

MINUTES

Board/Committee	:	Governing Authority
Meeting	:	Meeting M23-11
Venue	:	Boardroom, LISB
Date	:	18 December 2023
Attendance	:	Grainne Barron; Ronan Cahill; Liam Carroll; Donal Donovan; Garret FitzGerald; Ann Marie Kennedy; Shane Kilcommins; Brigid Laffan (Chair) Edmond Magner; Aibhlín McCrann; Kerstin Mey; Anne O'Connor; June Pearson Arnold; Emily Rosenkranz; Mark Southern; Bob Strunz
Apologies	:	Roger Dsilva; Kevin Fleming
In Attendance	:	Grainne Frain; John Kelly; Siobhan Scanlon.

1. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 1.1 NOTED The Corporate Secretary requested members to declare if they had a conflict of interest arising in relation to any matters on the agenda. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] will leave the meeting for the agenda item relating to the Audit & Risk Committee Report.

2. WELCOME

- 2.1 NOTED The Chancellor welcomed Ms Siobhan Scanlon who is a new member of the Governance Team in the Corporate Secretary's Office, to the meeting.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 AGREED The minutes of Governing Authority M23-10 of 27 November 2023 as presented.

4. MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 NOTED No matters arising that are not on the meeting agenda.

5. GOVERNING AUTHORITY ACTION ITEMS

- 5.1 NOTED Document entitled "Sixth Governing Authority Action Items to December 2023 Meeting", dated December 2023, previously circulated. The Corporate Secretary briefed members with regard to a number of action items on which he will revert with timelines. In addition, the Corporate Secretary will update members on the proposed approach to the publication of the Governing Authority minutes.
- 5.2. NOTED As notified to members via email since the last meeting, the University has been successful in a case brought against Irish Water and costs have now been

awarded to the University. The accrual by PCC will be reversed in the event of no appeal. Members welcomed this outcome for both the University and the sector.

6. PRESIDENT'S UPDATE TO GOVERNING AUTHORITY

6.1 NOTED Document entitled "President's Update to Governing Authority – December 2023", previously circulated and a briefing by the President including:

- A number of welcome research funding successes since the previous meeting in November amounting to approximately €5m;
- 530 students received the President's Volunteer Awards underpinning UL's lead position with >30,000 hours delivered by award holders in 2022/23;
- Executive Committee engaged with all staff constituencies delivering four roadshows with strategic updates on the 2023/24 budget; UL's research performance; calibration of UL@50; Climate Action Mandate; academic transformation project; and the WAM;
- Research Excellence Update including European Commission Awards; ERC Consolidator Award; Horizon Europe; Technology Transfer Office funding success; DTIF Award; Co-Centre for Climate+, Biodiversity and Water; QS World University Rankings for Sustainability with a significant move for UL now ranked 77th in Europe and moving from 6th to 5th in national ranking from last year;
- Recent visit by the late Chuck Feeney's family to campus to see for themselves the immense impact of his generous contributions to the University;
- Obligation under Climate Act Roadmap with mandatory training for 338 managers by February 2024 and a Climate Action Summit planned for 02 April 2024.

6.2 UL/Mary Immaculate College Dialogue

6.2.1 NOTED Briefing by the President that the negotiation teams from UL and MIC have developed an outline model for closer structural alignment between the two institutions upon which they are both agreed. The suggested model is a 'hybrid' one whereby closer alignment is achieved between the two institutions but it does not involve a merger or incorporation. The Presidents of UL/MIC and the Facilitator Professor Tom Collins met with the Minister, DFHERIS and officials in mid-November 2023 to brief them on the current position. The Department pointed out that the current legislative platform for statutory institutional collaboration was either merger, as occurred with most of the technological universities, or incorporation. There is no obvious statutory framework by which the UL/MIC proposal might be underpinned. Furthermore, the Department expressed reluctance to embark on a process of creating the additional statutory provisions to enable UL/MIC to arrive at our preferred position. The legislative route would be a lengthy process. While not well disposed to the UL/MIC proposal, the Department did however, express a readiness to continue the conversation and a further meeting is planned for early in the New Year. Both institutions are committed to ongoing dialogue with a view to developing the model of structural alignment/collaboration that will contribute to the enhancement of higher education, to the region and the national development plan.

6.2.2 NOTED Discussion including the following:

- A statement on this update will be issued to staff in both institutions;
- Both UL and MIC will engage further with the DFHERIS to expand further on opportunities and explore the proposed model whilst continuing to build on the positive relationship in the shared education and research space which would cover the entire education cycle from pre-primary through to third level;
- While the HEA has been very supportive of the approach by UL and MIC there may be a reticence at [REDACTED] to consider the required [REDACTED]
- Advantages of a closer relationship including that the Mid-West would have the largest HE institution and teacher education provision outside of the Dublin area;
- The proposed collaborative hybrid model under consideration would not have unduly fettered the autonomy of MIC including current governance, trustee and staffing arrangements;
- The main challenge is whether the model is viable within the existing legislative and political context. If this cannot be progressed, alternative options and opportunities including revisions to the current Memorandum of Understanding with MIC should be explored within an appropriate agreed deadline.

7. STUDENT RELATED MATTERS

7.1 Student Life Report

7.1.1 NOTED Document entitled “Report of UL Student Life for the Governing Authority as of 11/12/2023”.

7.1.2 NOTED The President and Deputy President, Student Life highlighted a range of items in the Report including: Commuter Hub; New Student Centre and Looking Ahead; Key Initiatives, Strategies and Opportunities; Student Supports; and Events; and financial concerns with a huge increase in students seeking financial aid.

7.1.3 NOTED The Chancellor and PDP congratulated the Student Life Officers on their Commuter Hub initiative as an exemplar of collaboration between Student Life and the University to support of students.

7.2 Postgraduate Students’ Union Report

7.2.1 NOTED Document entitled “Report from UL Postgraduate Students’ Union to Governing Authority”, dated December 18, 2023. The Report set out: PSU Highlights – Subsidised Meal Vouchers; Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement passed in PSU Council; Events; Sessions by Industry Experts; and Postgrad Month.

7.2.2 NOTED In reference to the motion passed by PSU Council, the importance of respect and sensitivity to all members of the University community was emphasised by the Chancellor.

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7.2.3 NOTED The President informed members she issued a statement to all students and staff emphasising the supports available to all in what are increasingly difficult times worldwide and that she would continue this stance into the future. This was welcomed by the Chancellor and members of the Governing Authority.

8. AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

8.1 NOTED Document entitled “Audit & Risk Committee Report to Governing Authority”, dated December 2023, previously circulated. Dr Strunz left the meeting for this item.

8.2 NOTED Ms Anne O’Connor, on behalf of the Chair, briefed the Governing Authority the matters addressed in the Report as follows:

- Policy Review – IT Security & Acceptable Usage Policies;
- HEA Draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2023;
- Student Record System Update;
- PCC Pension Review;
- Irish Water Case Update;
- Internal Audit Update;
- Internal Audit Review Buildings and Estates – letter to President by Chair, ARC;
- Internal Audit Charter – recommendation to Governing Authority;
- Additional resource for Internal Audit;
- KPMG Report Update;
- Risk Management Report;
- Audit & Risk Annual Report to Governing Authority.

8.3 Student Record System Update

8.3.1 NOTED Detailed briefing by the PDP with regard to a Masters’ Thesis C3 grade review, the background, approach and verification of regulations, grades and awards. The overall findings of the review included the following:

- Grade details in document submitted to PDP match records on student records system, confirms between 2010/11 and 2011/12 that 9 students were awarded ‘D’ grades in their thesis modules and graduated in contravention of the academic regulations.
- Thesis grades in accordance with general grading rules. No record of any discussion or decision by Academic Council Grading Committee or Exam Board to advise module leader/ student of minimum C3 thesis grading requirement.
- A review of all grades awarded in these modules between 2009/10 to-date did not identify any additional student who graduated with a thesis grade below C3.
- No student was identified as having graduated between 2014/15 to date 2022/23 in contravention of C3 minimum thesis grade regulation on Masters’ programmes.

8.3.2 NOTED Detailed discussion including the following:

- Memo regarding this issue considered by the Executive Committee, Academic Council and the Audit & Risk Committee;
- Safeguards in place were set out and increased automation going forward will further reduce risk;

- The importance of moving forward with new GPA model and engaging with the new automated system was emphasised;
- PDP briefed meeting that legal advice given is that the awards should stand;
- While concern was expressed at the delay in dealing with this issue when it was initially raised, members welcomed the transparency and assurances from the PDP that he will advise through the appropriate channels if any such issue arises again and deal with same in an appropriately rigorous and expeditious manner;
- A cultural shift, the distribution of power and accountability to deal with any issues at an early stage will take time and require effort across UL;
- Whilst not minimising the complexity of legacy issues, the Governing Authority acknowledged the importance of its oversight role in such matters and the importance of being kept fully informed on issues of key strategic importance during its terms of office.

8.3.3 NOTED Assurances are now in place and provided to the Audit & Risk Committee that (i) there are no further cases in relation to the Masters issue, (ii) the approach is justified having regard to academic regulations, and (iii) that the issue is now resolved.

8.4 AGREED To approve the Internal Audit Charter attached as Appendix 3 to the Report.

9. FEE RATES 2024/25

9.1 NOTED Memorandum from the DMPR entitled “Proposed Fee Rates 2024-25” dated 18 December 2023. The DMPR briefed members on the following:

- The University has the autonomy to set the student fee rates for all programmes pertaining to postgraduate, part-time, and international students. For full-time EU undergraduate students, the HEA / DFHERIS set the rates;
- Approximately 44% of student fee income is earned using UL’s own fee rates;
- Range of factors evaluated setting fee rates: cost of delivery; sectoral fee levels; international fee rates; who funds programmes; student demand/market factors;
- Fee rates reviewed annually to reflect cost inflation and any other factors that may impact the rate. This process was set out and the DMPR proposed a minimum fee rate increase for 2024-25 of 7%. In accordance with the student referendum, the student centre levy is increasing by €2 to €100. This is the only increase for EU undergraduate programmes. Following feedback from UL Global and the Deans, there are 26 non-EU courses where the tuition fee decreased;
- Table of 2024/25 EU /Non-EU fee rate movements by programme was noted;
- Appendix of Fee Rate Schedule for 2024-25 recommended for approval.

9.2 NOTED The President, Student Life raised the matter of decreasing the student levy given increases in cost of living and the pressure on students. Discussion on lagging fee rates against inflation trends, increasing pay costs, cost of living and the necessity of the increase in the student levy to service the significant debt arising from the new Student Centre.

9.3 AGREED Going forward the DMPR will provide more detail regarding trends, comparison with a selection of other universities and any plans to adjust financial aid for non-EU and postgraduate students.

9.4 AGREED To approve the 2024/25 fee rates as presented in Appendix 1 to the memo.

10. ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS RHEBOGUE

10.1 NOTED Memorandum from DMPR, FC, PCC and CCO entitled “Stamp Duty – Purchase Rhebogoue Student Accommodation”, dated 7 December 2023, previously circulated.

10.2 NOTED Briefing by the DMPR on the following:

- UL entered a contract on 12 August 2022, amended on 2 August 2023, for the purchase of 20 houses at Rhebogoue with 80 student bedspaces, at a cost of €11,439,280.
- UL subsequently assigned the contract to Plassey Trust Company (PTC), a wholly owned subsidiary of UL and a registered charitable body. The contract was completed on 10 October 2023. PTC filed a Stamp Duty Return, claiming full relief from Stamp Duty under Section 82 Stamp Duties Consolidation Act (SDCA) 1999.
- After filing of the stamp duty return, PwC contacted UL to advise that stamp duty may be applicable under Section 31E SDCA 1999 – Stamp Duty on certain acquisitions of residential properties. The relevant provision provides for a higher 10% rate of stamp duty to be charged on the acquisition of certain residential property. This higher rate of duty applies to the acquisition of individual residential units such as houses and duplexes, but not to apartments, where a person acquires at least 10 such units during any 12-month period.
- Section 82 of the SDCA provides for an exemption for conveyances, transfers or leases of land made for charitable purposes to a charitable body. However, Section 31E(19) disapplies this exemption in the case of acquisitions of 10 or more relevant residential units. Rhebogoue consists of 20 houses and this anti-avoidance measure (designed to limit mass house purchase for commercial gain), would appear to cover this transaction.
- PwC advised UL should engage with Revenue to inform them of the concerns that the transaction may be technically caught by this provision. A meeting was held on 24 November 2023 with Revenue and a follow up meeting is scheduled.
- It is recommended that engagement continue with the Revenue and PwC to determine if a liability to the higher rate of stamp duty exists.

10.3 NOTED Detailed discussion including the following:

- Governing Authority approved the purchase for €10.9m in August 2022. However, the contract for sale was signed for €11,439,280.
- No amended contract was presented to the Finance, Human Resources & Asset

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Management Committee or to the Governing Authority;

- Several members expressed serious concern at the adequacy of due diligence, despite assurances to the contrary and the implementation of a revised Policy for the Acquisition of New Property, Buildings, Land or Infrastructure;
- Concern was expressed at the apparent high price per house which appeared to exceed housing market value. The situation is now compounded because of the potential stamp duty liability;
- In the context of negotiations with Revenue, the DPMR advised members that UL has a Risk Appetite Statement which sets out a zero tolerance for any breaches with regard to tax compliance. However, the professional advice is that the figure should not be paid while negotiations were ongoing;
- If the liability to stamp applies, the additional cost of the transaction will be €1.14m, and UL's returns would require an amendment with the liability for interest and any potential penalty;
- Following initial discussions with Revenue on a number of possible grounds for exemption, it seems that only one such possibility may apply in the circumstances. Engagement will continue with Revenue who have been provided all relevant documentation relating to the contract;
- The exemption from stamp duty for charities was considered to be applicable when UL entered the contract initially but there have been legislative changes as set out by S31E(19). The DMPR was not aware of what PwC advice was taken on potential liabilities at the time of the initial contract in August 2022;
- In the event, all avenues are exhausted and there is liability for the stamp duty it must be paid immediately. However, every effort will be made to make a case regarding any possible penalties;
- A number of members of the Governing Authority expressed concern and dissatisfaction and requested a clear explanation from the University executive as to how this had happened;
- The importance of the Governing Authority being provided with all the facts, clarity on costs, legal, planning, inclusion of rent in payment to developer, reasons behind amended contract, checks and controls in place were noted;
- Members asked that it be established if the Governing Authority was in a position to make a fully informed decision when approval was given in August 2022;
- It was also noted that the C&AG will be reviewing all property transactions, including Rhebogue and will need to be informed of this matter;
- The President undertook to address the foregoing matters with the Executive Committee at its next meeting on 10 January 2024 and the outcomes will be shared with the Governing Authority at the next meeting on 30 January 2024.

10.4 AGREED The Audit and Risk Committee be requested to consider the matter thoroughly and from the outset, to include the original submission to FHRAMC and the Governing Authority, the ensuing contract entered into following that approval, the subsequently amended contract, advice sought from PwC and clarity on all costs. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee to be advised of the discussions.

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11. COMMITTEES OF GOVERNING AUTHORITY

- 11.1 NOTED Document from the Corporate Secretary entitled “Committees of Governing Authority”, dated 18 December 2023, previously circulated.
- 11.2 NOTED Briefing by the Corporate Secretary that as agreed at the last meeting of the Governing Authority work would commence on drafting terms of reference based on the revised committee structure. A first draft of the Audit & Risk Committee terms of reference was circulated for the information of members and work on drafting the terms of reference for the other committees is in progress.
- 11.3 NOTED The Nominating Committee and the Chairs and Members of the Committees, once constituted, will need to review draft terms of reference prior to their submission to the Governing Authority for formal approval at the next meeting in January 2024.
- 11.4 NOTED Discussion including the circulation of previous terms of reference and the inclusion of elements of the Fundamental Risk Register within the Audit & Risk Committee terms of reference where relevant.

12. STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE (SGC)

- 12.1 NOTED Memorandum from the Strategic Governance Committee entitled “Strategic Governance Committee – Report of Meetings & Memos no’s 1-8”, dated 18 December, previously circulated.
- 12.2 NOTED Briefing by the PDP including:
- Context regarding establishment of SGC under the leadership of PDP approved by the Executive Committee and Governing Authority to deal with outstanding material issues as per its ToR and keep the University community informed of progress;
 - Terms of Reference, membership, minutes of meetings to early August 2023, three memos and two reports to the previous Governing Authority for information;
 - A third report with minutes of meetings since August 2023 and five memos to Executive Committee in September and November 2023 were noted. These memos relate to: (1) SGC Workplan including plans to manage work, make recommendations and an associated timeframe; (2) Appointment of a Valuer including challenges getting valuations for pre and post April 2019 and taking into account the impact of the restrictive covenant. Valuations will be made known to members by the end of January 2024 but as commercially sensitive from the valuer’s perspective, may be made available in a controlled manner, similar to the KPMG Report; (3) Terms of Reference Review with an extension approved to end of January 2024 to the SGC to complete its work; (4) Communications and Culture with measures recommended around both external and internal communication for UL’s credibility, trust building and long-term success. Implementing proposed actions will facilitate transparent, effective and trust building communication across all stakeholder groups; (5) Misconduct in the Workplace and the need for a communication and training campaign clearly signposting the supports and protections available to staff should they encounter

misconduct in the workplace. This campaign should be supported by roadshows, mandatory on-line training for Dignity and Respect policies and pulse surveys;

- SGC will make recommendations to the Executive Committee and the Governing Authority in January 2024 in relation to any outstanding material issues as per ToR and measures it considers would be beneficial to further strengthen the existing governance architecture and/or grow trust and confidence in the institution.

12.3 NOTED Discussion including the following:

- A matter for the Governing Authority to accept the SGC recommendations and assign owners once its final consolidated report and recommendations are to hand;
- There will be discussions at the Governing Authority Away Day in February 2024 with regard to actions arising from SGC recommendations in addition to the development of the new strategic plan;
- Suggested that dignity and respect training be mandatory for all staff similar to what is currently in place regarding data protection training;
- Concern expressed by several members that the cultural audit did not fulfil purpose for which it was commissioned and that a different approach may be warranted;
- Level of protected disclosures, protection of individuals, confidentiality, the importance of dealing with grievances and concerns at the lowest level in addition to a culture of listening to everyone and balancing tensions appropriately;
- PDP informed members there will be SGC recommendations around misconduct in the workplace in addition to learnings and how to proceed with the city centre campus for the consideration of the Governing Authority;
- President informed members that policies are required to have a review deadline;
- While new policies are welcomed the real test is with their implementation, learnings and the importance of a method for Executive Committee to report on their effectiveness was emphasised.

12.4 NOTED The President thanked the PDP and the SGC for all their work and stressed that it would be beneficial to condense the recommendations into an action plan for operationalisation in the current and next strategic plan period.

12.5 NOTED The Chancellor stressed the importance of Governing Authority looking forward and building upon the platform provided by the SGC.

13. APPOINTMENTS

13.1 NOTED Memorandum from the Director, Human Resources entitled “Memo re Starting Pay”, dated 18 December 2023 and previously circulated.

13.2 NOTED The Director, HR joined the meeting to respond to a query raised regarding compliance with Government policy as stated in the Annual Governance Statement to the HEA. His briefing included the following:

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- The rules in relation to pay within the higher education sector make no distinction between professional/support grades, academic grades, research grades or any other category of staff and are applied to all grades of staff in a similar manner;
- The University is complying with Government policy on pay relating to starting salary;
- Starting pay rules are guided by and are in accordance with various circulars and clarifications from the relevant Departments and were detailed in the memo;
- Process determining starting salary for all employees and procedure reflecting sanctions, approvals and agreements since the foundation of UL and evidence where required was set out for the information of members;
- Based on this process, University appoints individuals entering from outside the Irish public sector on higher than the entry point of a salary scale where justified;
- Sectoral Rolling Governance Review – Pay, Pensions, Travel & Subsistence and Leave;
- IUA Sectoral practice with regard to the issue of starting pay and annual audits.

13.3 NOTED Members welcomed the clarification by the D,HR and were satisfied, based on the assurances provided via correspondence from the HEA and relevant Government Departments, that the University is operating starting pay upon appointment in a manner which is consistent with national policy and the sectoral approach.

13.4 NOTED The following appointments were not impacted by the query raised at the November 2023 meeting and were approved:

- [REDACTED] as Associate Professor B in Nursing & Midwifery on a [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] as Assistant Professor in Physics on a [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] as Assistant Professor in Psychology on a [REDACTED] contract (approved online previously as [REDACTED]).
- [REDACTED]
 - Executive Administrator
 - Senior Administrator
 - Executive Administrator
 - Deputy Librarian
 - Grounds Work Person
 - Senior IT Project Manager
 - Sustainability Engagement and Operations Manager
 - Executive Administrator
 - Library Assistant
 - Category Specialist Higher
 - Senior Administrator
 - Professional Competencies Module Co-Ordinator.

13.5 Academic Staff Appointments

13.5.1 AGREED In accordance with Section 25(1) of the Universities Act, 1997 to appoint [REDACTED] as Associate Vice President Academic Affairs on a [REDACTED].

13.5.2 AGREED In accordance with Section 25(1) of the Universities Act, 1997 to appoint [REDACTED] as Associate Vice President Student Engagement on a [REDACTED].

13.5.3 AGREED In accordance with Section 25(1) of the Universities Act, 1997 to appoint [REDACTED] as Head – Department of Physical Education & Sports Sciences on a [REDACTED].

13.6 Promotion – Personal Chair

13.6.1 AGREED In accordance with the Scheme for Internal Promotion to Professor (Personal Chair) to approve the promotion of Professor Sheila Killian to Professor (Personal Chair).

13.7 Support Staff Appointments

13.7.1 AGREED In accordance with Section 25(1) of the Universities Act, 1997, the filling of the following staff posts:

[REDACTED] Senior Administrator
[REDACTED] Library Assistant
[REDACTED] Business Process Specialist
[REDACTED] Senior Administrator
[REDACTED] Grounds Work Person
[REDACTED] Category Specialist Higher – Education Procurement
[REDACTED] Senior IT Project Manager
[REDACTED] Administrator
[REDACTED] Senior Digital Project Co-Ordinator
[REDACTED] Digital Marketing Officer
[REDACTED] Mission Lab Portfolio Manager
[REDACTED] Business Process Development Officer
[REDACTED] Projects Officer
[REDACTED] Business Process Development Officer
[REDACTED] Communication Coordinator
[REDACTED] Sustainability Funding Officer
[REDACTED] Business Process Specialist.

13.8 NOTED Research contract appointments for December 2023 as circulated.

14. DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF GOVERNING AUTHORITY

14.1 NOTED The Chancellor informed members that two nominations were received for members to serve as Deputy Chairperson. The Chancellor will have discussions with both nominees and revert to the Governing Authority at the next meeting.

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15. ETHICS IN PUBLIC OFFICE ACTS (STATEMENT OF INTEREST)

15.1 NOTED Memorandum from the Corporate Secretary entitled “Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 & Standards in Public Office Act 2001 (‘Ethics Acts’) “Designated Directors” Annual Statement of Interest for calendar year 2023”, dated 18 December 2023, previously circulated.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16.1 Induction Day 22 Feb

16.1.1 NOTED An off-campus day for the purpose of induction will be held in the No 1 Pery Square Hotel, Limerick City for all members of the Governing Authority.

16.2 City Campus Planning Application

16.2.1 NOTED The University submitted a change of use planning application for the City Campus Centre in order to utilise more of the existing space. The President informed members that two objections were made and will be dealt with by An Board Pleanála in April 2024.

16.3 Verizon Job Announcement

16.3.1 NOTED Members congratulated all those in UL involved with the recent announcement by US telecommunications giant, which is bringing over 400 jobs to the city centre over the next two years.

16.3.2 NOTED The importance of UL to the Mid-West region in particular and contributions by the university sector to the economy.

16.4 NOTED The Chancellor stressed the necessity of concluding legacy issues and facing what will be a tremendous future for the University. There must be a focus facing forward and stretching the institution for the next five years.