



College of Communication and Information

This document examines the key strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results (SOAR) for the College of Communication and Information (CCI) at the University of Kentucky (UK).

Academic Leadership Associates, LLC (ALA) prepared this analysis based on insights from key College internal and external stakeholders from a meeting of the National Board of Advisors on October 25, 2019 and a series of meetings and workshops held on November 18 and 19, 2019. The internal stakeholders participating in these meetings/workshops included the College's leadership group, faculty (with a special meeting/workshop for untenured faculty), staff and students (from all College degree-level programs). The external stakeholders participating in the meetings/workshop included individuals in leadership positions at the UK but not in the CCI, alumni, employers and members of the Lexington community. Over the course of a day and one half there were separate meetings for these individual stakeholder groups and a longer workshop with about 40 participants drawn from across all groups.

Strengths

In a SOAR analysis, Strengths focus on the key question: *What can we build on?* [Stavros and Hinrichs, 2009] To provide thought starters we asked participants working individually and then in groups to consider the following questions, among others:

- What are we most proud of at CCI?
- What achievements over the last couple of years we feel were most significant?
- What makes us distinctive?
- How do these distinctions provide value to the broad marketplace in which we work?

The strengths at CCI identified by the participants can be classified into the categories which are described in detail next (of course, some responses also could be classified in multiple categories):

- The New Leadership and Environment at CCI (sample comments):
 - A new dean with opportunities for a new vision
 - The opportunity for a more collaborative and friendly environment
- Strong Faculty and Staff (sample comments)
 - Student-focused
 - Engaged, passionate and strong
 - Diverse and rich experience (both academic and “real-world” of faculty across a wide range of CCI programs)
 - Young, new faculty
 - Strong, student-centered faculty
 - Staff care and are committed to student success
 - Faculty and staff advisors genuinely care about students and their success

- Curriculum and Education Programs across all degree levels (sample comments):
 - Strong academic programs including legacy programs, new innovative programs and on-line programs
 - Distinctive programs in areas such as Health Communications, ICT, ISC and MAS
 - Diversity of learning methodologies (in-person and on-line)
 - Service, extra-curricular and experiential learning including student media, study abroad and alumni programs
- Teaching/Learning (sample comments):
 - Strong instructional expertise
 - Strong balance between on-hands professional and academic learning
 - Award-winning student organizations
 - Faculty care deeply about teaching and student success
- Existing Outstanding Reputation (sample comments):
 - CCI's outstanding reputation across UK
 - CCI's strong national and international reputation based on its outstanding faculty, students and academic programs
 - Award-winning student organizations
- Students (sample comments):
 - Professor/student interactions
 - Student interactions with the professional community outside of UK
 - Faculty/staff caring for students and committed to their success
 - Increased CCI enrollments
 - Access to students through UK general education classes
 - Student awards, the Kernel, and radio
- Research (sample comments):
 - A good balance of applied and theoretical research
 - Productivity of research faculty and ability to engage multiple constituents
 - Scholarly research is bold, relevant and far-reaching
 - Opportunities for student research
- Professional Connections (sample comments):
 - CCI has excellent relationships with UK and Lexington
 - Strong engagement and partnerships with the community broadly defined
 - The Alumni Advisory Board

Opportunities

In a SOAR analysis, opportunities focus on the key question: *What are our stakeholders asking for?* [Stavros and Hinrichs, 2009] To provide thought starters we asked participants working individually and then in groups to consider the following questions, among others:

- What are the most significant opportunities on which we should focus our efforts?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders?
- How do we differentiate ourselves from our peer institutions and colleges?
- How can we reframe challenges to become opportunities?

The opportunities for CCI as identified by the participants can be classified into the categories which are described in detail next:

- The New Leadership and Environment at CCI (sample comments):
 - The new leadership provides the opportunity to boost awareness of CCI at UK, in the community and in industry
 - Increased opportunities for increased philanthropy
- Curriculum
 - Update and reviewing current curricula
 - Demand for new programs in the area of digital media, sports and health communications, information sciences, and in the international arena
 - Multi-platform preparation of students in all forms of communication
 - Creating a culture of rigor into undergraduate and graduate education
 - Build on our strength in on-line learning
- Faculty/Staff
 - Strategic attracting and recruiting and retaining of a broad-based diverse faculty
 - More teaching/research collaborations across faculties within CCI
 - Greater focus on applying for and obtaining external grants
 - Increasing the diversity of faculty and staff
 - Providing additional personal development programs for faculty and staff
- Students
 - Retention and higher enrollment of undergraduates
 - Increase student input
 - Increase the perception of the quality of CCI undergraduate students and academic programs
 - Better tracking of undergraduate and graduate student placements
 - Highlight student successes
- Facilities
 - New building that brings together the various schools and faculty at CCI (This was an opportunity that was mentioned more than any other)
 - Up-to-date technology
 - Creating of an academic resource center
 - Creating a safe space for students to share with academic advisors
- Collaborations – Internal to CCI
 - Collaborative initiatives across the university
 - Collaborations specifically with UK HealthCare and UK Athletics
 - Collaborations across the college
 - Bringing the College together literally (building) and figuratively (more unity)
 - Focus on decreasing the disconnect between undergraduate and graduate students and programs
 - More structured organization in the College and creation of unified programs
 - More cross-disciplinary programs
 - Defining and building a CCI brand
 - More support from the university leadership

- Collaborations-External to CCI
 - Alumni relationships and partnerships
 - Partner with extension services
 - Creating a unified CCI brand that the external community understands
 - Increased philanthropy and grant funding
 - Serving Kentucky as part of the land-grant mission
- Other
 - Protect the 1st amendment
 - Helping Journalism save democracy
 - Leader in open exchange of ideas for a free country

Aspirations

In a SOAR analysis, aspirations focus on the key question: *What do we care deeply about?* [Stavros and Hinrichs, 2009] To provide thought starters we asked participants working individually and then in groups to consider the following questions, among others:

- Based on our perceived strengths and opportunities who are we, who should we become and where should we go in the future?
- What are our most compelling aspirations?
- What strategic initiatives might support these aspirations?

The aspirations which for the most part mirror the opportunities identified for CCI can be classified into the categories which are described in detail next:

- Curriculum
 - Stronger and better funded graduate programs
 - Strong doctoral programs/best Ph.D. programs in the country
 - Enhancing national and international reputation
 - Building on strength in on-line programs
 - Building a better media/mass communication focus
 - Diverse, distinct and coherent CCI curriculum and programs with a consistent core, streamlined and centralized resources and increased on-line offerings
- Faculty
 - Recruiting excellent faculty
 - Increasing extramural funding for and by faculty
 - Significant emphasis on research including translational research, cross-disciplinary research and recognition of different types of research
- Staff
 - Diversity in staff and that we value diversity across all diversity issues
 - Address gender-based inequality in both staff and faculty
 - Continuing education of staff
- Financial
 - Achieve financial stability
 - Increasing financial resources – philanthropy, extramural funding, UK support

- Building
 - New building with up-to-date laboratories, facilities and collaborative space
- Collaborations Internal to CCI
 - We are college choice for students
 - We are the college choice for employers
 - A unified college with a new building
 - Developing a cohesive, unified identity for the College, emphasizing collaboration over competition between units, highlighting all types of research and recognition of different research output.
- Collaborations External to CCI
 - Enhance civic and community engagement
 - Cultivate alumni
 - Better branding and marketing of a unified college
- Rankings/Other
 - Improved rankings
 - Top-ranked college – best statewide and nationally
 - Increased job and academic placements
 - We are destination for the campus
 - Our curriculum is perceived within UK as rigorous and our undergraduate students are *better* than those in other colleges and STEM majors

Results

In a SOAR analysis, Results focus on the key question: *How do we know we are succeeding?* [Stavros and Hinrichs, 2019]) Over the day and half of meetings/workshops less time was devoted to the Results area in the SOAR analysis as this area will be a key focus on the strategic planning process beginning in 2020.

However, to initiate the discussion on results we asked participants working individually and then in groups to consider the following question: Given our discussions of strengths, opportunities and aspirations what are the initially meaningful measures that indicate we are on track to achieving our goals? The results of the individual and group deliberations are the following initial results:

- Completed or in-construction facility with established research/teaching/student space with equipment and technology available to students, staff and faculty
- Creation of a unified faculty and a culture of unity within the faculty with cross unit collaboration
- The creation and dissemination of a unified College brand
- Increased enrollment and diversity of students
- Increased diversity in faculty and staff
- Increased real and perceived quality of CCI students
- The development of distinct and coherent curriculum with a focus on digital and emerging technologies
- Increased active alumni engagement with CCI
- Increased funding and revenue sources

Consultant Summary and Observations

Over a day and one half on November 18-19, 2019, we facilitated a series of meetings/workshops with internal and external College stakeholders. Individual sessions were held for distinct stakeholder groups and a longer workshop with about 40 participants drawn from all groups. Both oral and written feedback was obtained from all meetings/workshops.

The College of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky is at an important crossroad in its long and distinguished history that traces its roots back to the 1890's. A new dean, Jennifer Greer, assumed the CCI deanship in August 2019 and this appointment was seen unanimously by all stakeholders participating in the SOAR process as opening the doors to a new era in the College's history, an era built on strong foundation of excellent faculty, staff and students. Key takeaways from the SOAR analysis detailed above are:

Facilities

Probably the most significant opportunity and aspiration identified by those participating in the SOAR analysis discussions was the immediate need for a new facility that is large enough to house all schools, departments and programs within the College. This facility needs to have research/teaching/student space with equipment and technology available to students, staff and faculty, especially in the areas of digital media and communication.

However, this facility needs to serve as more than a physical building; it needs to lead to a cultural change within CCI. Mention was made by almost all stakeholders that the College needs to create a more unified structure and remove the school and program silos that currently exist in the College. Curricula need to be unified to the extent appropriate, leaders across programs need to work collaboratively, as do faculty and staff. It has been very difficult for the College to achieve these aspirations while located across disparate locations. Thus, a new building is key to and a metaphor for the opportunity and aspiration to unify the College both tangibly and intangibly.

Branding and Funding

Buildings at the University of Kentucky need to be significantly funded by external donations. This need was recognized by stakeholder participants through the expressed desire to build on the existing strengths in the College by creating a unified brand for the College that leads to a case statement for a new building. Participants clearly understood that the individual units within the College have an excellent reputation with UK and external academic and professional community. Yet, the rather siloed nature of the College has hampered its efforts to be recognized for the existing excellent quality of the College at large. Thus, many of the opportunities and aspirations listed above are clearly focused on unifying the College both in reality and perception and creating programs that are on the leading edge that meet the needs of the College's varied stakeholders.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an important face of branding and funding. The combined academic and professional focus of the College provide substantial opportunities for meaningful community engagement both within and external to the university. This is a current strength and

one that SOAR analysis participants desire to see the College build upon. Opportunities abound for increased internships and experiential and service learning for CCI students. On the other hand, substantial opportunities exist for alumni and employers and the community at large to benefit from the work that goes on within the College including the research and teaching of its faculty. Many of the aspirations listed by meeting and workshop participants were focused on how to leverage the College's current strengths and opportunities vis-à-vis its alumni and external community.

Student and Academic Programs

Current students and the College's academic programs are seen as strengths, but participants noted that there are opportunities to strengthen both the perception and reality of the composition and quality of the current student body and the academic programs in which they study. College enrollments are strong, but participants felt that enrollments could grow across both in-person and on-line programs, and there is a clear desire for a more diverse student body across all degree programs. CCI student's themselves are concerned that their peers from other colleges perceive them as "taking the easy way out" and that CCI programs are not considered to be rigorous as STEM programs.

Nonetheless, the College has programs that are well-respected within UK and in the academic and professional communities. Meeting and workshop participants see an opportunity to strengthen curriculum across undergraduate, professional graduate and Ph.D. programs. Their aspirations are to build on existing strengths and to ensure that new programs related to digital media, health communications and other technology focused degrees are developed and implemented. SOAR participants felt that the College has opportunities to play a larger role in the larger UK academic community as well as the broader external community.

Faculty and Staff

The hiring of new dean, the development of new academic programs and ultimately the construction of a new building provide CCI with the opportunity to recruit, develop and retain qualified and diverse faculty and staff. Workshop participants recognize the existing high quality of the community (faculty, staff and students) within CCI, and aspire to continually increase the quality and commitment of the people within the CCI community.

The mixture of academic and professional qualifications of the College's faculty and the quality and diversity of the faculty's research is seen as clearly a strength and a strength that should be intentionally enhanced.

Summary

This SOAR analysis sought to engage a significant number of College stakeholders in the preliminary discussions in advance of the January 2020 launch of strategic planning. Many of the participants in the meetings will become members of the strategic planning team. The output from the SOAR analysis above will serve as a valuable input into developing a vision and/or mission statement, articulating the College's values, defining measures of success, and identifying distinctions, strategies and actions needed to achieve the mission of the College of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky.