A Shared Vision
For Our Future

President Cornwell reflects on the College’s new strategic framework, the initial instances of its implementation, and the power of a shared direction.

Q: Why are you such a proponent of the strategic planning process?
A: Strategic planning boils down to one thing and that’s getting better. First, we want to get better at delivering on the promises of our mission. In our mission statement, we promise to provide students with a liberal arts education that equips them to become global citizens and responsible leaders who are empowered to have meaningful lives and productive careers. That’s a very robust set of promises. We do very well at delivering on those promises, but we can always do better. In very specific ways, what should we be doing differently to better equip our students to be global citizens? What should we be doing differently to help them have productive careers? The plan includes a number of initiatives that are designed to yield better outcomes for our students. The second meaning of getting better is becoming more competitive in a fiercely competitive market. We want to have, and be seen as having, an even higher value proposition than we already do. Any strategic initiative should achieve both of those things. It should make us better at delivering on our promises, and it should make us more competitive for the best students.

Q: You were very intentional about including the entire college community in this effort. Why was that important?
A: Our community came up with better ideas than I ever could have sitting in my office. It is also critical that our entire community shares a common vision. We can’t make real progress if there are competing visions, if we haven’t worked out an understanding of the values, mission, and aspirations for the college, because then we’re working in different directions and people don’t feel like they’re part of a common enterprise. Actually, the most powerful thing about having a shared direction is everyone feels like they’re part of a common project—that’s more powerful than the actual things that you do.

Q: In June, we saw the first wave of the strategic framework go into effect with a large-scale reorganization of campus. What were the proceeds of that endeavor?
A: This gives me a lot of hope for Rollins, because there is not a resistance to change here. Instead, there is an eagerness to build momentum and forward progress. Over a long weekend, nearly 50 initiatives, and many of those initiatives were so inclusive, so complex, and so transparent is because I really do believe in the power of crowdsourcing. Our community came up with better ideas than I ever could have sitting in my office. It is also critical that our entire community shares a common vision. We can’t make real progress if there are competing visions, if we haven’t worked out an understanding of the values, mission, and aspirations for the college, because then we’re working in different directions and people don’t feel like they’re part of a common enterprise. Actually, the most powerful thing about having a shared direction is everyone feels like they’re part of a common project—that’s more powerful than the actual things that you do.

Q: What’s next?
A: The strategic framework outlines nearly 50 initiatives, and many of those are already under way. But I don’t see strategic planning as an episodic process. I see it as a continuous process. We’ve started something that isn’t going to stop. As soon as we implement initiatives, we will be testing their effectiveness, measuring their impact, and changing direction if necessary. Before too long, I’ll be asking the community again: What else is out there that we need to pay attention to?”