Initiative on the Future of Drury University and Southwest Missouri

Drury University and its Role in the Greater Springfield Area

Every year our Drury community reaches out to be engaged in nearly every aspect of business and community service in Springfield and Southwest Missouri. While many other universities focus on research, Drury prides itself as a community of scholars with a primary focus on teaching and on a commitment to liberal learning and community engagement.

In 2009, a group of local civic organizations in Springfield published a 2009 Community Focus Report that identifies a broad array of community strengths and opportunities and highlights significant challenges facing the Springfield community. Drury and its students, faculty and staff already help address in a multitude of ways the challenges identified in the Report, including:

- Support for local arts and culture
- Support for business and the local economy
- Community engagement
- Support for community health
- Support for education
- Support for elementary, middle school, and higher education
- Support for community housing
- Support for the area environment
- Support for public order and safety
- Support for recreation, sports and leisure

Drury is well known and well respected in the Springfield community, but despite our extraordinary level of engagement with our host community, neither Drury’s mission nor its vision are fully understood by the people of Springfield and Southwest Missouri, nor is Drury’s local impact fully appreciated. Drury can be of even greater value to Springfield and thereby do a better job fulfilling our mission if we engage local leadership in a dialogue about the extent of our current engagement, communicate better the interconnectedness of Drury University with Springfield and the Greater Southwest Missouri area, and discuss how we can partner together to expand our contribution to our common future. It’s time for Drury to take a greater ownership of the community in which we operate, and for the civic and business leadership of Springfield to take ownership of Drury University’s success.
The vision for our program is to make Drury a place of greatness:

- where theory meets reality
- where academic rigor meets community engagement
- where teaching meets community awareness
- where learning meets doing
- where campus labs meet community projects
- where Drury's reputation expands from simply a small liberal arts university located in Springfield to an integral engine of Springfield's success

It’s an effort to create a setting where the business and civic leaders of the Greater Springfield community come to know and to take an ownership interest in Drury. It’s an opportunity to dispel misconceptions about the University and to make Drury an integral part of the success of the community. It’s an initiative to foster the real understanding that: “As goes Drury University, so goes Springfield.”

The Opportunity

Drury’s faculty, staff, administration, and alumni and Springfield’s community leaders have expressed a sincere interest in developing and supporting programs that will more closely link Drury with the Greater Springfield community. The shared destiny of Drury and Springfield is a compelling idea for those who care deeply about our region. Because of our small size and our non-bureaucratic structure, Drury is quick and nimble and has the capability easily to manage administrative coordination. Many leaders within the Springfield community have received a Drury education and have made a significant difference over the years. We have the unique opportunity to highlight and to build upon those accomplishments. We can and we should better publicize the inventory of what we’re already doing, and continue to promote Drury’s faculty and staff as our local ambassadors outside the Drury campus. With the new O’Reilly Family Events Center, we also have the opportunity to bring the Springfield community onto our campus with conversations, convocations, and OFEC events. We can also focus on Drury’s recognized centers of excellence like the Breech School, the Edward Jones Center, the Hammons School, and the Pre-Health Professions, and build others. Drury’s engagement in the Greater Springfield community will inevitably lead to the community’s greater engagement with Drury.

Benefits to the Community and to Drury

The key to our program will be enlightened self-interest - our ability to understand the needs of our host community and to demonstrate to our community partners how Drury is already working and can work in the future to meet those needs. Drury will seek out the most influential community leaders and we will get them engaged in a joint effort. We will ask for their ideas, we will get them committed with intellectual investment, we will adopt their ideas, and we will ask them for their help in implementing the plans. If done properly, these leaders will take ownership and will move mountains to achieve our mutually stated goals and objectives.
Enlightened self-interest will be the driving force behind increased engagement internally as well. Our trustees will be asked to identify what programs they have a real passion for and are willing to commit their time, their financial support, and their influence in the community to pursue. More effective coordination of the already substantial faculty and staff involvement will be required as we demonstrate how their engagement enhances our students’ educational experience, helps us offer a unique blending of theoretical and practical learning, and advances Drury’s mission.

An Outline of the Initiative

To advance this initiative, Drury must establish and maintain an administrative structure that facilitates and reflects our successful outreach to the Springfield community - a structure that emphasizes the magic and the personality that makes Drury unique. We must be deliberate in maintaining a qualified Board of Trustees that mirrors the business and community leadership we seek to engage. We must build upon our existing structure of Advisory Boards, those actively engaged committees composed of alumni, parents, and friends of the respective departments:

- Alumni Association Council
- Breech School of Business Administration Advisory Board
  - Breech Student Advisory Board
  - Breech Graduate Student Advisory Board
- SIFE Business Advisory Board
- School of Education and Child Development Community Advisory Board
- Hammons School of Architecture Advisory Board
- Edward Jones Center Advisory Board
- Performing Arts Advisory Board (Early Discussions)

We must look at the important centers of focus that are not included in its current Advisory Board structure and determine the best ways to advance them, including:

- O’Reilly Family Events Center
- College of Graduate and Continuing Studies
- Global Perspectives 21 (Interdisciplinary Studies)
- International Studies
- Undergraduate Experience (Student Life)

Beyond these existing and potential Advisory Boards, Drury’s academic departments are currently grouped into four academic divisions based on certain commonalities. We have been operating under a departmental structure that has served our institution well for the last several decades, but one that was built for a far smaller and less complex institution than we are today. Perhaps the time has come for a new structure to manage the various schools. Now may be the time to change to a structure of “Dean-led” schools of study within the broader framework of the University. These Deans would have responsibility for guiding the curricular direction of the school, but would also be more outward-looking to coordinate the impact of the various schools on the local community.
With some strategic thinking and better coordination, this system of Drury Advisory Boards and academic departments can be organized in a manner suitable to support the outreach efforts we intend. Each Advisory Board and department can be asked to focus on how the challenges facing Springfield relate to its discipline and what it can do to begin addressing those challenges.

The goal of this initiative is to align Drury’s centers of excellence with the challenges facing our community, so that, for example:

- Musicians in Springfield can unite to strengthen Drury’s music department
- Business leaders can rally around our business programs
- Educators can rally around the education department
- Scientists can rally around our science and pre-health professions programs
- Cultural leaders can rally around the O’Reilly Family Events Center

In this way, the fate and future of Drury and Springfield will become inextricably linked, and it will become clear to all thought-leaders - both within the Drury community and in the business and civic community of the Greater Springfield area - that the success of one will benefit from and be dependent upon the success of the other.

**Addressing Concerns**

In preliminary discussions, a number of concerns have been surfaced and must be addressed as we move forward toward implementation:

- **Communication.** This initiative will require a heightened focus on communication. We must develop a simple way to explain why we are doing this and why the sense of urgency. Our volunteer efforts are already aligned with what is best for the City of Springfield and the greater Ozarks region, but we are not getting enough attention from the local media. This must change. We must build a strategy that makes it imperative for the press to follow what we are doing in the community.

  In order to gain buy-in from all internal stakeholders we must engage in an internal communications strategy that clearly outlines what is in it for everyone in the university family. Our internal constituencies must be shown how this will help to achieve a host of institutional gains which include long-term financial strength, short-term resources, rationalized work load, effective enrollment, elevated quality of staff and faculty, and quality of the student experience.

- **Faculty and Staff Workload.** The schedules of Drury’s faculty and staff are already full. We must make hard choices about our priorities and we must be intentional about doing fewer things well. In the meantime, it must be made clear that this initiative is not “additive.” To the contrary, this initiative is the structure and engine by which we will coordinate and make more effective the
many community outreach activities already being undertaken by our faculty, staff and students. In many ways we are simply taking what we are already doing in so many areas and taking it to the next level. The concept of community engagement will be folded into our existing academic programs, getting to the practical from a curricular standpoint - a great selling point to incoming students who seek real-world experience as part of their education.

- **Relationship with the Strategic Plan.** The timing of this initiative is fortuitous because we are putting the final touches on a new strategic plan that will help define Drury’s future. There should be no confusion between the strategic plan and this initiative. This initiative does not add to or conflict with the strategic plan. To the contrary, this initiative is the structure and engine by which we will execute major components of the strategic plan.

- **Cultural Concerns.** As we structure our Advisory Boards and their unique strategic plans, we must avoid creating silos and avoid any “us vs. them” thinking. We must encourage entrepreneurial thinking and healthy competition for new ideas, but within the context of a cohesive University community. We must promote the language of a common future.

- **The Competitive Environment.** Drury is neither the only institution of higher learning in Springfield nor the largest, and we are not the only local entity focused on community engagement. We must be careful how we communicate this initiative in our community and avoid burning bridges. Our goal is not to compete with MSU or OTC. We wish only to engage the Springfield community in our common future and to emphasize that the problems facing Springfield are many, and that addressing them will never be a “zero-sum” game. We will collaborate and cooperate with other education providers in the community as appropriate, but we won’t wait for others to take the lead. We will take charge of this initiative and we will move it forward as fast as we can marshal our own resources. Where individual initiatives might benefit from a joint venture or cooperative effort with other educational or civic entities we will actively pursue that course. Otherwise, we must try to remain nimble in the marketplace and move as fast as is prudently possible.

- **CGCS.** As we think beyond Springfield and beyond our traditional student base, we must consider how to leverage this initiative through the College for Graduate and Continuing Studies. We are the dominant presence in some of the smaller markets we serve. We must find ways to consolidate the gains we have made and to solidify our leadership presence within these communities by effecting the same levels of engagement we seek in the Springfield community.

**Suggested Governance Guidelines**

- The Advisory Boards will be established and populated with proven leaders from faculty, staff, students, alumni and the local community, all committed to internal improvement and external engagement. Existing Advisory Boards will
be reviewed against this standard and maintained to the greatest extent possible to honor the desire for service already expressed by their members.

- Each Advisory Board will be chaired by an appropriate departmental lead or a member of the Board of Trustees. All of the Trustees will serve on at least one Advisory Board, with many serving on more than one.

- The Advisory Boards will meet not less than twice each year.

- Each Advisory Board will be charged with developing its own strategic plan focused on internal improvement and community engagement. These plans will be presented first to a steering committee and then to the full Board of Trustees for approval.

- Each strategic plan will incorporate a departmental vision for the next decade, an analysis of the costs of achieving that vision, and a funding plan to cover those costs. University development officers will be assigned to each Advisory Board to assist them in their outreach efforts.

- Conflicts between departments are inevitable, so there will be a University Council that will consist of the department leads, the University President, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and others as deemed appropriate. A presentation will be made to that Council in certain cases to see what issues cross school lines and have University-wide impact.

- Each Advisory Board will produce a report annually on its activities. These reports will be consolidated into an annual report to the Springfield community telling them what Drury has been contributing to the community over the past year. This annual report will be issued in conjunction with a yearly gathering of community leaders on the Drury campus called the Annual Drury-Springfield Summit where we will provide a report to Springfield on what Drury is doing for the community, we will recognize what the community is doing for Drury, we will discuss the unmet needs to be addressed in the ensuing year, and we will announce the annual Drury-Springfield Partnership Awards to recognize unique contributions.

**Suggested Next Steps for Discussion**

- Building upon the existing system of Advisory Boards and based on an in-depth review of our academic departmental structure, rationalize Drury’s structure so that each of our centers of excellence has a Board that can identify and address issues of common interest between Drury and Springfield. Develop a common template of operating guidelines and reporting structures for these Advisory Boards.

- Preliminarily identify the challenges facing Springfield that could best be addressed by the Advisory Boards.
• Develop a communications plan to educate Springfield on how Drury intends to assist in implementing community wide development plans, including what the financial challenge will be to implement the plans. We should position this as the single largest investment - both in time and in money - in Springfield’s future.

• Reach out to the Greater Springfield community to populate the Advisory Boards with business and civic leaders interested in working with Drury to address the issues facing our community, building the case that Drury is vital to Springfield’s future.

• Require each Board to develop a strategic plan with self-identified measurable goals and timelines, and an analysis of the costs of implementation. Align development officers with each Board to assist in the funding of their plans.

• Odds and ends. Who will own/lead this initiative? What additional risks, potential benefits, and additional concerns exist? What is the scope of our effort? What new training will be needed? What should be our time frame for implementation?

We want Drury to be judged on its ability to help make Springfield and the greater Ozarks region a better place for us all. We must commit to producing students who will have learned how to be responsible community citizens not only in the classroom but, more importantly, in the reality laboratory represented by the greater Ozarks region. In the competitive environment in which we operate, Drury will never occupy the “most” ground, but that should not prevent us from seeking to occupy the “high” ground. Properly implemented, this initiative is an important step in that direction.