January 28, 2020

John C. Keller

Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

Dean of the Graduate College

207 Calvin Hall

Dear Dean Keller,

It is our pleasure to submit to you the final Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis and Strategic Planning document assembled by the Graduate College Strategic Planning Committee. As you know, the Committee was comprised as follows: David Cwiertny (Co-Chair) Professor College of Engineering; Ann Ricketts (Co-Chair); Senior Assistant Vice President for Research; Christian Bako, President, Graduate Student Senate; Caroline Cheung, Membership Director, Graduate Student Senate; Erin Barnes, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education; Andy Jenkins, Director of Information Technology, Graduate College; Christine Getz, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Liz Lara, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Graduate College; Dan Tranel, Associate Dean, Carver College of Medicine; Jeff Lieberman, Assistant Vice-President, UI Center for Advancement.

After its creation late in the Fall 2019 academic semester, the Committee met weekly to develop the SWOT analysis, and used this SWOT analysis to motivate and inform action items identified in the Strategic Planning document. Moreover, in order to garner broader input regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Graduate College strategic plan 2022-2027, the Committee Co-Chairs met with the following groups:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Unit | Date |
| Graduate Council | Thursday, October 24, 2019 |
| Associate Deans for Graduate Education | Monday, October 28, 2019 |
| Executive Committee of Graduate Student Senate | Monday, October 28, 2019 |
| Graduate College Deans and Directors | Wednesday, October 30, 2019 |
| Graduate College Unit Directors | Tuesday, November 5, 2019 |
| Directors of Graduate Studies | Wednesday, November 6, 2019 |
| GSS General Assembly SWOT analysis facilitated by Christian Bako and Caroline Cheung | Tuesday, December 3, 2019 |

An additional opportunity to provide input was gathered via a Qualtrics survey to the above groups as well as all Directors of Graduate Studies, Graduate Coordinators and Gilmore Hall staff. After drafting, early versions of these documents were presented, discussed, and revised accordingly after fruitful meetings with the Graduate College Deans and Directors.

Overall, the Committee found the leadership team and supporting staff in the Graduate College to be leading laudable efforts centered on student success, while also providing valuable support for the research enterprise at the University of Iowa. Several opportunities were identified to improve upon the operations and services provided by the Graduate College, including further strengthening its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusions initiatives and better marketing the value and products of the Graduate College to the University of Iowa community and Graduate College alumni. Notable among the threats were several issues that cut across and touched upon all four focus areas of the strategic planning process. The Committee was unanimous in the need for more financial and personnel resources to be committed to the Graduate College if it is to continue to be a national leader in addressing emerging challenges and threats from the evolving landscape of graduate education.

We thank you for the opportunity to Co-Chair this committee on behalf of the Graduate College, and for all of your support and partnership through the strategic planning process. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



David Cwiertny (Co-Chair)

Professor, College of Engineering

Ann Ricketts (Co-Chair)

Senior Assistant Vice President for Research

**Strengths**

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* The Graduate College has in recent years prioritized (in allocation of resources, mentoring from staff, and training activities) student success. The positive impact of this prioritization is evident through recent improvements in time to degree numbers and associated metrics for tracking student progress and success in graduate programs across UI. The Graduate College has a clear and measurable record of success here in recent years under the leadership of Dean Keller.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* The Graduate College has been at the forefront in addressing emerging challenges and threats from the evolving landscape of graduate education. They have championed student professional development and training for diverse career paths (indeed, this was recognized by UI’s selection to participate in a prestigious AAU PhD Initiative), and alternative models for the thesis to acknowledge scholarship from arts and humanities. A particular strength is the Office of Graduate Success’ work in the College; their high level of engagement with graduate students across campus and the services they provide are strong evidence that the focus on providing professional development for diverse career pathways has been well received by graduate students at UI.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* The Graduate College has intentionally and strategically allocated resources to benefit graduate students at times in their training that is most critical for development and retention. Examples include the Ballard-Seashore dissertation year, the post-comp research fellowship, and summer research fellowships that allow students paid positions to focus on their thesis development and scholarship.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Given their “student-centric” approach, there is a strong reputation for the Graduate College among graduate students, especially those that take advantage of its services. For example, students that use the College and their services are likely to recommend the College and its programs to other students seeking support.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* The Graduate College and its staff plays an important role of administering standards, norms, best practices and policy for graduate education across UI. The College aspires to provide equitable service to all units and departments.

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: The graduate students at UI, through support of the Graduate College, are nationally recognized (through awards) for excellence in graduate research and associated products at UI (e.g., thesis awards, with a profile of winners that matches top tier institutions like Yale)

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* The Graduate College plays a key role in the success of training grants by providing cost-sharing, especially for training opportunities for URMs. This increases the number of students able to participate in these innovative programs, which benefits both student development and the research mission of UI.

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: There is good support for helping graduate students seek extramural research funding. This is seen in the steady increase in number of applicants for prestigious external fellowships like the NSF GRFP. The incentive program provided by the Graduate College has catalyzed interest in these programs, and resulted in more awards to UI in recent years.

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* At a time when the future of interdisciplinary training at UI is unclear with the new budget model, the Graduate College has been a good incubator for interdisciplinary programs. The Graduate College has supported innovative programs like Humanities for the Public Good. Their Innovation in Graduate Education Challenge Grant program provided funding to create several new interdisciplinary, cross-college efforts. And the Graduate Certificate programs administered by the College allow for student training in new and emerging areas of research and discovery.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Several programs that are nationally/globally recognized are housed in and report to the Graduate College. The Graduate College has been a good, supportive home to these academic units and centers, and these academic centers and units play an important role in the College’s mission as it relates to research, discovery, and engagement.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Most recently because of the dean’s role as interim VP for Research, the Graduate College has long maintained a strong and close relationship with OVPR. Students in the Graduate College are central to the research mission of UI.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are identified priority areas for the Graduate College, which has motivated recent staff additions focused on DEI issues in the College.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* As part of their strategic use of resources in recent years, the Graduate College has several dedicated fellowship programs aimed at broadening participation in graduate education at UI (Lulu Merle, recruitment fellowships, etc.). These are programs that emphasize mentorship and training for diverse career paths, with the intent of providing under-represented students opportunities for success at UI.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* The Graduate College operates the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and ACT Scholars program. These have been successful programs in attracting promising URM students to UI for summer research experiences and promoting pipeline building for recruiting of URM students.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* The graduate student population at UI is very engaged on issues related to DEI. There are also many graduate faculty that are invested in DEI and want to work on improving campus climate.

*ENGAGEMENT:* The growth and success of the 3 minute thesis program is an outstanding outlet for communicating graduate research and scholarship to a broader group of stakeholders, both across and beyond the UI campus.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Engaged research and scholarship is a strengths of many of the academic units housed inside the Graduate College. For example, Urban and Regional Planning’s Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities has had impact across the state.

*ENGAGEMENT:* The Graduate College website design and available content is effective in engaging the UI community and a broader, outside audience (e.g., prospective students, etc.).

**Weaknesses**

*CROSS CUTTING:* Graduate research and training is not a priority at UI. Most efforts, funding and initiatives have gone preferentially to undergraduate programs and to improve the undergraduate student experience. There needs to be a shift in UI leadership to better value and acknowledge the value of graduate education at UI.

*CROSS CUTTING:* Some graduate programs are struggling, without critical mass (staff, faculty, students) to be effective in training and research missions in the current climate. What is the right size of a program, and what resources are needed to enable success?

*CROSS CUTTING:* Currently limited marketing and communication related to the strengths of Graduate College, particularly as it relates to student success (could help recruiting and advancement). There is a general feeling among key stakeholders that the role and value of the graduate college is not understood or appreciated on campus. Engagement is needed at all levels, from UI leadership, to individual colleges, as well as beyond campus in the local community, state and nationwide. Improving in this area will require dedicated resources.

*CROSS CUTTING:* Graduate application and admissions platform. It is far behind our peers, and suffering from years of no investment and insufficient personnel.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Diversity of programs within the Graduate College. All may not need/value some aspects of Graduate College Activities (particularly those with professional degrees where job placements are well-defined after degree completion)

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* There are opportunities to better leverage available data on student progress/success, and use that data to guide targeted interventions for students most in need. There are data that could be analyzed to indicate and guide when Graduate College personnel could make meaningful interactions that help promote student retention and success.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Dissertation requirements are sometimes inflexible and not conducive to diverse career pathways.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Key metrics all filtered through academic goals, rather than accounting for diverse career pathways.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Lack of authority to monitor faculty-student mentoring relationships.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Underutilization of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) in programs across UI.

*STUDENT SUCCESS + DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Inadequate funding for graduate student recruitment, especially funding to attract URMs.

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Graduate students sometimes treated as “efficient research labor” rather than being mentored toward independent research status. This is often driven by disagreement in the motivations and incentive structure for faculty and what is in the best interest of the graduate student trainee (e.g., professional development and job placement)

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: The Postdoctoral Office is an unfunded mandate.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Recruiting and retention efforts. There is no “macro level” approach to DEI in the Graduate College. “Do a lot with such a tiny team”. Lots of inefficiencies. Resources (including more staff needed), as current group is over-extended.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:*  Focus has been on recruitment rather than retention of URMs. Need to improve climate to enhance retention. And we have a retention problem linked to climate, where many URMs and other students report feeling unsafe and vulnerable. Retention, which requires changing campus climate, is as important (if not more so) than recruiting.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Some faculty have been dismissive of concerns (e.g. refusal to respect pronoun preferences or acknowledge UI has a problem with DEI).

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Treated as peripheral concern rather than integrated into the fabric of the university; the inability to retain a central diversity officer conveys a lack of priority on DEI on campus.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* The UI has announced a paradigm shift to DEI, but has not yet achieved diversity, let alone equity and inclusion.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Tokenism through marketing of students, faculty, etc.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Equity is an issue, particularly as it can relate to the power dynamic between student/post-doc and faulty.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Concerns have been expressed about how Graduate College handles discipline specific definitions of diversity (e.g., men in nursing, as one example)

*ENGAGEMENT:* Unclear how Graduate College is currently facilitating inclusion of graduate students in engagement opportunities across campus (where some departments are more of a natural fit for this than others). Unclear if Graduate College is currently doing enough to encourage student engagement.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Limited opportunities for support of graduate student opportunities (dedicated research funding, internships, etc.) through Center for Advancement.

**Opportunities**

*CROSS CUTTING:* Graduate College should be the home for all interdisciplinary efforts in training at UI. Many view it as the obvious choice as an incubator for such innovative training programs. UI and Graduate College Administration should embrace the fact that it is ***the*** place to incubate and support innovative, interdisciplinary programs. As evidence of past success, the academic units and centers that report to the Graduate College are standouts.

*CROSS CUTTING:* Graduate College needs to continue leading the way on integrating new priorities for student training (e.g., professional development, etc.) into graduate education. This new paradigm needs to view such activities not as an “add on” but as critical needs that are truly integrated and valued (without need for incentives) into degree programs and processes. This is part of building a new culture in graduate education that is truly student-centered, putting the best interests of the student above all else.

*CROSS CUTTING:* More advocacy for the value of the Graduate College (at UI) and the need for graduate education (in the State and beyond). Must be able to answer and communicate effectively: “What is the need of the Graduate College”. Currently the GC is not properly staffed or resourced to do this, however.

*CROSS CUTTING:* The Graduate College can lead in the development of training grants at UI. Long a supporter of training grant efforts, there is a need to increase the number of training grants at UI, as we are falling behind in this area relative to our peer institutions. The Graduate College should provide support for these efforts, which should leverage current successes in the Graduate College focused on innovative approaches for graduate student training and professional development.

*CROSS CUTTING:* Space is a limitation for the Graduate College, and an area for future improvement that will catalyze growth. Currently, the Graduate College is missing opportunities to create a community for students and host/facilitate events because it lacks a dedicated space akin to the buildings devoted to the undergraduate mission at UI (e.g., the Blank Honors Center).

*CROSS CUTTING*: Develop capacity for private fundraising, specifically funding dedicated to graduate students (e.g., a graduate student “success fund”) and that leverages support from alumni of our graduate programs. Using available data, there are ways to specifically engage alumni of the Graduate College with more targeted advertising/solicitations, particularly seeking support for graduate education efforts at UI. Here, these efforts should include a message on the clear strengths in graduate student success initiatives already in place in the Graduate College.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Leverage ongoing, innovative efforts in Graduate Education at UI (NSF NRT in Engineering, Mellon Foundation Humanities for the Public Good, AAU PhD Initiative) to broaden activities and outcomes across campus. Similarly, a Masters of Public Affairs degree has recently been approved. Themes surrounding engagement, public affairs and sustainability should be emphasized and celebrated.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Improving mentoring across campus. Use of IDPs more broadly across campus (and in ways that can catalyze student-student networking and new research collaborations). Professional development of faculty for mentor training.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Increase recruitment of UI undergraduates to graduate programs.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* Find ways to partner and support with individual colleges – message should be that we can do more and better together.

*STUDENT SUCCESS + DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* The Graduate College should strive to be at the forefront of student wellness and mental health in graduate education. This should be a priority for the GC going forward.

*STUDENT SUCCESS + DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Better utilize undergraduate research programs as a pipeline to recruit graduate students; increase SROP enrollments. SROP can be strengthened by increasing mentorship, making better use of data from the program (in terms of where students end up for graduate school and why), better leveraging cultural centers.

*STUDENT SUCCESS AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Maintain and increase advising and support for students seeking extramural funding. The incentive program has been a success and has driven more interest/applications for external funding. These are efforts that should be sustained.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: Assist/Centralize efforts across UI to recruit and retain outstanding domestic applicants (funding for recruiting, etc.). This includes finding ways to make offers more competitive with our peer institutions, both in terms of annual funding and extent of commitment for guaranteed funding.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: Create a “culture of research”. Better showcase what research our graduate students are doing (in partnership with OVPR banners, continue and grow 3MT, etc.). Better marketing and communication about graduate students and their research at UI (move beyond only recognizing those that are nominated, as nomination process has inherent biases). Need to make Graduate College a hub/connector to generate new research ideas/partnerships and opportunities across campus.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: Increase opportunities to link research at UI to training for diverse career opportunities. This includes research partnerships through internships, community engaged projects, etc. (with flexible appointment structures that encourage these types of training). Find ways to include products of these experiences in the thesis, which may require continued shifts in thinking about the format/content of a modern MS or PhD thesis.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Increase graduate research and training efforts with international programs. Joint degrees and research projects through MOUs facilitated by International Programs office to expand international research/degree partnerships. One tangible example: Some international programs require international experience with overseas partners as part of their training…identify more of these partnerships where UI can bring international talent to campus.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY + DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION*: Allocate (more) resources for student travel/participation in professional conferences, work with collaborators, etc. (more because there are some funds available for international travel – perhaps focus domestically). Through engaging with professional societies, this may also be a way to support URM students in helping provide networking opportunities not available at UI (e.g., support to attend annual meetings for professional societies for URM groups).

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Opportunity for Graduate College to provide students from under-represented groups a community and network, where they can go to be successful. Build a culture of support. In all aspects: recruitment, retention, mentoring (e.g., develop retention centers to catch students at vulnerable points and provide targeted assistance)

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Many faculty want to be engaged on DEI, but don’t have the tools and/or time for training. There are also resource limitations for training. As a result, many faculty/staff/research supervisors are not prepared to have difficult conversations with students or be effective allies.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Campus-wide unconscious bias training, not just for faculty and staff, but also students. Similarly, ethics training (beyond simply RCR).

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* More resources for DEI, beyond just training. This includes looking at funding models for the Graduate Student Organizations, which aren’t supported at UI to the same degree as undergraduate organizations.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Activities in the Graduate College will need to dovetail with broader university wide efforts, including aligning DEI goals of graduate college with the UI DEI action plan, particularly the four goals.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Develop a graduate student success fund specifically to support graduate students (and through targeting donations from graduate program alumni).

*ENGAGEMENT*: More discussion from central administration about the value and importance of graduate education/research to the UI mission.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Leverage Center for Advancement and their “touch points” data to establish a baseline for how engaged alums are with the graduate college/graduate college alumni.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Engage alumni who have gone on to great success. Bring them back to campus to engage with our current students. An easy opportunity is to invite them to be speaker at Winter/Spring Graduate College graduate ceremonies.

*ENGAGEMENT:* Better integrate engagement into graduate training efforts by partnering more/leveraging success of Obermann Center and its activities.

**Threats**

*CROSS CUTTING:* Declining funding/resource allocation will limit all opportunities going forward for Graduate College. One example is academic affairs, where we are failing far behind our peers without a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan or Customer Relations Management Plan. There is no way to proactively dialogue with prospective students. Graduate College can play a central role (opportunity). Need a director of graduate enrollment. Need better admission portal. But we are limited by lack of investment and personnel.

*CROSS CUTTING:* The challenge of declining resources is compounded by limitations in personnel. The College is relatively small, while the expectations and roles continue to increase as efforts across campus become more and more decentralized to the Colleges (e.g.., DEI, engagement, etc.). Currently, the budget model makes it difficult to compensate the existing personnel adequately (e.g., the budget model does not allow for cost of living and fringe increases)

*CROSS CUTTING:* Budget model disincentivizes interdisciplinarity and collaboration, although society’s grand challenges (e.g., climate change) will require interdisciplinary training/solutions and major funding initiatives at federal level (e.g., NSF convergence) require such partnerships. The budget model reinforces collegiate power at the expense of central and interdisciplinary activities. For example, CLAS is now asking Graduate College to buy out the time of their faculty engaged in interdisciplinary programs. The budget model also makes long term financial planning for units within the Graduate College challenging, as forecasting budgets for future years difficult in the new model.

*CROSS CUTTING:* The value of the Graduate College is not well known across campus. It is often viewed too narrowly as the enforcer of theses and dissertation formats. As such, individual colleges want access to Graduate College resources that they don’t think are justified. The individual colleges believe they can better utilize the resources than Graduate College can. Going forward, the Graduate College must be able to answer the question “Why should Graduate College get that money/resources rather than us?”

*CROSS CUTTING:* National trends in funding for graduate education pose a threat. The Graduate College needs to identify ways in which graduate students can be fully funded (for duration of their time) without relying so heavily on TAs (which impacts their ability to do scholarship).

*CROSS CUTTING:* Generally, differences in GOGs/TA rates/RA rates and appointment structures leads to unequal compensation for students across campus, which builds inequity, strains student wellbeing, and hinders student success. For example, there are occasions of unequal compensation across graduate students, sometimes in the same laboratory. How many years of funding is guaranteed (e.g., UIUC is now guaranteeing 5 years of funding for graduate students in Engineering). Often students are working far more than the terms of their appointment letters to achieve their degree objective (e.g., 20 h a week for 0.5 RA, when the reality of what it takes to produce a thesis in some programs requires work far beyond that workload).

*STUDENT SUCCESS*: The central administration is evaluating success and progress for the Graduate College using the wrong metrics, with too much focus on number of PhD students to satisfy AAU criteria. Student success and satisfaction, not simply enrollment numbers, should be the focus. Similarly, for programs that are struggling, there is a need to “right size” programs based on metrics that prioritize student success (graduation rate, time to degree, placement) rather than raw numbers or simply filling available TA slots.

*STUDENT SUCCESS*: Job market for graduates is tight, and there is uncertainty in the future US economy and how it will drive enrollment and interests in graduate education.

*STUDENT SUCCESS:* The power/influence of the Graduate College in the mentor/mentee relationship is not clear; does the graduate college have clear authority to intervene in that relationship?

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY:* Research and discovery is too narrow. There are other scholarly and creative products that should be recognized, and require expanding beyond historical outcomes/products of research and discovery (papers, patents, etc.).

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: How do the faculty perceive the role of GC in Research and Discovery? Most view GC as simply about dissertations/theses.

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: Many of the programs housed in the Graduate College are due to have retirements in the near future, which will require a change in leadership. With budget uncertainty, are there clear succession plans to maintain success and recognition of these programs?

*RESEARCH & DISCOVERY*: For programs within the graduate college, there has been unclear messaging from UI leadership on the long-term home for these units (remain in graduate college or be relocated to another college). Long-term stability/certainty is needed (a planning horizon from week to week, semester to semester is detrimental to sustained success).

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION:* Lack of centralized leadership for DEI on campus. This is compounded by current climate on campus is not healthy and supportive of DEI (see Chronicle piece, etc.). The lack of leadership threatens to demoralize faculty, staff and students that are invested in improving DEI at UI.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION*: Redundancy resulting from decentralization. There is little value (or economic sense) to having 20 different DEI plans across different units/organizations at UI.

*DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION*: Has to be more than an add on to obligations of other administrators (engagement AND diversity, equity, inclusion). Needs to be given priority and viewed as of equal importance to other missions at UI (undergraduate education, research, etc.).