June 3, 2013

Dear Friends:

The 2012-2013 fiscal year has brought significant change to Missouri S&T and the University of Missouri System, with new leadership at both the campus and system level, and the creation of this comprehensive strategic plan. It’s also been a year of great change for higher education at the national level. Faced with tightening budgets, technological disruption and increased public debate about the value of a college degree, institutions everywhere are coming to the realization that the days of “business as usual” are quickly drawing to a close.

At Missouri S&T, we aren’t waiting for an imminent crisis to force us to act. By undertaking this thorough and comprehensive strategic planning process over the last year, we are ready to move forward confidently into the future, rather than have decisions thrust upon us by external forces.

As I became immersed in all things S&T during my first year here, the campus community also learned more about me. You may recall that one of my hobbies is gardening, so it should not surprise you to learn that during my travels I have visited many parks and gardens, paying particular attention to the variety of thriving indigenous foliage and fauna, as well as to their diverse styles and forms. Denver gardens display riotous color and tamed wilderness. Japanese gardens — serene and reflective — blend natural beauty and textures. English gardens produce a sense of order and elegance.

With its three phases of preparation, planting and nurturing, gardening is, in many ways, akin to leadership. Not all people feel comfortable with this analogy, however, because nurturing necessarily involves pruning, and that is sometimes difficult. Determining what to no longer do is often harder than determining what to do. Indeed, it took me some time to overcome my natural hesitancy to change the direction a plant was growing, or to move a tree that was not thriving in its current location. And I had to read numerous gardening books, and visit with many successful gardeners, to realize that pruning is essential for health and productivity.

Not until I planted roses did I truly appreciate the amount of attention — and pruning — required to help such plants thrive. In a broader context, though, I prefer to reach back into history and put our more modern concept of pruning into perspective. The Greek word airo is often translated to mean “pruning” or “removing,” but a more accurate interpretation may be “to lift up.” All of us could use a little lift now and then!

Like the best gardeners, we at Missouri S&T must realize that continuous improvement involves constant monitoring and adaptation (pruning). We must be nimble in implementing our focused yet dynamic strategic plan and prune those actions that do not bear desired fruit, so that our attention and resources are both directed and effective and our progress and success is ensured.
Preparation

Our legacy over the past 143 years provides a remarkable foundation upon which to build. Together with traditions and structure, our understanding of S&T and its people energizes us to embrace the present and create the future. Rooted in this broad and inclusive strategic planning preparation — and upheld by standards that reflect what is important and guide our decisions — we envision a sense of place for the S&T of 2020 manifested by providing a top return on investment to our key customers. I am gratified to see that this comprehensive strategic planning process has helped clarify our mission and the strategy we employ to fulfill our overall vision, which is to be the first place people go for innovation in research, education and partnerships to address our world’s critical challenges.

Planting

Missouri S&T is a community not only of thought but also of action. Enhancing access to and interaction with renowned faculty and staff, services and experiential learning opportunities — hallmarks of the Missouri S&T experience — provides fertile soil for growth. With the many educational, research and business ventures in which our institution can, and does, take the lead, each of us — staff, administrators, faculty, alumni, and partners alike — must plant “seeds” that foster creativity, entrepreneurship and a culture of excellence. Embracing wholeheartedly the Missouri S&T strategy will help achieve sustainable growth, ensure the best yield, and enhance our reputation.

Nurturing

And let us not forget to water and (cross-)fertilize! The concepts of encouragement, engagement, cultural competency, inclusion, and building and growing relationships are characteristic of this plan. Given that most new advances cross disciplines and institutional boundaries, we must facilitate interdisciplinary and multi-institutional collaborations that add value beyond what could be accomplished alone. Further, to be most relevant and competitive in a global environment, we must continue to engage our customers and stakeholders in meaningful and open dialogue and to recognize and reward collective contributions to our mutual success.

We are most effective as a university if each one of us can answer the following three questions:

1. Where are we going?
2. How will we get there?
3. How do I fit in?
Answers to all of these questions lie within this plan and its dynamic nature. The answers to the first two questions are the same for each of us, and they originate in the vision, strategy statement and metrics. The answer to the third question is much more personal, and one that drives your own actions and decisions on a daily basis. I urge you to find that answer for yourself guided by the values, themes, levers and specific actions in the plan; regularly reflect on what other actions, priorities and opportunities might improve the plan’s evolution; and make your own contributions to our journey toward success.

This strategic plan is the fruit of an unusual process — one in which we flipped our perspective and viewed Missouri S&T from our customers’ point of view. Thousands of participants addressed how to provide a top return on investment for six key customer groups chosen from among 36 very important stakeholders.

The insights gained from this 180-degree shift requires us to think candidly about how we add value, change lives and help solve the world’s great challenges in education, energy, health, information, security and the environment.

Thousands of students, faculty, staff, alumni, business partners, research partners and others helped shape this plan; hundreds were instrumental in its development and are listed in Appendix B; still others have assumed leadership roles and are important resources for its implementation. I thank each of you for all that you have done and continue to do to achieve our vision. Special thanks go to the Strategic Planning Coalition, the Chancellor’s Cabinet, the six Customer Task Forces, and the extraordinary leadership, organization and dedication of co-chairs Dr. James A. Drallmeier and Dr. Warren K. Wray. I’m also grateful for the support and assistance of Krista Chambers in the Provost’s Office and Linda Bramel, in my office.

I am proud of all our accomplishments and am convinced that the seeds we’ve all planted this year will grow and prosper. Thank you for extraordinary and sustained effort in shaping an exciting future for Missouri S&T!

Warmest regards,

Cheryl B. Schrader, Ph.D.
Chancellor