

## MU Strategic Advantages Survey

### Brian Foster's Take on Faculty Input

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I have carefully read the faculty input for our taskforce on strategic advantages at MU and found it to be thoughtful and extremely informative. Below is a brief summary that comes from my careful but informal, holistic, and intuitive read of the input messages. I send this in the interest of openness with respect to where I'm coming from.

#### Overarching comments

Several overarching comments about university assets were repeated sufficiently often to bear special comment; I would not have predicted this outcome, though agree with all of them. I take these to be highly positive comments that are important as we think about how to position MU as an institution.

- MU has a beautiful campus with a heritage and traditions that connect people to MU
- There is broad diversity of academic programs
- MU has a deep, historical commitment to state-wide service, and there is deep pride in MU across Missouri
- MU is at the center of the nation—a cross-section of the US

Two “potential” assets were mentioned repeatedly—potential assets if we better cultivated them:

- Strong private-sector/corporate collaborations have not been pursued aggressively
- Strong collaboration with individuals and communities across the state through extension and other means

Several constraints on realizing our aspirations may be of importance in assessing where to put our efforts:

- Limited air travel limits MU faculty travel and travel of others to MU
- Salaries have become a big problem for our competitiveness in hiring and retention and cause compression and other internal tensions
- There is lack of financial and facilities support for interdisciplinary work

#### Assets that may be considered “strategic advantages”

##### Academic assets

- MU's strong interdisciplinary culture was mentioned by more people than any other single matter

- The Nuclear Reactor is a unique resource that has potential links on many academic areas as diverse as policy studies, physics, medicine, engineering, and ethics
- The mix of programs including Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Animal Science, and Engineering is nearly unique among American universities; exploitation of potential interactions, especially given our interdisciplinary culture, uniquely positions us in the very timely area of comparative medicine

### Assets of great potential

- MU has many programs and faculty with an interest in aging, and numerous cross-disciplinary successes have been accomplished. We have no broad-based program, however, either in instruction, service, or research.
- We have many strengths in writing, broadly considered, including our premier Journalism program, our highly ranked Creative Writing Program, and the nationally known Campus Writing Program. As one respondent said, we have potential to be “the great writing campus.”
- We have more than 70 faculty interested in Nuclear Science and Engineering, broadly considered, and MURR is a unique national resource. With a more inclusive structure MU could be poised to be a major force in the area.

### Other thoughts

There were many other thoughts that caught my attention. Here I’ve focused on themes that seemed to me to recur throughout the faculty messages. Below are three thoughts that came from those many other comments.

- Journalism came up repeatedly, but there didn’t seem to be a theme around the many mentions except in relation to writing. It is, of course, a premier program that in itself is a huge asset. The question is whether there is a broader theme for which Journalism would be central.
- Several social science and humanities themes were mentioned, but they didn’t seem to recur in the way the Life Science theme did. These are areas that merit further thought and discussion.
- Some of the very positive input from students converged closely with faculty comments on tradition, beautiful campus, commitment of faculty, the writing program, international studies, and sound education. A strong undergraduate education asset can be crafted from these strong elements.