

TO: Charles Perfetti, Director, Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC), University of Pittsburgh

FROM: Board of Visitors: Art Graesser (chair), Gautam Biswas, Hilda Borko, Thomas Carr, Suzanne Donovan, Barry Fishman, Judith Harackiewicz, Ping Li, Danielle McNamara, Kenneth Pugh, Stephanie Rowley, Reed Stevens, Stanley Thompson

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RE: Board of Visitors' Reflections on Recent LRDC Meeting

The Board of Visitors (BOV) appreciate the opportunity to hear about your strategic plans to advance the important work of LRDC in the university, the Pittsburgh community, the nation, and the world. We met virtually this year (on Zoom, in two 2-hour sessions on March 29 and 31, 2021) because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was on strategic planning, as opposed to previous years where we had the opportunity to hear more detailed reports on your recent research, applications, and outreach.

This BOV report focuses on your five areas of strategic planning: (1) mission and vision, (2) committee on diversity, equity, and inclusion (CODIE), (3) visibility and connectedness, (4) student and staff initiatives, and (5) staff happiness. We focus on some highlights whereas Liz Rangel has detailed notes on the discussions in the two sessions in March.

Mission and Vision

The BOV suggested that the mission and vision (M&V) should be societally impactful statements and differentiate LRDC's mission, vision for the future, and strategic actions. The motto (*Understanding Learning, Improving Education*) is a succinct memorable message that could be more prominent. The M&V could convey more salient connections with the university's vision and strategic plans. It could identify "big issues" facing Pittsburgh and the world, with LRDC being the "go to" center on campus for innovative research and solutions; the research contributions, areas of specialization, and interdisciplinary network would then branch out from the big issues. The LRDC logo and a graphic visualization that captures the essence of LRDC would be an important step in better selling LRDC's signature impact on the world. It is of course important to include LRDC's commitment to diversity, equity, fairness, and inclusion. In all of these endeavors, LRDC's ability to implement both research and consultation via Zoom and other virtual platforms can be a model for others.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CODIE)

The BOV was impressed with the progress that has been made in increasing the diversity of faculty and staff since the last meeting and with the formation of a very active committee (CODIE). The committee recommended that CODIE continue to consider existing literature on the complex topic, and to investigate practices at other universities. The BOV discussed a variety of specific actions in addressing diversity, equity, fairness, and inclusion: (1) voluntary "safe-place" meetings in which individuals could share their experiences, (2) mandatory periodic training that has the benefit of providing a common ground on policies, guidelines, and vocabulary (but also carries potential liabilities that have been documented in the literature and must be guarded against), (3) active support for incoming faculty, staff, and students, and (4) a focus on systemic structural changes that are informed by empirical studies and successful approaches at other universities.

Visibility and Connectedness

LRDC has an impressive record and is well known within university research communities throughout the world, and education stakeholders in several school districts. However, LRDC also may be underselling itself so the BOV offered some thoughts for increasing visibility and connectedness. Connections to undergraduates would increase through the proposed certificate program and through community events like annual poster sessions. Connections among LRDC students, staff, and faculty (as well as interested administrators and the public) could be achieved by LRDC Research Expos where 8-10 faculty present their new research ideas (perhaps in 5 minute "firehose" style so it lasts an hour or less), followed by a poster session with food and beverages. Within the context of the university, LRDC could hold more general or thematic Research Expos that allow researchers across the university to display their research and development. LRDC could position itself to set the vision for the university and the Pittsburgh community partners on topics related to learning research and development. At the national and international levels, LRDC could intensify its attempts to influence the narrative regarding education policy, as it has positioned itself over previous decades. The Institute for Learning could play a visible role in implementing research and development in several ways, including the 200 on-line professional development lessons, increasing motivation with technology-enhanced learning, and integrating data analytics with professional development. Accomplishing these various events and goals will require additional staff and expertise to handle the additional workload: organizing events, communicating with the many different stakeholders, designing multimedia visualizations and videos, maintaining a captivating up-to-date website, and overseeing the new undergraduate certificate program.

Student Initiatives

As already referenced, LRDC proposes to create a certificate program that documents undergraduates' research on Learning Sciences. While there was some hesitation due to a potential increase in workload by faculty, the BOV encourages LRDC to pursue the implementation of such a certificate. Several members pointed out the success of similar certificates in ways that are not particularly burdensome. For example, the Learning Sciences certificate courses could be selections from existing courses in different departments, with a small number of LRDC courses (e.g., an introductory proseminar course with researchers each presenting only a week or two, individual student research projects for credit). The poster sessions and expos would be a magnet for attracting students to become involved with LRDC.

Staff Happiness

LRDC is encouraged to maintain a model of respect and support for staff, and to fully support them in professional development and continued training opportunities. In addition, a greater sense of community for staff members might be enhanced by engaging in various activities described under visibility and connectedness, such as Expos.