The Next Level

By Joel Seligman

Throughout all of our years together, we have sought to be a University whose quality placed it among the leading research universities in this country, consistent with our core values of academic excellence, academic freedom, diversity and commitment to our community.

In the past 10 years, we have become a stronger University with the successful initiation and financing of major new projects in the Medical Center and each school.

We are now ready to ascend to the Next Level.

In March of this year, nearly 300 members of the Rochester family, including board members and volunteer leaders, gathered with senior University leaders and faculty speakers to celebrate reaching the initial $1.2 billion goal of *The Meliora Challenge* campaign and plan how we would race to the finish during the last 15 months of this Campaign. We aim to exceed the initial goal by 10 to 20 percent as the most successful campaigns frequently do.

Our major focus, however, was going beyond the ambitious goals of the 2013–2018 University and school strategic plans, whose implementation remains in full force, to articulate the key initiatives that we believe will be most effective in accelerating our progress during the 2016–2020 period, likely before we initiate our next capital campaign.

We view these key University initiatives as having three characteristics: (1) an ennobling social purpose; (2) where the University of Rochester can make a material difference; (3) necessarily at sufficient scale.

Rigorously applying these criteria, we commended four new or enhanced major initiatives:

(1) Data Science: Once we raise the additional $50 million sought in our October 2013 strategic plan, we still will have a long way to go to fully be one of the nation's leading data science programs. A major effort here is essential. Information technology is redefining the way we think, analyze information, and make decisions. Data science is ubiquitous. We focused on specific areas in which we are most likely to achieve best in class or near best in class programs: (A) Predictive Health Analytics,

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(B) Cognitive Systems and Artificial Intelligence, and (C) Analytics on Demand.

(2) Neuroscience and Neuromedicine: The brain has a unique ability to "rewire" and heal itself in response to injury, disease, and normal aging—a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. Our University has outstanding neuromedicine clinical programs, a world-class brain and cognitive sciences infrastructure, as well as basic and translational neuroscience research programs which address learning and memory, brain development and fundamental wet-bench research into neural structure and function. Here we proposed to focus on (A) Stroke and Neurorestoration, (B)

an Institute for Developmental Disabilities, and (C) Neurodegenerative and Neuromuscular Diseases.

(3) Humanities and the Performing Arts. Through our classroom experience, scholarship and creative works, the humanities and the performing arts are essential to the success of virtually every major research university. Our University long has had world-class programs in performing arts through the Eastman School of Music and increasingly has established prowess in Arts, Sciences & Engineering through our music, theater, and dance programs. Our humanities departments long were among the most notable at the University, but particularly in the post–2008 recessionary world, we have seen a decline in student enrollments in the humanities as students have focused more on the career relevance of their studies. We recommended: (A) Creation of an Institute for the Performing Arts, (B) Creation of a Humanities Center, and (C) Strengthening programs that involve Arts, Sciences & Engineering and the Eastman School of Music as well as the Memorial Art Gallery.

(4) The Revitalization of Our Community: Progress for our University is bounded by the progress of the Greater Rochester community. The stronger our community is, the stronger the University will be. While Rochester's suburbs today generally are doing well, the City of Rochester is struggling with the highest rate of extreme poverty of any comparably sized city in the United States. The Rochester City School District perennially has graduation rates below 50 percent. We will focus on three core areas which can contribute to strengthening the greater Rochester community: (A) Community Engagement, (B) K-12 Education, and (C) Entrepreneurship and Economic Development.

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I have posted the full Next Level discussion document on my home page, www.rochester.edu/president. I welcome your comments. ®