

# Achieving Progress: Year 1 Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

In 2008 UTC launched the implementation of its Strategic Plan. I feel like the drum major for its progress as I share with you our progress.

First a little background. *Critical Partnerships – a Pathway to Excellence* – guides the direction, decisions, and actions of The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, an engaged, metropolitan university. This strategic plan for 2008-2013 establishes four key initiatives that focus on excellence in teaching, research, and service as the University dedicates itself to meeting the diverse needs of the region through critical partnerships and community involvement.

The four key initiatives or critical partnerships include the following:

- Partnerships for students [teaching and learning
- Partnerships for education and research
- Partnerships for diversity
- Enabling partnerships

After a year of study in 2007, preceded by earlier efforts in 2003 and 2004, three task forces and a planning council formulated goals and activities for the strategic plan, which was subsequently presented to the university community in November 2007 and approved by the Board of Trustees. Implementation began in January 2008 with the establishment of 28 action committees for each identified activity.

This report presents an overview of the accomplishments of the action committees during their first year of work that ended December 2008 and incorporates data provided from the Faculty/Staff Worklife and Diversity Study (FSWDS) that was conducted in fall 2008.

Let me take each initiative separately. Please remember that the accomplishments do not include any from spring 2009, since the first year of implementing the Strategic Plan ended in December 2008.

## **I. Partnerships for Students {Teaching and Learning}**

*Create partnerships that provide distinctive educational experiences for students both in the classroom and beyond, lead to meaningful engagement between students and all other members of the University community, and enhance students' commitment to The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.*

To provide institutional support through education and advising to ensure student success, a senior faculty member was appointed as assistant provost for retention and

advisement. Advisement services were restructured and consolidated. As a result, freshman retention from fall to spring jumped from 84% to 90%.

As you know, UTC has spent considerable energy (and sometimes political capital!) to enhance UTC access to students in the region/state. And our efforts have paid off. We received approval from the Board of Trustees to offer regional tuition to juniors and seniors from NW Georgia and NE –Alabama; and, the first time the tuition was offered in fall 2008, 110 students participated.

UTC also extended access to students by increasing the number of online courses from 2007 to 2008 by 48%.

And, for the first time, we have an inventory of service learning courses in our academic curriculum that will provide good preparation for that particular objective.

## **II. Partnerships for Education and Research**

*Create external educational and research partnerships that take advantage of UTC's distinctive programs, faculty expertise, and the resources of the Chattanooga metropolitan region.*

The appointment of an assistant provost for Research and Engagement to lead this effort has resulted in an inventory of incentives/disincentives affecting faculty research productivity and a new policy to permit academic units to carry over F&A recoveries at year end. In addition, the action committee identified a center for education in the STEM areas and facilitated a new process to administer UC Foundation general grants program, linking awards to the UTC Strategic Plan. However, the Faculty/Staff Worklife and Diversity Study (FSWDS) revealed faculty would like more adequate support for their research.

During this first year of the Strategic Plan, the number of international partnerships increased by 43% from 7 – 10; and, correspondingly, there was a 30% increase in the number of students participating in international study.

UTC has shared its arts programs with the community for decades but never kept a formal listing of these events. In year 1 of enacting the Strategic Plan, an exhaustive inventory revealed the extent of these programs and their audiences. Did you know that in 2008 there were over 100 programs in the arts with 49+ partners, and 28,503 attendees?

## **III. Partnerships for Diversity**

*Embrace, celebrate, and sustain a campus community that is inclusive of diversity in all forms—people, ideas, and culture.*

Post-Geier funds enabled the campus to renovate space in the University Center and open an attractive new Multicultural Center with a staff person dedicated to mounting programs and activities. There were 1871 visits to the Center in its first semester of operation. A complementary committee developed a new statement to reflect UTC's commitment to diversity. As a note of caution, the FSWD Study reminds us that faculty think support for minority faculty is lower than it should be. In a year of fiscal constraints and virtually no hiring, UTC maintained level retention rates for minority faculty but dipped slightly with staff and undergraduate students. The number of graduate students of diversity increased. Remarkable progress was made in improving the physical access of the campus and ensuring ADA-compliance through the use of Braille signage for UC meeting rooms, handrails at a steep site, elevator upgrades or replacements, and the purchase of a van accessible for students with physical needs. As we look toward the future, we now have an accessibility audit of current campus facilities and infrastructure: we know what we have and what we need.

#### **IV. Enabling Partnerships**

*Create a learning, work, and community environment by enabling and supporting the University's strategic direction and mission through efficient use of human, fiscal, physical, and communication resources.*

This initiative is a broad one and has 13 committees to carry out its charges. As you might expect, the accomplishments are many and varied in this area.

A highlight occurred when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching affirmed UTC's mission in fall 2008 by awarding it recognition as a community engagement institution under both eligible categories: curricular engagement and outreach/partnerships. Especially reassuring is that the 2008 survey of faculty, staff, and administration indicated an overwhelming percentage agrees with this mission.

The budget process was fine-tuned and made even more accessible to the UTC community. When asked to assess their level of satisfaction with employment at UTC and their careers here, faculty, staff and administration were very positive. Most faculty are satisfied with the tenure process but would like more teaching support. Gains have been made in improving internal communications and media placement, and UTC has increased its outreach to alumni with many new and innovative activities.

The campus continues to receive accolades for its landscaping, sustainability, and accessibility efforts. On behalf of the University, I have signed the Campus Climate Agreement. We are working hard to be responsible stewards of the environment.

There were no salary increases in 2007 and 2008, a source of real disappointment. Moreover, because of budget constraints, a large number of faculty lines remain unfilled, and library resources are crippled.

While funding was constrained during the first year of implementing the Strategic Plan, there are bright spots. The librarians have been resourceful in working with UT libraries, Tenn-Share, TN Electronic Library to increase access to resources and services. Reports coming from athletics show good news: there are major improvements in donor funding which was up by 25%, increased grade point averages of student athletes, and winning seasons for many sports. The attendance in wrestling and soccer events was impressive. Graduate education showed bright. There was an increase in the number of graduate students and graduate degrees conferred, but the action committee continues to seek more funding for assistantships. The University of Chattanooga Foundation developed a new funding model that will be highly supportive of UTC's academic programs; and the SimCenter received \$17 million in private gifts for a National Center for Computational Engineering.

Committees have worked diligently to establish UPRAC as a budget and fiscal allocation advisory mechanism, enhance budget and financial accountability, and provide disclosure by publishing budget materials on-line.

As the Center for Social Research has conducted its surveys on students, staff, administrators, and faculty during 2008, we have learned some valuable information:

- There is a high level of understanding and acceptance of the metropolitan mission. Results also indicate faculty and staff members place value on the metropolitan mission to student learning
  - Faculty 81% (agree, highly agree)
  - Staff 78.5
  - Administration 81
- Employees report increased satisfaction with their UTC jobs.
  - Faculty 86.5% (agree, highly agree)
  - Staff 86.7
  - Administration 86.5
- Employees report that their work is valued by UTC. Faculty were not asked this question.
  - Staff 70.4% (agree, highly agree)
  - Administration 74.8

BUT we need to continue our efforts: Employees do not feel UTC has a transparent decision-making process

- Faculty 23.7% (agree, highly agree)
- Staff 23%
- Administration 28%

I want to assure you that even before the time of last year's survey we began sharing this information by creating new Web sites, such as those for the Strategic Plan and the budget. We will continue to fine-tune this process.

Put in the perspective of the many accomplishments, we can realize that the first year of implementing the Strategic Plan was fruitful. Without question, UTC followed its motto: **“We Shall Achieve.”**

However, we must be responsible and ask: Where do we go next? The 28 action committees are currently implementing year 2 of the Strategic Plan. Some of the next initiatives include the following:

- Developing external curricular experiences for every student
- Implementing a formal service-learning structure and a civic/community engagement program
- Submitting a proposal to the UC Foundation for development of General Education courses for online delivery
- Conducting monthly roundtable discussion for faculty/staff engaged in community projects
- Completing the 2009-2010 budget
- Gaining approval of the technology plan
- Launching the new UTC News Center Web site
- Completing an online fundraising appeal to young alumni
- Identifying resources to improve faculty compensation
- Evaluating the use and effectiveness of services/facilities
- Rebalancing UTC's financial position, aligning it with the Strategic Plan, focusing on the SACS self study and QEP, and considering the effect of stimulus funds
- Preparing UTC to be the most sustainable campus in the state.

Thank you all for your commitment and diligence in completing the first year of the Strategic Plan. We can all be proud of the many impressive first accomplishments, while we look forward to further progress. **We shall continue to achieve!**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roger G. Brown".

Roger G. Brown  
Chancellor