Academic Planning Summit
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Session 8: How can we better encourage and promote innovation and enterprise that responds to some of the major world challenges?

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Group's Consensus/Recommendations

Forming a URI Research Corporation.

What would this look like? It was suggested that a Research Corporation could be either in the form of an actual park on campus where buildings are either built or set aside for the sole purpose of promoting and doing research. This could also be structured as an umbrella concept. Encompassed would be all the research conducted on campus but overseen by the foundation in order to ease restrictions inherent with state operations.

What businesses? Who is involved? The idea of bringing businesses to campus was brought up in connection with both the research park and the idea of cooperative education. Local businesses could work as a collaboration to bring their work onto campus. This would give local businesses a leg-up in technology, and potentially bring in revenue to URI. This could also allow our students to have hands on experience in the "real world" by working on projects being completed on campus.

What input/impact do faculty have regarding who is involved at the proposed research park? Faculty are very interested in learning what businesses would be involved with this research park. Currently, talk is underway for a research park but the faculty has had little input or been informed about what businesses are being considered. This appears to be a poor use of URI resources, and faculty feel that they should be included in these discussions and decisions.

Bringing people from the corporate sector to campus to form partnerships: precedent set with parks/forestry here on campus. More of this should occur in order to give students a more rounded experience and take them beyond the classroom experience. Also, the services that a professional could provide would be beneficial to the campus.

Broad based: it was suggested that this be broad based in order to bring in people from all over campus. People should feel welcomed in this area, and it should look to utilize the aspects of each unique major

Ground up: Faculty should drive the research being conducted and be free from restrictions that usually inhibit progress.

Engaging the staff: Some of the staff are energized to do research but only a third seemingly do so. More research must be conducted to get to that middle third that are on the fence.

Incentives for research: The staff should have incentives to conduct research, and this is a great way in order to get the ball rolling.

Including all areas of academe: It was reiterated that all areas should be included in the research park.

The research park should help faculty in the following areas by breaking down and removing barriers:

Hiring: new employees are needed to fill spots immediately. Often candidates are lost because the hiring process takes too long, or the spot cannot be filled right away and the funding is lost.

Firing: People that do not really do work or research. People not willing to come to the table and accept things are going in a new direction should be able to be fired instead of protected.

Grant opportunities: Should be seized right away without waiting for tedious and long paperwork processes. Currently opportunities are lost because of the limited windows offered through certain grants. This prevents faculty from being proactive in research.

Purchasing: faculty should be trusted to purchase necessary equipment in order to expedite the process, as well as free from state purchasing chains.

Research/partnership portals: for research issues of the day, think tanks that draw upon all areas of campus together to work on these topics

This could also be a place to figure out who is doing research on campus in order to better work together with departments and faculty. People generally want to work together and form better working relationships, as well as be able to draw upon strengths and perspectives outside of their realm of experience when doing research.

Global dimension: locations abroad/foreign students. We need to do a better job of expanding URI's outreach, as well as our connections with foreign Universities.

Cooperative education: URI should consider moving towards a cooperative learning environment with industry. This would better serve the students by giving them hands on experience in the private sector. The initiative should be campus wide, and include off campus businesses.

Reasons why this would be positive for URI:

1. Institute for Undergraduate Research: through cooperative learning, URI students would benefit from doing research in class with professors. This is a win-win scenario for both the students and professors that get the extra help.

2. Build open communication channels both on campus and with off campus groups: This helps students when they transition into the work force.

3. Facilitate more interaction with industry to educate students (faculty too): Again, this allows for students to have hands on experience, and for faculty to stay current with the most up to date technologies being used by businesses.

Reduce grant funded graduate student tuition: Grant funded graduate tuition costs more than all regional (and national) universities, which reflects a lack of investment in URI's graduate research students.

URI needs to decrease the current Out-of-State tuition costs to In-State tuition levels, and offer more financial packages to grant funded graduate researchers. Any "lost" tuition would be compensated by URI being more competitive for research funding, leading to an upward spiral in overall research productivity.

Vision of grant based research enterprise: URI needs to specify in the existing vision/mission statement to include research and take strides in bringing URI up to speed with other research universities.

Notable Issues, Questions, Challenges:
Hiring and firing of candidates.
Lack of support and funding for graduate researchers – URI is extremely uncompetitive.
Increase communication between departments with regard to major research activities on campus (research park)