At a public forum on May 16, the Board of Regents heard comments on President Bruininks's recommendations for the U's future--the latest step in the strategic positioning process. About two thirds of the people favored the plan; the remaining third questioned its content, scope, or process. At its June meeting, the board must vote on one specific recommendation: the integration of the College of Human Ecology, the College of Natural Resources, and General College (GC) with other colleges on the Twin Cities campus.

Forty people took turns coming up to the podium to speak for three minutes. Some voiced their support for specific recommendations that particularly affect their college or area of study; some spoke of their own experiences as students or parents of students; some advocated for underrepresented students. In the comments--all civil and sincere--was an obvious appreciation of the University and a hope for a better future, whether achieved by following the recommendations or by challenging them.

"If you want to give further input to the Board of Regents or the president, please feel free over the next few weeks to send us either an e-mail or a letter," Board of Regents chair David Metzen told the overflow crowd. "Let me assure you, they all get to us." (See sidebar for contact information.)

In the comments--all civil and sincere--was an obvious appreciation of the University and a hope for a better future, whether achieved by following the recommendations or by challenging them.

Three significant questions seemed to emerge from the comments: How exactly will the University assure diversity with the integration of GC into other colleges? Where will the money come from to move the University into the ranks of the top three public research universities in the world (the goal of the strategic plan)? And how
does the strategic plan support the land-grant mission?

David Tilman, Regents Professor in the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior, noted that we are one of the top 20 research universities, but in quantitative rankings for undergraduates, we place about 150th. Tilman thinks that, along with an expanded writing program and better support and counseling services for all students, Bruininks's recommendation for a campus-wide honors program can help raise the U's undergraduate ranking. "We have to attract a higher proportion of students in this state who are currently applying to schools like Harvard and Princeton, or to liberal arts colleges like Williams or Carleton," said Tilman. "We believe the expanded honors program will allow us to attract those students."

Charles Muscoplat and Susan Stafford, deans respectively of the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences and the College of Natural Resources, came to the podium together in support of the recommendation that would merge the two colleges. After their remarks, they shook hands.

In an impassioned address, William Gleason, Medical School professor, stated why he thought the integration of General College into other colleges would be a setback for diversity. "Why are we destroying a college that already attracts a diverse population, hoping the slack will be taken up by other debatable mechanisms?" asked Gleason. "Those who support General College have been painted as not being in support of excellence, or motherhood, or apple pie. This is not true. I am a graduate of this great and excellent University. I agree that we can be, in the future, so much better than we are now. But destroying General College is not the way to do it."

Sheila Ards, associate vice president for community partnerships and development, said the president's goal is consistent with the core beliefs and needs of her community. "I am pleased that my president has stated and embraced the value of diversity in the student body, assuring that we do not lose ground, but make progress in admitting, retaining, and graduating students of color," said Ards, who is black.

General College students spoke fervently of their appreciation for their education. Zeb Anderson, from a self-described "average Minnesota family," felt the process has excluded General College students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general community. "Three-minute blurbs on our positions by a few people are not enough to make such drastic changes," said Anderson.

Anderson and others advocated that the board wait until November to vote on the plan, giving more time for discussions with students, faculty, staff, and community members.

One of the suggestions to change the focus and force of the recommendations came from Joanne Eicher, Regents Professor in the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel. Eicher suggested an alternative "megacollege" for the colleges singled out for change, creating a conglomeration similar to the Institute of Technology and the College of Liberal Arts.

At the end of the forum, Metzen said, "Today, we heard very clearly from people representing many, many different viewpoints. On behalf of the Board of Regents, I want to thank you sincerely for the respectful way in which you presented your
positions. [The strategic plan] will be on the June 10 agenda. It will either be voted up or voted down."

©2004 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.  

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.  

Trouble seeing the text? | Contact U  

Last modified on Wednesday