

## **A GUIDE TO UPCOMING OPEN MEETINGS ON BRANDEIS' FUTURE**

This document serves as an introduction to our open meetings on the future direction of Brandeis. It has three main goals:

1. To provide the context for charting the university's course over the next three to five years.
2. To present a set of high-level strategic priorities, which will draw the major contours of the university's direction over the coming years. On Tuesday, November 28, we will begin a discussion that will continue for several months as I hold open meetings and receive feedback to what I present at these meetings. This will include, but not be limited to, a high-level summary of ideas and commentaries from the 33 self-reflection documents.
3. To provide a timeline for the dynamic, iterative process we will use over the next nine months to establish a course for the university, which will include setting priorities and a financial plan.

### **I. THE CONTEXT FOR CHARTING THE UNIVERSITY'S DIRECTION**

Those of you who were at Brandeis last year will remember the open meetings at which we summarized the findings of two detailed studies — one by Mark Neustadt on institutional identity, the other by Kermit Daniel on institutional financials. Those findings included these details:

- Brandeis is among the most complex of universities: It offers more programs and services than virtually any other university of its size and with its resources. Size matters — with fewer students, there are fewer tuitions to defray total expenses. All things being equal, we lose net tuition dollars by operating at our current size compared to our larger peers. And though we have increased the size of our student body significantly over the past fifteen years, our scope of operations still lies beyond the revenue we generate, primarily from tuition dollars.
- At the same time, and unrelated to cost, our faculty are among the most productive within our peer group when we compare their research output and the frequency of their scholarly work cited by other academics to the work of faculties at other institutions. And though the small size of our student body is a liability, or a handicap, when it comes to generating revenue for campus operations, this

smallness gives us a great advantage when it comes to the quality of the undergraduate education we can offer our students. I would argue that we do not want to diminish this aspect of Brandeis, because it sets us apart from our peers.

- As we maintain the high levels of faculty scholarly productivity and a scale of operations that is advantageous for a more personalized undergraduate experience, we have been unable to invest in some crucial areas of the university. These areas include, but are not limited to, faculty and staff salaries; the physical and technological infrastructure; research and development support for faculty; communications and marketing, to inform the world beyond campus about Brandeis' excellence; and institutional advancement, to strengthen ties to alumni and friends to garner greater support for our mission.
- Our major sources of revenue are currently at their limit. I am confident we will increase our resource base as we successfully address specific issues, but it will take significant time to show the kind of increase we will need if we are to do all we seek to do. Our tuition is among the highest among our peers, and spending from our endowment is more than 15 percent greater than the convention among universities (5.8 percent versus 5.0 percent). Gift income has been flat and, I believe, will increase over time, though this will depend on the compelling vision we put before our prospective donors. And the income we receive from indirect costs from government and foundation support for research faces challenges given the current political climate in Washington, and the negative views of higher education among politicians and the population at large.
- The Neustadt report — based on surveys of our alumni, interviews on and off campus, and in-depth focus groups with current and prospective students — highlighted key questions about our institutional identity: What does it mean to be the only institution founded by the American Jewish community, and what does it mean to be “secular”?
- The inability or decision not to define who we are has hurt us and created confusion for prospective students, alumni, and our longtime friends who have generously supported the institution since its founding. Are we a “Jewish” institution? Must we take specific and public positions related to Israel or the American Jewish diaspora? How is our openness, so central to our founding in 1948, still relevant to

our mission today? We need to declare who we are, and determine how our founding is relevant today and tomorrow.

In short, I see us at an important inflection point. We are an excellent institution that, to use perhaps a dated phrase, “punches well above its weight” academically but operates in unsustainable ways. We are spending the earnings from our endowment faster than we should. Our faculty and staff are being asked, for prolonged periods, to do more work than they should at an institution with our aspirations and quality. And our mounting deferred maintenance threatens our competitiveness in terms of recruiting and retaining the best faculty, and matriculating the strongest students.

So, how best to address the challenges outlined here; continue the pursuit of excellence for the university; and do this in a way that does not compromise the integrity of the university, is sustainable, and takes advantages of the creativity and the best ideas on campus?

As a newcomer to the university, I have found that listening and learning over the past 17 months has been crucial to the forging of a strategy and direction for Brandeis. Fortunately, in part forced by the recession of 2008-10, this community has already done a lot of thinking about what its mission should be and how best to ensure the university’s future success.

In addition to reading the multiple summaries from the 2011-13 strategic planning process, annual reports submitted by every academic department and program to their respective deans, and a recent multiyear review of general education requirements by a special task force, I have listened and learned from many constituencies in multiple venues. I have gained a broad sense of our history, challenges, strengths, opportunities, and, most important, great potential. My conversations have included one-on-one meetings during my office hours; weekly small-group lunches, now numbering more than 60, with faculty, staff, and students; and travel across the country to meet with alumni, parents, and friends of the university. And I have studied the 33 self-reflection papers submitted by faculty and administrators across the university.

## **II. HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

The following areas — our strategic priorities — are intentionally broad, most likely come as little surprise to longtime members of the Brandeis community, and require articulation and strong content if they are to represent a meaningful direction for the university.

I have included in each major area some ideas based on Brandeis' history, previous planning efforts, the work of the Task Force on General Education, the 33 self-reflection documents, and my personal conversations and observations during my first 17 months as president. They represent only part of the content to be associated with each strategic area. We will be forming small task forces to delve deeply into each strategic area and further define goals.

- **Brandeis as a newly extroverted institution with regional, national, and global connections and impact**
  - Sharing institutional (student, faculty, and staff) accomplishments with the wider world in order to build strong external relationships and greater support.
  - Creating, with university support, intentional connections within the institution — as well as with Greater Boston, the U.S., Israel, other international institutions of higher education, cultural institutions, and businesses — to enhance our academic programs.
  - Defining “social justice” for an institution of higher education, including engaging students on moral issues about how to live, what is just, and how to contribute personally and professionally to the world through one’s own actions and talents.
  
- **A redefinition of the student experience (both undergraduate and graduate)**
  - Placing students at the center of what we do, with a focus on residential communities (including their physical infrastructure), curriculum, pedagogies, academic advising, career placement, counseling, and mentoring about life skills.
  - Taking into account the impact that technology, global competition and cooperation, demographic changes, and a dynamic labor market have on our students.
  - Creating a unified community with a shared school spirit.
  
- **A commitment to the highest standards for research and the production of new knowledge**
  - Supporting in significant ways faculty research and knowledge creation in all academic programs through expanded faculty development opportunities regardless of the degrees (BA, BS, MA, MS, PhD) offered by one’s department.
  - Modernizing the academic physical infrastructure.
  - Focusing investment in graduate programs where Brandeis excels or can excel within our R-1 and professional education environments.

- Articulating university policy on free expression to ensure the freedom to explore, research, teach, and create new knowledge and artistic works by faculty and students.
- **A mission that includes service to the Jewish community**
  - Though nonsectarian, committing to providing an essential resource for the broad and deep study of Jewish topics, and Jewish and Israel studies.
  - Ensuring a rich environment for the growth and maturation of our Jewish students.

### **III. PROCESS AND DRAFT TIMELINE**

Over the past year, it has become clear to me that we need to move beyond what feels like a freewheeling mode of operations and management (akin to “startup mode”), to one that is predictable with known structures typical of those found in older, more established institutions. The image I like to use to explain this is that of a powerful locomotive engine, which needs well-laid tracks before it can become operational. We have many areas of excellence at the university, but we lack the structures, systems, policies, and known protocols to take advantage of all we do well and meet our potential.

Over the coming months, we will need to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the plan that emerges by late summer. Some of the issues to address, a good number of which have been mentioned in the self-reflection documents, include:

- Aligning the administrative structure of the university with the dual mission of providing a personalized liberal-arts undergraduate education on the one hand, while maintaining Brandeis’ standing among the world’s leading research universities on the other.
- Strengthening institutional governance by clarifying the roles of the board, the administration, faculty, staff, and students, and updating institutional bylaws along with faculty and student handbooks.
- Assessing alternative time/space modes of operations
  - a. using the summer months to create an additional “term” to expand academic and “applied and co-op-like” opportunities.
  - b. establishing remote locations to expand local student access and enhance specific study and applied programs.
- Reconceiving the financial underpinnings of the university
  - a. by streamlining the current model of financial relationships between the university and lower-level units (the schools, the centers/institutes, and the museum).

- b. by aligning resource allocation with agreed-upon priorities of the university.
- Reimagining how we engage and strengthen bonds with our alumni.
- Defining and committing to administrative transparency.

The process to lay the appropriate groundwork so that “locomotive” Brandeis will have the necessary tracks on which to pursue its goals and articulate the details of its vision will be, by necessity, dynamic and iterative. Here is what I envision over the next nine months:

### **November 2017-March 2018**

- Open meetings to share a summary of the 33 self-reflection reports and the contours of a university plan
- Feedback on the general contours/strategic priorities through comments from:
  - a. attendees at open meetings
  - b. Faculty Senate
  - c. deans and division heads
  - d. Student Union
  - e. Graduate Student Council
  - f. (new) Staff Advisory Council
  - g. Alumni Board
  - h. Parents Advisory Council
- Form the committee on student life
- Form mini-task forces on remaining buckets

### **March-April 2018**

- Circulate refined university “vision statement” for feedback
- Complete university policies regarding freedom of expression
- Review recommendations from mini-task forces
- Make final edits to the vision statement

### **April Board Meeting through August 2018**

- Finalize searches for the dean of arts and sciences and the dean of IBS
- Board consideration of the vision statement (April 2018)
- Prioritize initiatives
- Assign costs to initiatives
- Fine-tune financial model with assumptions on major revenue sources and expense drivers
- Select and sequence initiatives within a five-year draft financial plan
- Seek affirmation by the Faculty Senate, faculty, and board

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

My first year and a half on campus has given me great confidence in Brandeis' future. The exceptional quality, dedication, and loyalty of the faculty is the university's strongest asset. The faculty is also the administration and board's most important partner if the institution is to achieve its aspirations and live up to its founders' high ideals.

Building what I believe can be our university's most unique promise to our outstanding (current and future) undergraduate students — an education as exceptional as that offered by any residential liberal-arts college, along with collaborative research and creative work opportunities unavailable at those institutions — will require a new focus and a perspective rarely seen in the academy. Such a focus and perspective will involve a necessary softening of established and increasingly impervious silos in favor of a singular institutional perspective — moving beyond the interests of one's own program and pursuing what is best for the university. It will mean accepting new ways of governing, new approaches to decision-making, and new methods of resource allocation. Ensuring excellence in our graduate programs will require a similar mindset if we are to address gaps in critical support of and services for our graduate students.

As a relative newcomer to Brandeis, I bring a fresh set of eyes to the university — at least for a while. These fresh eyes tell me there is something very special here, but it needs significant attention and care to thrive, or even simply to survive in the long term (though mere survival cannot be our goal).

I believe the university can no longer put off critical investments in a number of areas. To make these investments, we must align our aspirations with both our priorities and our available resources. I look forward to beginning this process on Tuesday, November 28.