**UND Strategic Planning**

**Meritorious Staff Focus Group Questions**

**Monday, May 23 3:00 pm**

**7 Participants**

1. **UND’s Mission is “*to provide transformative learning, discovery and community engagement opportunities for developing tomorrow’s leaders*.” What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this statement?** 
   * “Developing tomorrow’s leaders” stands out to me. I think under our core values we do not touch on the leadership part enough. This is what we are trying to do at UND: develop servant leaders.
   * **Let’s talk more about the term ‘servant leader’:**
     1. I like that term; I don’t hear it as often. You want your personal values to match with UND values, and this would for me. I would like to see this as a value, but don’t know how the greater university views that label.
   * One of the comments I have heard is that ‘not everyone wants to be a leader.’ Maybe we want to broaden the idea of leadership?
   * Add more of the community engagement: Grand Forks is reliant on UND- so the community engagement piece is important.
   * Transformative learning is important, but some people may not understand what we mean by that term. How do we explain this in a different way that may be more relevant to people?
   * It seems very geared towards students. But can our mission include more people- broaden it to include how we all can play a role in the UND mission?
   * We should always look for things are ‘process improvement’. We are never ‘good enough’. If you are not growing/changing, then you are behind. Things are changing so quickly you need to be continuously improving. So, how does everyone interpret this word “transformative”
   * **Weaknesses to this statement?**
     1. Why are we not able to keep our graduates in this in Grand Forks? We need to focus on how to keep students in this area and look at why we are losing these good people to other places?
     2. I would add the State of North Dakota to that statement. Keep our graduates in the state of North Dakota.
     3. I think they are attempting this, to forgive loans to stay in ND, but back to this point, keeping people here is so important. The wage scale may be a problem.
     4. We do not say anything in our mission about cutting edge technology. A lot of what we do is transformative, and this is not hit on in our statement. This is geared towards students and leadership. We mention student engagement, but don’t have research in the mission.
2. **Who does UND serve, and do you believe we are currently meeting these needs?** 
   * Students- they are paying us money to earn a degree to better their livelihoods.
   * This is the primary mission: our students. I think that we serve them quite well. We teach them what the need to know and get the leadership and education. We also serve the community, people that want to get lifelong learning (not just high school graduates coming straight to college).
   * Local communities and businesses. We have a petroleum engineering advisory board and we ask them what direction they want to see us go in. We then can modify our research to cater to industry needs. Nation, State, Community, and Industry leaders are all important groups that UND needs to serve.
   * We serve the State of North Dakota and need to make sure we are taking care of its needs and the needs of the people, community, and industry in the state.
   * Legislators have been supportive of us because UND is reaching out to more rural communities. We embraced distance education a long time ago. We have an obligation to reach out to our rural communities in the state. Graduates were able to stay in their local communities and earn their degrees. As long as we are a rural state, we need to stay committed to this. We need to try to reach out and engage with these communities.
   * I think that we do a good job of this when we look at our distance/online numbers right now. We are a leader in this area.
   * Our transfer students- are we serving our 2-year schools and our transfer schools like we should be? Our Tribal Schools - are we serving these students as well and bringing them on to campus and online? I think that we could improve in this area more.
   * I think we are also good resources for other institutions of higher education in the state- so this is a way to serve the other campuses and help them be successful as well.
3. **The Core Values of UND are Community, Discovery, Diversity, Inclusivity, Liberal Arts and Lifelong Learning. What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of these Values? To what degree do you feel these Values are part of UND’s culture?**

* My background: I was a construction worker until age 40. In 2009 went back to school and now I am working on my Ph. I’ve done 2 undergrads, a masters, and a doctorate. I was in the Marine Corps and have lived in other countries and experienced other cultures. All these UND values resonate for me because of my past experiences. I have 86 international grad students of a diverse backgrounds and we all work together with no issues. We are all valued for what we bring to the team.
* I think that we have improved in diversity, but we can continue to do work here. Maybe not UND, but in the community. Some of our international students have had issues in the community. Hard to control but an area we can work with the city on a bit.
* I have had the opposite feedback from my students who all say they love it here and have no issues. My international students have not had any concerns in the community.
* **Are we living up to Livelong Learning?** 
  + The employee benefit of being able to take up to 3 classes a year to work towards a degree is great. I couldn’t pass up getting my MBA because it was free- so this was an incredible benefit. I have looked at different masters and the PhD program. This encourages folks to continue with their education and can allow them to move up in the university.

1. **What do you see as key differentiators of UND as compared to other institutions?**

* The small size of UND is important. Students get to know people in class and network that way. Keeping that ‘family feel’ for students. The welcoming environment.
  + UND is the best kept secret- we are not marketing ourselves enough.
  + You can’t advertise yourself out of this demographic trend. Advertising/marketing will not cut it. It is in offering an excellent USER EXPEREINCE (Amazon example) where we will find the biggest benefit
    1. Not only in terms of students, but also the onboarding of employees- needs to be better user experience. This is really a differentiator. I am nervous about what the state offers us. CTS provides a solution for us, which is not the greatest solution, but it is a monopoly so we can’t change it. It is a system that is less than user friendly and it will cause us problems when we try to compete.
  + The faculty relationship is what keeps people connected to UND. However, when we look at what we offer transfer students it is not always a welcoming approach.

1. **What does it mean to feel valued and supported as an employee at UND?**
   * We can take classes for free. We can finish our degree and have learning opportunities. Some employees feel they are valued because of the benefits, such as the tuition break for families.
   * The support that we get from people just by saying ‘thank you,’ stopping by, recognizing us. It does not always need to be in the form of money, but just recognizing this. Even a faculty member saying that to a staff member this goes a long way.
   * Covid has played a big role with remote work and not a lot of in-person gatherings. Trying to get back to that. The appreciation ceremonies- it is good to see people together again. You have been working with people remotely in the last few years and not the same as being face to face. A thank you occasionally is appreciated.
   * I would agree, a thank you or that recognition makes you want to come to work/log into zoom. Some supervisors are way better than that than others. The recognition that we get now is better than what we had before. Different supervisors have different ways of showing this. It is nice to get the ‘kudos’
   * Things should be fair, but that does not always mean equal. Flexibility to be fair to employees, but this does not always mean equal. Some people do not need public recognition, but some may like it. Supervisors should know what works for employees. The remote work- the ability for some people to balance their life has been life changing for them. For others coming back to the office has been life changing. There has been lots of value in the trust my supervisor has when we work remotely that we can ‘meet or exceed’ expectations from remote places. There are some jobs that this does not work for. But what is fair vs. what is equal. It has meant a lot to our folks.
   * It makes sense, but a lot of people I interact with this is not an option. The service positions (plumbers, dining, etc.) and being told what they must do, and I felt like this was a major breakdown in trust. There are supervisors who were promoted because they have been here for a long time, not necessarily because they were the best for the position. Breakdown between supervisors- some have been unfair, unkind, and not understanding. As a result, we cannot hire in these areas. Some of the rules we have here do not work best for employees.
   * How others are treated is so important. Should be equal treatment across the board. To feel valued is when things are looked at fairly (waste, fraud, and abuse- when these things are not investigated). When I go that extra step and work harder, but get the same recognition that others are getting it is very discouraging.
2. **What would be your vision for UND’s future? Do you have any ‘big dreams’ for the institution?** 
   * + - We want to see UND excel and be better. Working for a place that just wants to be ‘good’ is not here we want to be. We want to be excellent. We want to be the university that everyone wants to go to- so what does it take to be that? We need to be transformative, innovative…
       - Some people only focus on the larger universities. But many of them managed to get a ‘facelift’ before we did. I am proud that I am a part of this facelift that was so needed on our campus. Our grounds and buildings are starting to look more updated. I am happy that I get to be a part of the solution.
       - Everything that we talked about today, would be a part of the vision that is aiming for constant improvement. We cannot just hit a goal and be done. Keep doing what we are doing but constantly improve. Needs to be an improvement in technology. The user experience for students and employees- just a constant improvement.
       - DRACOLA- we have had people come from other universities look at what we are doing at UND and comment that they have never seen opportunities like this available to students. Staying on the cutting edge is where UND must be to keep our future bright. Honor tradition but find ways to constantly improve and be okay with change.
       - To do this sometimes we need to stop some things that we are doing and put energy and resources into things that will position us better. Resource constraints: stop doing some of the older things and breath new life into things. This become a conflict for people at some point in time.
       - Some people are hesitant to change. Need to say on top of the trends and future focused.
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