IMPLEMENTING FOUR ACADEMIC PLATFORMS

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Thirty or forty years from now multiple generations of students will have studied at ASU and graduated, and another generation of faculty and staff will have replaced those of us here today. Most likely none of us in this room will still be a part of the university working here. Our conversations and meetings will have been forgotten as entirely new sets of priorities preoccupy the people who will one day assume our roles. So what I thought I would do today is talk about some of the challenges that confront us as we plan for the university of tomorrow, discuss some of the changes presently underway, and provide an overview of our reasoning for those changes.

ASU is evolving as an institution of higher education at the same time that the greater Phoenix metropolitan region matures and becomes a vast metroplex with a population of seven to ten million. It is my belief that ASU can best accommodate the needs of the region by facilitating the broadest possible distribution of its teaching, research, and community service. Because ASU is the only major research university in metropolitan Phoenix, it has a special responsibility for the cultural, social, and economic vitality of the region. Community colleges, private universities, for-profit universities, and other types of post-secondary schools are based on different models and offer significantly different learning environments.

With the burgeoning demand for higher education in the Phoenix metropolitan region, with the need for new buildings and infrastructure on the Tempe campus, and in keeping with the goal of creating a university that will serve the entire metropolitan region, we must ask: Would it be in the best interests of the people of Arizona or the university itself to concentrate 90,000 or 95,000 students on the Tempe campus? If ASU attempted to do so, would it be possible for ASU to build the political support, and garner the resources, and establish the linkages needed for ASU to become a thoroughly inclusive and socially embedded university? Could a single campus set off by itself and geographically isolated from the rest of the greater Phoenix community really be inclusive and socially embedded?

Many of you have grown up on or been a part of the Tempe campus. The facilities of the campus—most designed for a useful life of no more than fifty years—struggle to serve the 48,000 students enrolled on the campus today.
The useful life of these buildings and classrooms and laboratories and studios has been exceeded, and a large part of those facilities, while still currently usable, cannot be upgraded or repaired. Though the campus has served the university well over the years, I would ask that you project thirty or forty years into the future and imagine the conditions of the facilities.

The Tempe campus has constraints on physical expansion, and with those constraints, the university’s potential to move in new directions has been restricted. The limitations of the campus have constrained even thought and conceptualization. Plans to accommodate more students and additional faculty members, new research infrastructure, or expanded graduate programs have sometimes been curtailed merely because of limitations imposed by the physical campus itself. And I do not believe that a university should be restricted because of site limitations.

As set out in the “One University in Many Places” white paper, ASU has decided to address the challenges of burgeoning enrollment with a distributed model. ASU will build at least four great campuses with academically distinct schools and unique learning environments based upon the clustering of schools. ASU will nurture the colleges and schools, foster the academic excellence of each, and help each establish its own identity and trajectory towards national standing.

Above all there will be no main campus and no tiered branch campuses. We are a single and unified institution—one university in many places—and there will be only clusters of related schools on differentiated campuses of equally high aspiration. Our university will be spatially distributed across a wide swathe of metropolitan Phoenix, each school independent yet an integral part of the whole. Hopefully by now people are beginning to see that ASU is actually making headway with its plans, and that the plans have not just been empty rhetoric. For the Downtown Phoenix campus we now have an agreement with the City of Phoenix for it to acquire all of the acreage necessary to renovate three buildings on the downtown campus, build three additional buildings, and improve the streetscape and other infrastructure. It is crucial that the limitations imposed on the Tempe campus are eliminated and that we all work to create an environment for inclusiveness and success for the schools that are moving downtown.

ASU is committed to the renovation and revitalization of the historic urban core of downtown Phoenix. All of our planners, our designers, our faculty, our urbanists, and others suggest that it is essential to the health and well-being of the region to build a vibrant urban core at the center of this vast urban agglomeration.

Take the School of Public Affairs as an example. Management, regional governance, competitiveness, social justice, immigration—issues critical to running a region previously made up of a bunch of small desert farm towns now amalgamated into one of the nation’s largest metropolitan regions—will have to be addressed. As things stand now, we do not have an undergraduate program in public programs, we have only one master’s program, and a Ph.D. program. For the sake of the region we want to build a School of Public Affairs with an unparalleled breadth of academic opportunity, with undergraduate programs, multiple graduate programs, research centers, policy centers, and policy institutes integral to the region, a school that is inextricably intertwined with the city and metropolitan region, yet focused globally, on a trajectory towards becoming an internationally top-ranked school of public affairs. While the students and faculty of the future will not care if the school is located on the Tempe campus or the Downtown Phoenix campus, the location has great ramifications for the future of this region and the urban core of Phoenix.
There will be issues to resolve as we plan the downtown campus, including transportation, housing, and libraries. But ASU is going to advance the development of the Downtown Phoenix campus in two ways. First, ASU is going to cast off any preconceived notions of how to build an urban campus, and will focus on goals and outcomes rather than processes. Second, ASU will find partners and establish alliances and attract resources that match our vision and ideas. The Phoenix city council, for example, has unanimously supported the development of the campus. Why are they willing to invest in the development of a campus downtown? They believe, as I know we do, that education is essential to the advancement of the city and region. Phoenix is one of the five largest cities in the nation, and is lagging in educational indicators. Education is the principle mechanism for economic competitiveness and quality of life and quality of place, and that is why they are willing to make this investment.

There are many universities and colleges and schools that have achieved greatness by focusing on goals and outcomes instead of processes. The London School of Economics and Political Science, one of the schools of the University of London, is an example. The University of London has 34 colleges and schools and institutes apart from the London School of Economics—the London Business School, Goldsmiths College, Royal Holloway College, University College London, Imperial College London, King’s College London, the Royal Academy of Music. All of these schools and colleges and institutes are not neatly compacted together into one huge massive campus—rather they are spread out all over London.

With only 5,000 students, the London School of Economics receives much less from the government and much less tuition than ASU, but it maintains its autonomy by focusing on its primary strength: providing one of the best programs in economics to be had anywhere in the world. One of the most important things to consider and emulate in schools like the London School of Economics is that although they are removed from the original site of the university, they are by no means a branch campus. They are not a sequestered and isolated place like so many satellite locations at other universities.

At ASU we are concentrating on four academic platforms spread across metropolitan Phoenix. And ASU intends to build great colleges and schools on these campuses, each operating within their respective niches, competing with peer colleges and schools around the world, and meeting the highest possible levels of academic performance and success.

The Downtown Phoenix campus is by no means the only part of the university now advancing. ASU has developed and will be distributing an executive summary of the ASU Comprehensive Development Plan. In the Comprehensive Development Plan, ASU is outlining its physical identity for the future. All parts of the university will be moving forward at the same time, something that will require coordination and linkage.

With the development of the Downtown Phoenix campus, as well as the other campuses of the university, we need to constantly ask ourselves, what is the outcome that we seek? We seek higher success rates for all our students. We seek enhanced access to the university for all members of the community. We seek to set new standards in teaching and research and public service. We seek to provide leadership and guidance for the region. We seek to build a nationally competitive university with a global focus. And for the schools coming to the Downtown Phoenix campus, there is no reason why each cannot be among the best among its peer colleges and schools. The only thing that can hold us back is our lack of vision.