

2010 Strategic Thinking

A black and white photograph of the Chicago skyline, featuring the Willis Tower and other skyscrapers under a cloudy sky.

vision

A red circle containing the text "mission + values".

**mission
+
values**

UIC

A red circle containing the text "environment".

environment

A red circle containing the text "people".

people

A red circle containing the text "institution".

institution



UIC Strategic Thinking : Introduction

Since October of 2003, the 2010 Committee has engaged the UIC community in an exercise in “strategic thinking.” During this process we have been asked many times, Don’t you really mean strategic planning? Actually we don’t. Strategic thinking is both a collective process and a preparatory one. It sets in motion a collaborative, institution-wide conversation about the vision and the mission of the university, designed to help us decide what we should be planning for rather than to tell us what our plans should be. Strategic thinking sets the stage and provides focus for the more specific strategic planning that is crucial to the effective development of a university. Thus, strategic thinking is the first step toward institutional evaluation, change, and growth.

But a first step implies more steps to follow. Strategic thinking must be followed by action, and action requires planning. The information and recommendations gathered in this document can guide the principles on which UIC plans its actions. In sidebars throughout the document we suggest agenda items and potential directions for the plan that follows—examples of endeavors, informed by the university’s mission and values—that are necessary for UIC to move toward the vision of 2010.

UIC: Then and Now

Like many great public universities, UIC has no single origin. The university as we know it today was formed in 1982, when a consolidation of the University of Illinois Medical Center and the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle brought together the history and traditions of two very different campuses. The Medical Center campus, dating back to the mid-1800s, housed the health sciences colleges and the University of Illinois Hospital. The architecturally distinctive Chicago Circle campus, opened in 1965, was a comprehensive teaching and research university. It was the successor to an earlier campus, housed in temporary buildings on Navy Pier, that had served as a feeder for the University of Illinois after World War II.

Over the past twenty years UIC has transformed itself into one of the top fifty research universities in the United States. UIC now has more than 25,000 students, almost 40 percent of them professional or graduate students. It employs more than 11,000 people. The campus comprises more than 100 buildings on 250 acres of land just southwest of Chicago's Loop plus sites in Rockford, Peoria and Urbana-Champaign. For all the changes in the site and size of the campus and in its mission and visibility, UIC remains inextricably tied to the city of Chicago. Those ties are affirmed by UIC's Great Cities Commitment: partnering with government agencies, community organizations, businesses and schools, UIC has sought to improve the quality of life in Chicago, and other urban areas, through teaching, research, service and economic development. Supporting that commitment, the Medical Center annually handles over 470,000 visits from the community, and the College of Medicine provides Illinois with one out of every six of the state's physicians.

Students are attracted to UIC. They are applying in increasing numbers and they reflect the diverse, global nature of Chicago and other cities around the country and the world. Put another way, many of our students are decidedly urban, and over a third speak English as a second language—they work well in the city environment and appreciate the resources it provides. As a state assisted university, we offer a tuition advantage over many schools; as a premier research university, we offer an intellectual advantage over many others. Furthermore, our location in Chicago makes us attractive to students and faculty both. Taken together, these factors—the kinds of students who want to study here, the kinds of faculty who want to teach and work here, the kinds of involvement with the global city that our location makes possible—are fundamental to who we are.

Strategic Starting Points

We assume that UIC can be at once:

- 1** A source of high quality, comprehensive undergraduate education;
- 2** The home of highly competitive academic programs of graduate and professional preparation;
- 3** A public research institution, state-assisted and therefore responsible to the state, even in the face of declining state investment;
- 4** A fully integrated institution, engaged in the city of Chicago, the state of Illinois and the world, at all levels of research and service.

These ambitions and responsibilities combine to create a dynamic institution where change often occurs at dramatic rates. As starting points for strategic thinking, they require thoughtful participation by all of us at UIC—students and faculty, staff and partners, alumni and friends of the university. In this spirit, the UIC Strategic Thinking 2010 Committee has sought to be inclusive, reflective and at times provocative. The committee's aim is to set in motion a representative and fully engaged deliberative process that will stimulate and enrich us all.

The committee itself is a diverse group representing a wide range of faculty, staff and students at UIC, as well as the interests of alumni and the business community. We have taken our charge from the Provost very seriously, and we have attempted to build an inclusive and interactive process of strategic reflection and direction. We understand our mission to involve not only writing a report but helping to create an ongoing culture of strategic development. Toward this end, we have held over forty full committee meetings and met with every college in subcommittee meetings over the past year. We have met with student, faculty and internal interest groups, and with alumni and external interest groups. We have met with every level of administrative and program management, participated in the 2004 Campus Leadership Retreat, engaged in literally hundreds of conversations with members of the UIC community and collected and reviewed numerous UIC documents and reports, including historical documentation. To give us context we have also identified, and placed on our website, the strategic efforts of more than one hundred public and private universities (<http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/oa/2010/resources.html>). This document is intended to stimulate conversation and deliberation across the campus. With the help of faculty and students in the Graphic Design program of the College of Architecture and the Arts, we will create an interactive website where the campus can continue to re-work and re-invent the strategic direction of UIC. We hope the discussion begun here will come to play a role in committees across the campus, in conversations among colleagues and even in the curricula of some classes. Still, it is a document that is the heart of this process. Our approach to strategic thinking is substantially different from those described in most of the strategic planning documents you will find on other public university websites. What we have learned from every sector of the campus over the last year does not lend itself readily to traditional academic and institutional categories. UIC's unique mission and vision have led us to report our strategic findings in a slightly unconventional but, we hope, compelling way.

2010 Strategic Thinking



- 1 Vision.** The vision provides a view of UIC that acknowledges where we have been, registers our experiences in the moment and challenges us to shape a future with a focus, but without limits.
- 2 Mission and Values.** This discussion provides direction toward our vision and begins to identify the standards by which we will measure success at UIC.
- 3 Environment.** Here we explore the physical condition of UIC, its architectural and developmental role in the city of Chicago, the goals and themes of our physical environment and the planning that will lead UIC to excel as a great urban institution.
- 4 People.** Our report on the people of UIC encompasses students, faculty, staff and visitors, describing the demands of instruction, research and support. We identify key themes of current life at UIC and offer a set of targeted objectives for 2010.
- 5 Institution.** This section examines the administrative, managerial and financial infrastructure necessary to support UIC and its diverse constituencies in reaching the vision and fulfilling our mission. While these structures and processes are not as visible as buildings and people, they evoked some of the most passionate calls for change.

The document does not deal explicitly with our financial constraints. It's not that we aren't very much aware of these, it's rather that we believe the purpose of our committee is to think about what UIC should be doing in 2010 in ways that are in some respects budget-neutral. If one outcome of this process is a set of priorities, they will be roughly the same whether we have significant discretionary resources (in which case we can hope to accomplish a lot of them) or very little (in which case we will have to make the hard choices that make this process, and the guidance of this document, even more important).

At the same time, the need for resources has been very much a part of our thinking. Indeed, one crucial purpose of this report is to provide the kind of vision that will make it obvious in both the public and the private sphere—in the legislature and the corporate community, among alumni and other potential donors—that UIC is, as we all passionately believe, an institution worth investing in.