

# Summary President's Listening Report – Fall 2010

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## Introduction

After 90 days of listening to students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the university, I have compiled the following report as an attempt to chronicle what I heard. My listening included an online survey completed by over 150 respondents, three open forums, many group and departmental meetings, both on and off campus, in addition to personal conversations with over 2,000 individuals. The result is nearly 70 pages of comments organized into 8 categories: 1) Academic Advancement and Degree Attainment; 2) The CU Student Experience; 3) Financial Capacity; 4) Faculty and Staff Success; 5) A Culture of Planning, Assessment, and Continuous Improvement; 6) Communication Listening and Dialogue; 7) A Solid and Visible Leadership; and 8) Civic Engagement.

Within each category the feedback was further divided as to: What Clarion University currently does best; What Clarion University could do better; How should the president spend her time; What is the one thing the new president should do this year; and What will I (the respondent to the online survey) do to advance Clarion. Regarding the information from the on-line survey, the text is presented exactly as received except any specific names of individuals or departments except mine were removed. I will review confidentially specific details with the individuals named. All information regarding any individual respondents was also removed. These efforts have been taken to ensure a level of civility and confidentiality while making clear the intentions of respondents.

This report has formed the basis of my individual plan of my action for the next 500 days of the presidency from October 2010 – May 2012. The individual plan is presented in a second report. I thank everyone who took time to comment to me personally, in groups, and on line. My hope is that in many ways you will find your best thoughts regarding Clarion University in this report and the subsequent plan. While I have been clear that I can not guarantee everyone's satisfaction with this university presidency, I can guarantee everyone's involvement. Please consider this report evidence of this commitment to inclusion as we all work together to ensure Clarion University's future success.

Fly Eagles Fly!

Karen Whitney  
November 18, 2010

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## Academic Advancement and Degree Attainment

### **Summary:**

There were many expressions of pride in Clarion's long history of academic excellence and hard work. The points of pride included not only what is taught but also pride in how we teach and whom we teach in terms of increased numbers of students who are first generation students, students from small communities, and students who may not be fully academically prepared.

There was also a large set of comments regarding what challenges Clarion academically as an institution. Class size, course availability, course scheduling sequencing, financial aid, and advising were most often cited as areas for improvement.

There were many comments advising the president on ways to contribute. Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*"I hope that she will treat faculty as the experts that they are, and send the message that academics are valued at Clarion. While financial stability is important, it is merely a means to an end, not the ultimate mission of the university."*

## The CU Student Experience

### **Summary:**

There were many expressions of pride in the student experience at Clarion including overall strong feelings of community and belonging. The points of pride included not only feelings of involvement but also comments about the importance of student-centered services such as admissions, advising, financial aid and housing to the overall experience. The central relationship most often mentioned was the relationship between students and faculty around the common ground of teaching and learning.

There was also a large set of comments regarding what many believe challenges Clarion's student experience, including the need to restore and expand student services, programs and facilities. There were many comments expressing frustration with enrollment related services such as financial aid and course availability. The physical environment was also frequently mentioned as needing improvement such as landscaping, sidewalks, and learning spaces.

There were many comments advising the president on ways to contribute. Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*"Become a student-centered institution--an institution where decisions are based on how they will impact student learning and the student experience, as opposed to placing the primary focus on how decisions will impact faculty/staff."*

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## Financial Capacity

### **Summary:**

The greatest expression of pride for the university's financial efforts was for the University's history of offering a college education at an affordable price to students. While taking pride in our historic affordability there is an obvious anxiety about the university's ability to continue this commitment.

Comments on how to improve our financial capacity varied from suggestions on greater fiscal oversight of our expenditures to descriptions of the long-term adverse effects of annual reductions of the budget upon filling faculty positions.

There were many comments advising the president on ways to strengthen our university financially. There were also comments that many are hoping the president will take a leadership role to increase the financial capacity of the university to carry out its mission. Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*"Have a sound comprehensive financial plan for the university's future particularly given the serious issues facing it."*

## Faculty and Staff Success

### **Summary:**

There were many comments of pride regarding the faculty and staff of Clarion University. Most notable were comments around the care that faculty and staff have for students personally and a commitment to preparing students academically. Faculty were described as committed to mentoring students and developing quality learning experiences. There were also many comments that indicate a great sense of community and civility among faculty and staff with each other.

Many comments recommended that to support the success of faculty and staff more faculty and staff should be hired to teach and provide services/programs. These comments also expressed a frustration over the decline in funding over several years that has resulted in the incremental devolution of faculty and staff positions from full-time positions to temporary positions as well as not filling positions when they become vacated. This devolution has resulted in increased work loads and a general concern about the future quality of the institution.

There were comments that many are hoping the president will take a leadership role to reverse the trend of hiring part-time faculty. Comments were vague as to how we might increase the financial capacity of the university or how to determine the basis for funding full-time faculty positions. Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

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*"Maintaining the strong working relationship between the administration and the rank & file by learning the culture, asking questions before making decisions and sharing the rationale for the decisions."*

## A Culture of Planning, Assessment and Continuous Improvement

### **Summary:**

There were no points of pride indicated regarding Clarion's work in the area of planning, assessment and institutional improvement. There were many comments regarding suggestions for areas deserving improvement. Comments referenced the need to assess what we do in order to inform future efforts, to plan well in order to determine the strategic allocation of limited funds, and to empower faculty and staff to regularly use data to inform decisions. Given the timing of our work with our Middle States Accreditation, there were many comments regarding the importance of meeting accreditation planning and assessment standards.

There were many comments calling for a change in the university's approach to planning and assessing. There were calls to improve a variety of administrative processes, which are viewed as not fully serving students, faculty and staff. Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*"There are some issues with processes of administration and communication. Some of these may be procedural - clarifying processes and empowering people to make decisions."*

## Communication, Listening and Dialogue

### **The Summary:**

There were few comments of pride regarding communication. However, there were many comments indicating the importance of communication, listening, and dialogue within the university with calls for the new president to establish routine events to ensure communication across the university organization. There were many comments expressing feelings of not being heard and the importance of people in power and authority listening to others in order to advance the university. Finally there were expressions of not feeling reasonably well informed about the university and a lack of transparency adversely affecting employees' ability to do good work.

There were many comments that suggested that the university should communicate more often and with more effort to a variety of external audiences in order to attract more students, increase popular support, and advance the university.

Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*"Creating an environment with faculty, staff, administrators and students that allows for candid feedback on how to move forward without dwelling on how we've always done things."*

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## A Solid and Visible Leadership

### **Summary**

Interestingly, there were few comments directly attributable to what we do best in regard to leadership. In other sections pride in leadership was expressed in combination with another theme. There were many comments regarding individuals in leadership positions and either how decisions were made or how they demonstrated poor leadership. There were calls for the president to hold the leadership of the campus more clearly accountable for achieving specific outcomes.

There were a multitude of comments asking that the leadership of the campus and the president in particular to establish an ongoing routine of being visible throughout the campus and the community. There were also many comments for the president to work with the leadership of the campus, the Provost, Vice Presidents, Associate/Assistant Vice Presidents, and Deans to lead in a manner that builds trust and commitment, appreciates differences of opinion, ensures accountability, and results in moving the university forward.

Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*“Championing the things Clarion does well, striving to change the things we don't do well, keeping a balance of the bottom line and the quality of educational experiences for the students, faculty, and staff.”*

## Civic Engagement

### **Summary:**

There are many points of pride regarding how the members of Clarion University work with the community. In particular, respondents recognized that the University contributes positively to the economic development of the region. There is also a commitment to using our teaching, learning, research and university assets to benefit the region.

Comments suggested that we could communicate more effectively the good that Clarion University brings to the community along with the value of the students we graduate, the value of the people we employ, and the value of the services and programs which the region enjoys because of Clarion University.

Perhaps the response that best summarizes the comments of many and one that will resonate with us as we move the university forward is a comment advising the President as follows:

*“Incorporating the off campus community into our teaching and our research helps our students really apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world while at the same time helping the community be successful.”*