

## Special Report

This edition of the AU Report presents an overview of far-ranging initiatives and goals that interim President Ed Richardson outlined to the AU Board of Trustees on Friday, June 17. Those matters, which are critical to the future of the university, will be the focus of a great deal of activity by faculty, staff and others during the coming year. Regular coverage of campus news will resume with the AU Report on June 27.

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### Timetable for key measures

## Richardson outlines goals for AU

Saying he wants to ensure that his successor has a long and successful tenure at Auburn, interim President Ed Richardson presented a broad and fast-paced agenda to the Board of Trustees and the university community on Friday, June 17.

The agenda, expanding upon six initiatives unveiled in 2004, places major emphasis on AU creating a comprehensive and ongoing strategic planning process, changing the concept of the AU System, developing a process of academic program review and creating an institute to give a new focus to AU's programs in agriculture, forestry and the natural sciences.

"It is important to note that many of these proposals come in anticipation of what I believe will be a continually growing demand for accountability from both the Legislature and the taxpayers of Alabama," Richardson said.

By moving quickly on the plans and proposals, Richardson said, AU would control its destiny and

overcome "disconnectedness," which he described as an environment in which AU constituencies see themselves at odds with one another instead of pursuing goals for the common good of the university. By working together in pursuit of these goals, he said, all parties will help set the stage for Auburn's success under a long-term president.

Richardson said the university could make enough progress during the coming year to conduct a search for a new president and fill the position by the end of 2006.

Faculty and administrators began work on the strategic plan earlier this year. The plan will guide the board's allocation of resources, guide efforts to establish a legislative agenda and assist the board in identifying priorities that would aid in the search for highly qualified candidates for a new president.

Richardson said he expects to bring a proposal to the board in November. If the board approves

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## Plans revolve around six key initiatives

Six initiatives that interim AU President Ed Richardson introduced in October 2004 figure prominently in proposals and plans that Richardson presented to the Board of Trustees on Friday.

Initiatives discussed Friday were:

- ◆ Review and reorganize Auburn's agricultural and related programs to reposition those programs to meet 21st century challenges.

- ◆ Define the relationship between Auburn and AU-Montgomery, ending ambiguity about how the institutions work together while maintaining separate identities in the AU System.

- ◆ Establish a process for regular and ongoing review of academic programs.

Initiatives discussed earlier this year were:

- ◆ Establish a research park near campus to bolster faculty research and state economic growth.

- ◆ Provide university leadership for a privately

financed and operated beachfront resort hotel and convention center at Gulf State Park that will provide a base of operations for related academic programs.

- ◆ Reposition the AU-owned Auburn-Opelika Robert G. Pitts Airport as a more attractive, more modern and self-sustaining economic development tool for East Alabama.

The airport initiative was advanced on Friday through board action authorizing the administration to proceed with approval of ground leases for commercial development at the airport.

Also on Friday, Richardson further defined and set timetables for the initiatives related to agricultural programs, the AU-AUM relationship and academic program review.

The research park and the Gulf Shores projects are in early stages of development.

# AU initiatives

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the plan, the administration will immediately begin developing organizational strategies.

The strategic plan, Richardson said, should include statements declaring an official AU System. At present, he said, AU has operated as a system only for budgeting purposes, missing other advantages of a system. He promised to bring recommendations for revamping the system in September.

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The title of the Auburn University president would change to chancellor of the AU System and president of Auburn University. The title of chancellor of AU-Montgomery would change to president of that campus.

The executive vice president at AU would become vice chancellor for financial and administrative services for the AU system and would retain the current title for AU duties.

The title of AU provost and vice president for academic affairs would be changed to vice chancellor of academic affairs for the AU System and the person would retain the current title for AU duties.

The title of the vice president for development would change to vice chancellor for development for the AU System while retaining the current title at the Auburn campus.

Richardson proposed that the board invite the president of AUM to sit at the table as an adviser during board meetings when the stronger system model is implemented.

He said changing to a stronger system will result in more timely consideration and approval of academic and administrative changes and make AU more attractive to presidential candidates. He added that the changes would provide recognition of AUM as a major component of the AU System, demonstrate an improved commitment to the AU mission and help strengthen both campuses through shared resources.

In another major initiative, Richardson said AU needs a comprehensive, coherent approach to academic program review if the university is to maintain its academic progress. Academic programs now undergo an array of reviews by

external accrediting agencies and various units within the university, but those reviews vary widely and often have little in common with one another.

“How do we know if our programs are successful and our graduates are prepared unless a comprehensive review of academic programs is conducted?” he asked.

Richardson said the provost will work with faculty to develop a presentation to the board in November. That presentation will address specific criteria, objectives and timetables for conducting academic reviews.

“There will be some cost to conducting ongoing reviews,” he said. “But the confirmation of success, adjustments to further improve the programs, reorganization to comply with the Auburn System’s strategic plan and establish a more objective system of accountability should be worth the cost and should provide valuable information to the board.”

Richardson added that the academic review program should include a cycle of review for the faculty, including tenured faculty. “The purpose is to support faculty development as a basis for strong academic programming and, in addition, ensure that our students receive a quality education,” he said.

Willie Larkin, faculty adviser to the Board of Trustees, said faculty leaders are not sure additional reviews of faculty performance are needed at this time but are willing to work with the administration on the matter.

Meanwhile, in a move that goes to the heart of Auburn’s original land-grant mission, Richardson proposed establishing an institute to administer programs now under the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, College of Agriculture and School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

Richardson said the institute will not be dominated by the College of Agriculture and would be led by an administrator operating out of Samford Hall. He said the name should reflect the institute’s broader role in natural resources and environmental science. He will present recommendations to the board in September.

As part of the institute development, AU needs to reduce the number of agricultural experiment stations and have targeted objectives or specialties for those that remain, he said. Funds generated by sale of agricultural station lands should be earmarked in a quasi-foundation fund to help maintain the institute’s operations, he added.

For the institute to be effective, Richardson said, additional changes will be needed by April 2006. Those changes could follow a review of departments and programs in other colleges and schools and decisions on whether they would be more appropriate to include in the institute, he said



## President cites other objectives for AU to tackle in coming year

Interim President Ed Richardson cited some objectives that fall outside the six initiatives cited on page 1. These include:

- ◆ Finalizing the criteria and guidelines for a space utilization and management plan for the AU Systems.
- ◆ Completing a north Auburn campus plan to accommodate future needs and preserve valuable existing programs.
- ◆ Adopting a plan to promote diversity. The plan would attempt to reflect “best practices” and be adaptable for future conditions. Annual reports, including comparisons with peer institutions, would be made available to the board.
- ◆ Expanding the university’s involvement in partnerships with the City of Auburn and other local governments. Explore partnerships, especially, in such endeavors as development of a new performing arts center to serve both the city and the university.
- ◆ Building upon the enhanced relationship between the AU and University of Alabama systems. Richardson noted that both universities fared better in the 2005 legislative system because they worked together instead of separately. He also called for an increased presence in Washington, D.C., and cited plans to contract with a director of external relations to prepare for next year’s legislative session in Montgomery.
- ◆ Continuing to review operating costs with an eye toward containment of expenses. The review would involve athletics along with other programs and include services, publications, utility usage, health care costs, staffing and facilities.



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The AU Report is published by the Office of Communications and Marketing at Auburn University. Issues appear each Monday during fall and spring semesters and every two weeks in summer term, except on the Monday of or the Monday after some major U.S. holidays. Copies are distributed free by campus mail to full-time faculty and staff at campus offices. Deadline for delivery of items for publication is 4 p.m. on Wednesday before publication date. Direct inquiries, suggestions and news items to AU Report, 23 Samford Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849. Telephone: 334/844-9999. E-mail: summero@auburn.edu.

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From the president

# Auburn is positioning itself to lead way for others in higher education

By Ed Richardson, Interim President, Auburn University

As most of you are already aware, I put before our Board of Trustees at its June 17 meeting several items that will result in significant change at Auburn and within the Auburn University System.



Richardson

It is important to note that many of these proposals come in anticipation of what I believe will be a continually growing demand for accountability from both the Legislature and the taxpayers of Alabama. When implemented, the changes I have proposed should better position us to meet that demand as well as to be more attractive to highly qualified, outstanding presidential candidates of the quality this university deserves.

We are already beginning to see the call from our state lawmakers to demonstrate that we are making wise use of the funds we are allotted. Recently, the Legislature’s Commission on Government Accountability released data from a survey of recent graduates of Alabama’s public universities. The survey asked graduates whether they would attend their respective alma maters again as well as sought ratings on various elements of their student experiences. Auburn fared extremely well in this survey. In fact, a higher number of our graduates said they would definitely attend Auburn again for their undergraduate degrees than did those of any other school.

But this simple survey, despite the importance of the numbers that it generated, is only the tip of the accountability iceberg. It is clear to me that the public perceives that stringent measures to demonstrate how well our institutions of higher learning are spending public money are long overdue. From Opp and from Oxford, the public view of higher ed is dominated by ever-increasing tuition rates and the perception that our professors enjoy light workloads, yet draw significant salaries.

Rest assured that constituents pass those views — in essence, those concerns — along to their legislators and that those concerns, unless they are effectively countered, come into play when the state begins its annual budgeting process. Soon, these demands for accountability will become more stringent and more formal, and Auburn is far better off if we prepare ourselves in advance of those formalities.

In order to do so, there are a couple of important steps that we can take. One is to position the university and its programs to be more reflective of the needs of the state’s citizenry. Certainly, the formation of the institute that will revolve around

life and environmental sciences, the coming Research Park and, to a lesser extent, plans for the Gulf State Park are steps in that direction.

Also, better definition of the relationship of Auburn and Auburn-Montgomery, along with more effectively integrated administrative and business operations, should provide for better use of resources and more appropriately address the needs of the state and both institutions’ local communities.

Secondly, and most importantly, higher education should take the lead in defining the terms by which accountability will be measured. It is only reasonable that those who work daily on our campus should know better than anyone the best indicators of our effective use of resources. If we are able to play an active role in establishing the benchmarks by which we are measured, we are, in essence, self-governed — a far better fate than having standards imposed upon us by those less familiar with what we do.

It is my desire that Auburn lead the way in establishing accountability measures for higher education in the state of Alabama. Now, in advance of mandates that are sure to come, is the right time for us to begin “setting the bar.” The timing is made even more essential with a presidential search on our horizon.

We can begin to address accountability in advance of outside mandates by keeping tuition increases to their minimums.

We must also closely scrutinize faculty time and workload, taking into account time spent in the classroom, time spent in the research laboratory and other applicable factors.

We must re-examine how we schedule our classes and utilize our space, ensuring that we don’t create new space to meet maximum class loads that could be more effectively spread out and, as a result, require less space.

We must begin to establish relationships through which we work with other institutions of higher learning throughout the state to maximize resources. In particular, we should take advantage of

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# Auburn developing new planning process to identify goals for future

With AU about to complete its five-year plan for the first half of this decade, faculty and administrators at AU are preparing a strategic plan to guide the university through the remainder of the

**Phase two will focus on answering strategic questions and setting goals for the next five years and beyond.** decade while setting a pattern for planning in the future. This spring, an ad hoc steering group coordinated by Bill Sauser, a member of the AU faculty since 1977, solicited input from university faculty, staff and other constituents through public forums and a web site in an attempt to identify the major challenges facing the university over the remainder of the decade and beyond.

Sauser is a professor and associate dean for outreach in the College of Business and the Ginn College of Engineering.

With assistance from the Group Solutions consulting firm, the steering committee will assemble the material and present a final draft of questions for consideration to interim President Ed Richardson in July.

Richardson said he will take a proposed plan to the Board of Trustees in November. After the board adopts a plan, the administration will work with faculty and staff to develop operational strategies to achieve the goals.

While the first phase has concentrated on identifying questions and issues that could affect the university's progress over the next five years, phase two will focus on answering the strategic

questions and setting goals. That process will include more specific forums and web surveys in August and analysis by the strategy team in September.

Early in fall semester, Richardson will seek feedback on the strategy team's draft and further narrow the list to a set of overarching goals. Richardson is scheduled to present six to eight overarching goals to the Board of Trustees in November, but Sauser has said the final number could vary, depending on the results of the final draft and feedback from the university community during the planning process.

With the current five-year plan expiring on Oct. 1, vice presidents, deans and other AU budget planners will use the resulting goals next spring and summer in developing operating budgets for 2006-07. The goals will also guide AU in setting priorities and planning of budgets for the remainder of the decade.

Procedures established during the current planning cycle will be modified as necessary and followed as the university develops an ongoing process for long-term planning beyond the next five years.

In recent presentations, Sauser told the University Senate and the AU Board of Trustees that the new process is intended to provide a comprehensive and broad-based means of defining the university's direction with a limited set of high-priority, long-term goals. Those goals, he said, should guide policy decisions and legislative strategy; focus decisions about resource allocation; serve as the basis for unit operational goals, plans and benchmarks of progress; and guide selection of future leaders.

## Accountability

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opportunities to work closely with the University of Alabama System. Such a relationship can prove particularly beneficial, as is evidenced by our cooperation in the most recent legislative session.

Finally, we must pursue the ongoing comprehensive strategic planning process that will provide for us all a more definitive focus for Auburn's future.

Increased calls for accountability are on the horizon, and I believe that measures taken as a result of my six initiatives coupled with those I

have outlined here will better prepare this university to answer those calls and, at the same time, attract a president with the qualities to serve Auburn well for many years.

It is my hope that the entire campus community — students, faculty, staff and administrators — can move toward making these proposals a reality with a degree of unity so that we can improve and effectively demonstrate to the legislature, taxpayers and presidential candidates the outstanding job we do in meeting our missions of education, research and outreach.

## Increase in tuition will help fund scholarship program

The AU Board of Trustees on Friday approved a 4 percent increase in tuition for 2005-06.

One-fourth of the \$5.3 million in added revenue will fund scholarships, and one-eighth will be for Student Activities Programs. The remainder will go toward university operations.

The increase will be \$95 per semester to \$2,400 for in-state students. Non-resident students will see their tuition rise by \$285 to \$7,200 per semester.

Addressing concerns about the impact of rising tuition on students from families with lower incomes, the increase will generate more than \$1 million per year for scholarships.

Executive Vice President Don Large noted that AU ranks near the bottom among major universities in the South in the amount of financial aid, \$12 million, awarded per year and in the percent of students receiving aid.

In 2004, 55 percent of entering freshmen at Auburn received financial aid, compared to 74 percent at the University of Alabama.

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