

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the 'Cuse Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, Senior Internal Communications Specialist at Syracuse University.

Jamie Winders:

Academic strategic planning that it's a roadmap to the future that we all collectively create. And so I think of it as answering three basic questions. And so the first question is where are we right now? And in particular, what are we already really good at? What are we almost really good at? And we think of that as the distinctive excellence we already see on campus. So that's the first question. The second question we ask is, where do we want to go? What do we want to be? What's that aspirational future state we'd love to see here at Syracuse University? And then the third question is, how do we get there? And so we think of the Academic Strategic Plan as laying out those three questions so that it's that roadmap to where we want to go. And then it also becomes the set of principles and ideas that help shape our decisions that help us think about, of all the things that we could do as a university, what should we be doing to reach that future state that we want?

John Boccacino:

Our guests today on the 'Cuse Conversations podcast are thrilled and honored to have two esteemed guests from the academic side here at Syracuse University, talking about the Academic Strategic Plan and the process that is going into this essential roadmap that really will dictate where we as a university and academic community want to go over the next five years. It's been a comprehensive process. It's involved the community members at every step of the way. I think it really makes it special that we are getting the feedback from our faculty, our staff, and our students here on campus as far as the makeup of this strategic plan. And our guests today joining us to talk about the Academic Strategic Plan, it's Gretchen Ritter who is

process like this, what exactly is an academic strategic plan and what are the goals we hope to accomplish with this Academic Strategic Plan moving Syracuse University forward?

Jamie Winders:

So John, as a geographer, I love that you described it as a roadmap because that's exactly how I think of academic strategic planning, that it's a roadmap to the future that we all collectively create. And so I think of it as answering three basic questions. And so the first question is where are we right now? And in particular, what are we already really good at? What are we almost really good at? And we think of that as the distinctive excellence we already see on campus. So that's the first question. The second question we ask is where do we want to go? What do we want to be? What's that sort of aspirational future state we'd love to see here at Syracuse University? And then the third question is how do we get there?

And so we think of the Academic Strategic Plan laying out those three questions so that it's that roadmap to where we want to go. And then it also becomes the set of principles and ideas that help shape our decisions that help us think about, oh all the things that we could do as a university, what should we be doing to reach that future state that we want?

John Boccacino:

Provost Ritter, I want to piggyback off of that question. In your esteemed opinion, how can an academic strategic plan set Syracuse University up for sustained long term success?

Provost Gretchen Ritter:

Yeah, thanks John. I think the benefit of a plan like this is that it's a coming together around what we're seeking to achieve as a community. And so as Jamie talked about, part of that starts with the why question. I've encouraged everybody to start conversations about academic strategic planning by asking themselves why do we do what we do? And I think a great way to think about this to say, imagine you are talking to someone you're trying to recruit, a faculty candidate or prospective student, undergraduate or graduate student, what do you tell them? What do you tell them about why this is the place that they want to come to?

And when you get people to start talking about that, you surface all the things that they're proud of, you surface all the things that we're really great at, you surface all the ways that as an institution we already make a difference. And then I think our job is to think together about given the moment we're in, given what we see on the horizon five years from now, what should we be thinking about doing collectively to [inaudible 00:05:41] a difference in a way that is distinctive to the areas of excellence that you see here at Syracuse?

Jamie Winders:

I think one of the beauties of academia is that when we think about Gretchen used that phrase coming together is that we collectively chart our own path and that we as faculty, it's students, it's staff, it's often alum, and that process can sometimes be a little chaotic, but it's also the things that make universities work at their best. And I think that's what our goal with this process is that coming together to think about where do we collectively want to go and how do we get there?

John Boccacino:

I love these of coming together because all of us that work or attend school or employed by the university, we have a passion for Syracuse University, a unique passion. But I feel like there's members of our community still. They might need a little bit of a sell job on the Academic Strategic Plan. Why should you care about this Academic Strategic Plan? What are the best ways you can get involved in voicing your feedback on this?

Provost Gretchen Ritter:

I think people should get involved with it for both principled and practical reasons. I think they should get involved in it because they believe that what they're doing makes a positive difference in the world, this is a way to accelerate and enhance that difference. So at a principled level, if you think educating students and helping them to develop their skills, their talents and ambitions makes a positive difference in our community, our country, in our world, then thinking about how do we do that at an even higher level is something that I think people should want to be involved with. I think at a practical level, this is, we're developing a social contract for this community. We're saying these are the commitments that we have identified and that we are going to bind ourselves to. So I would hope that everyone would want to be part of the effort to create what that social contract is since it's going to govern our work over the next few years.



John Boccacino:

Not to put you on the spot, Jamie, but can you think of any type of feedback that you've heard so far through these forums that really has made you stop and think and maybe want to interpret this and incorporate it into the plan moving forward?

Jamie Winders:

So I think the most telling moment for me coming out of the. So we have three pillars, we have four crosscut areas. Each of those areas has held at least two of these conversations or these public forums. And earlier this week I was at this second forum for the research and creative excellence pillar and they were bringing back what they had learned from feedback of different venues and were presenting some preliminary ideas to the people on the call to get a double check of what we've learned, is this resonating with you?

And toward the end, this was on Zoom, someone put in the chat, "Could we get into smaller groups and keep talking about these ideas?" And to me that was such a telling moment because it's the second reason that we do this. It's not only to get the feedback to create this robust plan, but it's also to model and encourage the cross-campus conversations about research, about creative endeavors, about our work as scholars. And that was such an important moment for me when that happened organically of people saying, "I'm really getting value out of talking with folks from other parts of campus about what we collectively do in the area of research. I want these conversations to continue." And that to me is what the process of academic strategic planning is doing is it's helping to identify and shape that vision that we then all want to be part of moving forward.

John Boccacino:

I know there was the watershed moment when Provost Ritter had the text messages that at 6:00 in the morning to get us on this path. But part that I didn't get to dive a little bit, and you've hit on it, you both have hit on this, are the working groups that have been formed to take the process of these inclusion and accessibility, global engagement, enrollment strategy and resource sustainability and budgeting. Provost Ritter, what was the thought process when you had that brilliant moment in the morning of sending this diagram along to your colleague? What was your thought process behind those four all

Provost Gretchen Ritter:

I think a chunk of the credit for this goes



commitment to engagement as a campus around this will be the key to making this a true living document.

John Boccacino:

I want to give our audience some insights too. This not something where we're sitting back and waiting, there isn't an ambitious timeline that Academic Affairs has set forth just a few months from now in January. The goal is to have a draft plan ready for review and feedback coming up in the year. What was the driving force behind this ambitious timeline?

Jamie Winders:

So I think the keyword there is draft. So when we sat down and thought about what's our timeline for producing a refreshed Academic Strategic Plan, we were cognizant of a few things. We did not want the planning process to stretch until the next time we need to revisit the Academic Strategic Plan. And so we wanted to contain that process on purpose so that it would be an intense period of engagement as opposed to this low intensity thing that we're just doing seemingly in perpetuity. The other is that we wanted to really focus on, we want a draft so that we then have a separate semester to engage it, to finesse it, to talk about it, to workshop it, to get feedback on it. And so we were intentional in terms of putting an ambitious timeline around drafting it out so that we had the bandwidth then to really massage it and to work through it and to reflect on does this document which we've drafted accurately reflect where we are and where we want to go.

Provost Gretchen Ritter:

When I talk to students who are working on a dissertation, I say write your first chapter because it will help you figure out what the project's about. It creates the idea, the framework for what the project's about. And then expect once you've finished all the other chapters that you'll essentially go back and completely rewrite that first chapter because by then you figured out what the project's about. So this is we're writing the first chapter in order to give our community a chance to help us figure out in greater detail what is this really about. And then we'll go back and refine it in a way that represents our collective wisdom as to where we should be headed.

John Boccacino:

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