Institutional Identity Working Group  
November 11, 2010  
Minutes  
Submitted by: Mark Valenzuela

The working group: Tammy Gieselman (co-chair), Mark Valenzuela (co-chair), Lora Becker, Bob Boxell, Alissa Fricke, Lucy Himstedt, Beth Hochgesang, Scott Lank, Kim McDonald, Mark Shifflet, Beth Speer, Chuck Watson, Dan Miller, Joe Ellsworth

1. All members were present, except Dan Miller, Beth Speer and Scott Lank. Scott shared thoughts about mission, vision, values via email with Tammy and Mark prior to the meeting. Joe Ellsworth attended via speaker phone. It was explained to the group that Joe Ellsworth had been unable to attend because of a mix-up in communication, but not through any fault of Joe.

2. Lucy shared with the committee a questionnaire/survey that she developed with the help of Kim McDonald and the survey used for freshmen. Members discussed the questions and methods of distribution and collection. The following were recommended:
   a. Questions to be framed so that they might apply to different constituencies (students, faculty, alumni).
   b. A question to be added that related to the responder’s aspirational vision for the future of the University of Evansville.
   c. An option for follow-up be included.
   d. Take advantage of Homecoming weekend to distribute the questionnaire to the various gatherings throughout the weekend.

Lucy will make changes and work with Sylvia DeVault to distribute to various constituencies.

3. Mark and Tammy provided a report from the Strategic Plan Steering Committee
   - Collaboration with the Connections and Student Development Group was discussed. The Student Development Working Group will be collaborating with Student Government for focus groups and they offered to help in the process of gathering feedback from students regarding institutional identity.
   - The importance of budget considerations was discussed (but not necessarily to be constrained by present finances).
   - Trustees on the steering committee urged working groups to think big and to push the board of trustees.
   - Dr. Kazee emphasized the importance of focusing on “who we are” versus “what we do.” Members of the working group discussed what was meant by “who we are” and helped to transition to the next topic of discussion.
4. The members of the committee discussed the President’s Inaugural Address for important themes. Several themes were highlighted and from there, other themes were offered by working group members.

Key paragraphs that members highlighted include:

“In your programs, you’ve seen a statement that attempts to capture what is essential about UE. That statement is built around three claims: first, that the best education is one built on a liberal arts foundation; second, that a program affording exploration of and preparation for professional careers gives students a richer set of learning opportunities than is possible at other types of colleges and universities; and, third, that these learning opportunities must be grounded in an institutional context that foregrounds global awareness and engagement.”

The paragraph helps give one account of who we are. The theme that emerges is one of “opportunity.” From “opportunity” other themes emerge: (a) personalization, (b) the drive of students attracted to UE to take advantage of opportunities, and (c) faculty and staff coming together to help students take advantage of these opportunities. “Opportunity” is echoed later in the inaugural address in this paragraph:

“Of course, if you said the UE experience begins and ends with its commitment to liberal education, you’d be only half right. It begins there, to be sure, but it is the rich array of options our students can consider that contributes significantly to the distinctive character of learning at this place. And let me be clear about this argument: the impressive variety of pre-professional and professional opportunities from which our students may choose is not incidental to the liberal arts foundation of our curriculum. It is, in fact, precisely this marriage -- this synergy -- between liberal education and career preparation that represent one of UE’s great and most distinctive values.”

Another highlighted paragraph highlights our church tradition that invites questioning and invites consideration of social justice:.

“We are, in other words, encouraging learning for learning’s own sake – stimulating intellectual curiosity, fostering engagement with new ideas, and examining received truths. Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan University, writes that liberal education develops “habits of mind that thrive on ambiguity and that foster combinations of focus and flexibility, criticism and courage.” And at UE, we’re not afraid to pose, even to emphasize, questions of values, faith and ethics. Our long relationship with the United Methodist Church not only enriches our institutional identity and heritage but invites reflection on the ultimate questions all of us face in our lives.”

Other phrases that stood out include:

“It is this synergy between breadth and depth that is the magic of liberal education.”
“...discovery and innovation are the twin pillars of a democratic society.”
“An education at the University of Evansville, however, would be incomplete without the overt and substantial commitment we’ve made to global awareness.”
5. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, November 18 at 1:00 p.m. Room 255 in Koch Center. At this meeting we will take a look at Identity, Mission, Vision, Values and see what “words” come to mind that ring true for our experience of UE.