Open forum – 10/8/15 – Notes and Additions From Past Meetings

The following themes seem to flow from the questions, concerns, and answers that came out of Thursday's meeting. I have also added at times points which flow from our first several meetings and mesh with discussion topics from the forum. I have synthesized what everyone sent in and added some of my own to create these major points to consider with questions which expand the conversation. Attached at the end is the text last modified and sent in by Dr. Musser. My comments here are an attempt to pull all of this together into a framework for discussion. SCJ

Size of the University
This seems to drive so many of the other points of discussion that it deserves to be dealt with first.
- Should the University continue to grow or should it stabilize at the current level or should it contract?
- Is there an optimum and sustainable level of enrollment for Tech? For each campus? What factors drive the level of enrollment that Tech can sustain? What factors are irrelevant to or unaffected by enrollment levels?
- What measures would Tech need to take to increase enrollment? What measures to cap enrollment? What measures to reduce enrollment?
- What are the most likely consequences of maintaining an average five-year enrollment growth similar to that of the last five years? Is that level of growth possible? What policies and actions would it take to achieve that growth?
- What are the most likely consequences of capping enrollment at the current level? What policies and actions would it take to maintain the current enrollment level?
- What are the most likely consequences of reducing enrollment? What policies and actions would it take to reduce student enrollment 10%? 20%? 30%?

Revenues
Once the desired size of the University has been determined, the revenues from student fees and state allotments can be estimated.
- What are the five-year annual estimates of revenues? What assumptions underlie these estimates?
- What are our expectations for future state funding? What factors determine any increases or decreases in funding allotments? What can Tech do to influence these factors or prepare for them?
- What steps can Tech undertake to help move a change in the State's funding formula? Can Tech modify the current legislative perception of Tech and how to fund its programs?
- What are our expectations for student ability and willingness to pay for education through personal funds and financial assistance? What can Tech do to influence these factors or prepare for them?
- What level of tuition and fees can Tech students sustain through graduation? What are the risks of raising tuition and fees too high or lowering them too low? How high is too high? How low is too low?

- What are the effects that tuition and fee growth have on students? On their families? On taxpayers? On the community?
- What level of enrollment growth (positive, negative or neutral) can be sustained using our current revenue pattern? What level if revenues grow 10%? Fall 10%? Other levels?
- How do Tech's revenues and revenue streams compare to other institutions such as UCA? If there are any differences, why do they exist?
- What can Tech do to increase the level of grants awarded to the University? Should the University establish a stand-alone central grant writing office? Should it establish one within each of the Colleges and major areas (e.g., Residence Life)? Should it follow both of these options?
- Are there alternative revenue streams that Tech can pursue? What actions need to be taken to make it possible for Tech to pursue these streams? How much revenue can Tech realize by pursuing these streams? What keeps Tech from being able to pursue these streams? Are there any ethical or legal concerns which must be addressed which are attached to these streams?

Expenditures
Once the desired size of the University has been determined, the expenses from operating a University of that size can be estimated.
- How can the University increase the actual and perceived transparency of the budgeting process? Who are the key personnel in the process? How can they assist staff and faculty in gaining access to the budgeting process and the budget documents?
- How are budget priorities determined? Is the procedure a top-down process? A bottom-up process? A zero-sum process? An incremental process? A zero-based process?
- What are the critical determinants of each area of the University's annual budgeted expenses? What factors are the greatest influencers on increases or decreases in the overall budget and in each area of expense?
- What are the fixed costs of the University that must be paid no matter the level of student enrollment? What are the incremental costs for each new student enrolled at the University? What are the incremental costs for each faculty or staff member added to the payroll?
- What is the lowest level of responsibility for expenditures at the University? What are the benefits, detriments, consequences of providing expenditure authority at lower and lower levels? What are the legal and ethical ramifications?

Staff & Faculty
Much of the discussion in the open forums revolves around the resources and their allocations across the University.
- What is the comparison of faculty and staff salaries with employees at UCA? What is the difference in state approvals for any differing levels? What factors influence these differences and how might they be addressed?

- Is there a more equitable method of determining faculty and staff salary/wage levels than by comparison with peer institutions? What are the consequences of changing the method of determining salary/wage levels for employees?
- What effect does teaching at overload levels have on faculty? Are faculty teaching overloads to make up for wage levels or to teach courses for which there are no other faculty or both? Other reasons for overloads?
- Are there benefits that are enjoyed by some employees that might be shared by staff members? What are the effects of extending these benefits to all employees regardless of status?
- Are there non-salary/wage compensations which might be available to attract or to keep faculty and staff members at Tech? Are there salary/wage adjustment methods (equity pay, etc.) which might be explored to attract/retain employees?

Facilities & Technology
There are many more areas that need repair or replacement than we seem to have resources for funding.
- Can we afford to continue to build new buildings? What is our usage efficiency for the buildings that we currently maintain? Are there buildings that should be removed, repaired or renovated before we build any new structures?
- What is the incremental cost for each building on campus? What are the factors that drive the costs inherent in each building? Are there ways to make each building most cost effective? If so, what are they?
- Which classrooms and offices are the most dated and require new equipment, furniture, etc.? Should they be renovated or would it be most cost effective to move the office to another location? Which facilities cannot be repaired or renovated in a cost effective manner?
- What is the method for prioritizing the maintenance of any facility on campus? Who is in charge of this process? Who else should be involved in the process? What means of input is available to other employees to shape that prioritization?
- What is the five-year plan for replacing or repairing or maintain each building on campus? Are there means of creating a maintenance fund for future work on each building on campus? How would each fund be created and maintained?
- What is the five-year plan

Open forum – 10/8/15 – Notes

General:
The university is in "triage", underfunded, understaffed, lacking facilities, equipment and services across the board.
Vision for university size drives needs. Need enrollment plan so that needs can be estimated for faculty, buildings, support services, etc.
There is an appearance of decisions being made "behind closed doors".

Reserves:
What is adequate for an institution our size? Are there rules of thumb relating to reserves for comparable institutions?

Revenues:
Need a five-year estimate on anticipated revenues and expenditures.
The following question was addressed from two perspectives:
        What number of revenues is needed for a student body of about 10,000?
        What number of students can be served by current revenues?
Need to advocate for a change in state funding formula to assist institutions like ATU catch up.
Need to increase fundraising (foundation funds) and grant funds to increase the revenue stream.
Need to set up grant writing office(s) (centralized or within colleges).
How do ATU revenues compare to UCA revenues (as a similar sized school in the area)?
There is a nation-wide trend of decreasing percentages of university revenue coming from state funding.

Budget:
The budget process is not known by faculty.
Need a change in how the budget priorities are set.
Investigate alternative methods for setting priorities, including a "bottom up" scenario.
Increase transparency in the budget process.
Set up an anonymous email for submission of ideas to finance/budget.
There should be campus-wide budgeting for infrastructure.

Students:
Is there an optimum size for the University?
Do we need to cap enrollment? Increase admissions standards (ACT scores)?
Need to provide each incoming freshman with a tablet.
Students have little to do here outside of academics.

Faculty:
Salaries line at UCA is much higher than at ATU.
Salaries need to be increased to attract and retain qualified faculty.
Faculty are teaching overloads to make up for low salaries.

Promotion increases need to be increased to retain faculty.
Usage of a comparison group for faculty salaries is inherently flawed, particular for some disciplines.
Need more full-time faculty, less adjuncts.
Adjuncts have low pay and few benefits.
Need a plan to increase full-time faculty over time with less dependency on adjuncts.
Faculty need release time to do research effectively.
Need an increase in the CETL budget to assist faculty with professional development on campus.
Need additional on-campus research monies.

Staff:
Need promotional funds for staff.
Need to look at ways to increase benefits for staff (cell phone allowances; overtime; day care facilities; not charging leave time during Christmas break, etc.).

Facilities:
How can we continue to afford to build new buildings?
Classrooms and labs, in particular, are dated and need new equipment and furniture.
Need a long-term plan for facilities maintenance.
Continued accessibility issues in several buildings.
Parking needs to be addressed long-term for the university.
Career Center (behind the Russellville High School and owned by Russellville Public Schools) is landlocked with no space for additional parking or facilities.
Need a facility for large campus meetings of staff and faculty and for use by large professional societies or organizations/conferences.
Need defibrillators within each building.
Need to focus on recycling and make the campus "greener."
Need residence hall plans and student union facilities to increase sense of student identity with ATU.
Need space for faculty-student research.

Brand:
Need an institutional identity for students to identify with.
Students like Tech but lack pride in Tech.