrar and the Office of University Advancement.

Early on, I switched the location of the offices of the Provost and CFO in order to bring the Provost's Office closer to mine and to demonstrate that Academic Affairs was central to my presidency.

In the early years, I remember in particular two trustees who always seem to ask the penetrating questions: "What if?" and, "What do you think is important; what keeps you up at night?"

During this period we also began receiving recognition for our efforts, in particular from the *Fiske Guide to Colleges*.

In December 2003, Trustee and alumnus Leon Pollack proposed that we undertake the Comprehensive Campaign for Adelphi and offered the first \$1 million gift from a living alumnus.

I reminded the board that our fundraising consultant, after conducting a campaign planning study and interviewing nearly 60 external members of the Adelphi community, recommended a goal of \$35 million, but that I argued for \$56 million. We raised \$58.5 million over 8.5 years, which included the years of the Great Recession.

During the years 2011 to 2015, we were doing better, but still not the best we can do. However, I think we can be justifiably proud of CHI (the Center for Health Innovation) and its various programs, the expansion into new academic areas, especially those related to health, such as Public Health and Health Informatics, and the increase in community partnerships.

The progress report for AU2015, our strategic plan, indicates the many ways in which we have strengthened the University. We have increased the full-time faculty to 340 from about 195; we increased endowed funds to \$175 million from under \$50 million; we increased total assets to about \$500 million from around \$150 million; Standard and Poor's raised our bond rating to "A" from "A-"; we completed some \$350 million of capital improvements yet have only \$120 million in debt; we have kept our tuition level almost 25% lower than regional competitors, with better student results; we increased the graduation rate to be the highest among comprehensive private colleges in the region; we received gifts of \$1 million or more from 18 individuals; alumni participation in annual giving is approaching 10%, up from under 2% in 1997; we have a strong reputation as the "engaged university" in the region; and we now have a board of trustees that consists overwhelmingly of alumni. None of this was inevitable.

I am particularly pleased with undergraduate enrollment, which has grown over 50% and the recognition we have received from *The Princeton Review* and other publications; the Levermore Global Scholars Program, which emphasizes thinking globally and acting locally; the Adelphi Prize for Leadership for Garden City youth no matter where they go to high school; the Community Fellows Program, which supports paid student internships at non-profit organizations in the region; the Center for Non-Profit Leadership, which provides strategic planning, succession planning and both leadership and board development assistance to non-profit organizations in the region; "Vital Signs", the social health indicators project; the success of the Honors College; our joint-degree programs with Columbia and New York Universities; and the records set by our student-athletes on the court and on the field as well as in the classroom and in the community.

In addition, I would count our NGO status at the United Nations; the numerous international initiatives, which not only bring diplomats to campus, but also support a robust Study Abroad program; the number of full-time faculty covering course sections; new facilities and support for teaching and learning; accreditations up-to-date; internships and employment for students; financial aid improvements and affordability, with moderate debt for graduates; and improvements with relations with neighbors, the Property Owners Association, and the Village of Garden City. By the way, 75% of undergraduates say that Adelphi contributed to their “awareness of community and global issues.”

Suffice it to say the Adelphi image and identity have improved in the local, regional, and national settings.

With all this good news, I do have concerns. One is with graduate enrollment. Teacher Education enrollment has decreased at Adelphi and elsewhere due to school district layoffs and negative press for the profession. Some other graduate programs have seen enrollment of Chinese students decline due to competition and Chinese government policy. We have solid plans to deal with these challenges.

We need to continue to focus on fundraising and building the database of information about alumni. Many who have been successful in their careers and have the capacity to make major gifts were ignored for decades and became involved in other institutions and organizations. We have been identifying the next generation of donors and building our potential for fundraising. It certainly is the case that those who have graduated in the last ten to twelve years have a much better affiliation with the University and these younger classes have higher rates of participation in annual giving. In fact, the University’s alumni participation rate continues to rise while the national trend for alumni participation continues to fall.

Many people comment on the state of the “business model” of higher education without being specific. For some, it means too much lecturing instead of using technology to bring courses and experts from other universities to offer standard or high level courses. The use of technology must be mission-based, and we have made great strides in offering courses and programs online when it is appropriate.

However, the core elements of the higher education business model are, first, research and teaching. Research is given too much weight at too many

institutions. We need to make sure that the research we support through grant support, released time from teaching, and leaves of absence is research that strengthens our teaching mission.

The second element of the business model that concerns me is the “discounting” of tuition to create financial aid versus families’ “willingness to pay”. The very high debt that some families take on represents a “willingness to pay” for a brand name institution. We need continually to focus on what makes Adelphi distinctive and offer the highest quality and best results so that students want to attend. We are known for the transformational nature of our student experience, and must never become just another transactional enterprise.

A third part of the business model that gets too little attention is how universities prepare faculty to know what to expect of students and what the standards are for excellence in coursework. This is something we pay attention to but need to do even more about. Without this attention, the result is either grade inflation or unhappy students who do not know what level of work is expected of them from class to class.

A fourth dimension of the higher education business model is the calendar. A university is a 12-month enterprise, yet the faculty role in shared governance is often limited to the nine months of the academic year. We strive to make ours a year-round commitment.

Another important part of the university business model is the role of the board in ceremonies that celebrate the special nature of a university, such as Matriculation Day and Commencement; the recruitment of new trustees, and in philanthropy. The Board should be more involved in recruiting people to the cause. It also should be the center of Adelphi’s philanthropic efforts, with the next campaign actively chaired by one or more Trustees.

For the future, we need to increase the endowment through new gifts so as to be in a position to be competitive in awarding scholarships and to maintain our “A” credit rating.

The Facilities Master Plan needs to be updated, not only to take into account the reclaiming of the land occupied by The Waldorf School, but also in understanding

if, when, and how we should take advantage of the sale of houses on property adjacent to the University.

The Board's role continues to evolve in adding value. Certainly it is responsible for oversight, but also for introducing the University to networks of friends who can be speakers and sponsors; hosting prospective students who have been offered admission and current students on career-oriented field trips; and participating in other activities that enhance the environment for teaching and learning on campus. The board, too, can execute the 4 "I's" of fundraising and engagement: interest, inform, involve, and then they invest.

We need to continue the development of online programs and our capacity for it. We have 90,000 living alumni, many of whom have requirements or a desire for continued professional education. Online and blended courses for master's programs are a priority. In addition, all students need to know the technology and methods of online learning. We also need to be prepared for students who come with sophisticated knowledge of technology and be able to satisfy their interests and evaluate the transfer of credit from courses taken online elsewhere.

We talk about "Enrollment by Design." This means that each academic unit and degree level has an enrollment goal and that no one cell, that is, no one academic unit or degree level, should bail out the others. Each must reach its target.

We also should be exploring more areas of collaboration. For example, our relations with Hofstra University are very good and there is the potential for additional joint programs with it. We already have a joint Doctor of Audiology Degree with Hofstra and St. John's, and should be looking for more such partnerships.

I have been asked about acquiring another campus that was in trouble, and have said consistently that I am open to serving more students, but do not want another institution's debt and deferred maintenance.

We also should be building on our partnerships with major employers such as those we have with Estee Lauder, North Shore-LIJ, Catholic Health Systems, and Winthrop University Medical Center, among others. These are models for future growth.

I was asked about my priorities if I were to continue as president for another five year. First, I would be able to spend my time differently and would have the vice presidents and deans take on more community responsibilities. I would travel more to visit alumni and to extend Adelphi's international reach for student and faculty recruitment and exchanges.

I also would be mindful of the organizational changes needed when key senior staff will retire and the level of position we would need to create to cover all aspects of responsibilities for facilities planning, construction and maintenance, grounds, housekeeping, and related functions.

In addition, I would ask the board to follow up on the previous special task force on tuition and develop a philosophy on tuition, fees, discounting, and endowments for scholarships.

I definitely would call upon trustees more often to bring their expertise to students, whether in their offices or on campus. We have done this, of course, but can do more to help board members be even more involved with Adelphi between meetings and to play a larger role in representing the University.

Adelphi University is in a strong position for claiming an even higher place in the postsecondary universe during its next fifteen years. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.