

## II. Executive Summary

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## Executive Summary

The SUNY Upstate Medical University (“Upstate”) and the hospital it operates, University Hospital, seek to enhance their operations in such a way as to create systemic improvements in instructing and learning, research, clinical care and the development of human potential in general. They wish to be seen as a resource not only for Syracuse and Central New York State, but for the Northeast and beyond through President David Smith’s “Engaging Excellence” initiative.

As a foundational first step for launching this initiative, Upstate has commissioned an environmental scan designed to identify and bring focus to the major operational themes that persist throughout this complex institutional environment. The purpose of this scan is to establish a basis for further work by select teams whose job it will be to explore those themes and issues in greater detail and prepare reports with recommendations. Those recommendations will likely range from methods to strengthen and improve existing processes and procedures to ways in which certain barriers within systems might be removed. In keeping with the intent of this engagement, this report is free of specific recommendations or suggestions for change. That particular responsibility must fall to the task teams, just as it will become the responsibility of the President and his executive staff to weigh the relevance of eventual recommendations and decide whether and how to implement change.

Beginning in September 2006, Butler/Helm worked with staff of Upstate to develop survey instruments and other tools with which to begin the engagement. In October and November, interviews were conducted with numerous groups and individuals. These interviews were designed to elicit information relative to how and why Upstate and the hospital adhere to their particular set of institutional values and follow the formal and informal procedures and practices currently in place. The intent was also to gain a sense of Upstate’s position within Syracuse and the region and within the community of health care providers.

By its very nature, an environmental scan is never intended nor designed to delve deeply into procedural or cultural areas of concern. However, even with that understanding, it is worth noting that to the extent possible the consultants went back to secondary sources and reviewed printed material as appropriate to validate or “test” the issues that rose to the surface through this study.

Generally the research consisted of these elements:

- Internal interviews with leadership, staff, faculty and students of Upstate and leadership and staff, including patient care staff, of the hospital
- Discussions with groups who hold common or closely aligned responsibilities in the university and hospital
- Personal or phone interviews with members of the community who have both an abiding regard for Upstate and/or serve the university in some advisory capacity
- Personal or phone interviews with former staff and faculty who at one time or another held executive leadership roles within the university

The findings of these interviews and group discussions point to a number of recurrent themes regarding Upstate's current internal landscape and external positioning:

- Upstate maintains a loyal and dedicated core of high quality staff and faculty, some of whom have spent all or most of their careers there and who maintain a fierce pride in the institution.
- A rift has persisted for many years between the hospital and the university proper (sometimes referred to as "the campus"). While the situation appears to be somewhat improved at present, the removal of the former hospital CEO some twenty months ago, and the manner in which he was removed, has apparently exacerbated the antagonism in certain quarters.
- The rift seems to influence to this day the manner in which employees of the two entities, hospital and academic campus, view and appreciate core administrative functions and processes. In a very general sense, Human Resources and Information Technology are more likely to be viewed as "helpful" or "very good" by employees of the hospital than they are by employees whose primary responsibilities are on the campus.
- There is a perception that the former hospital administration lacked transparency in the business dealings with certain clinical departments. It is also alleged these arrangements were unevenly established and maintained. This resulted in the belief that certain clinical departments benefited financially while others did not.
- There is a prevailing, though not universal, view that current top leadership of the university and the hospital, Dr. Smith and Mr. Schaengold respectively, are the right individuals at the right time to move Upstate forward significantly.

- Students give the university high marks and are generally pleased with the quality of the education and training they receive, though they are less satisfied with some aspects of the facilities.
- Faculty are generally thought of as “very good” and “excellent.”
- There is a perception of inequity among faculty of the College of Medicine (COM) and those of the other schools, in terms of resources, facilities and investment in future growth and development.
- Some external supporters expressed a belief there was something akin to a “golden era” in Upstate’s past when faculty, research scientists and students were routinely recruited nationally and even internationally due to the high quality and value of the research and the academic and clinical enterprises.
- Internally, faculty and staff have a strongly held belief in the high quality of instruction, research and care that are hallmarks of the university. They carry an inherent knowledge of the value the institution brings to the community and region, but at the same time they seem to share a concern that Upstate’s tremendous value is not similarly understood or appreciated by the community.
- There exists in the minds of many a belief that the intergovernmental and fundraising efforts are not as robust and effective as they could and should be.

President Smith has chosen the following broad areas for further examination by five carefully selected cross-functional task teams:

- Faculty
- Students
- Human Resources
- The Research Enterprise
- The Clinical Enterprise

In conducting the research and preparing this report, focus was brought to bear on six cross-cutting administrative and/or support areas that will be instrumental in the success or lack thereof of all endeavors related to the five major categories above. These are:

- Institutional Advancement
- Intergovernmental Relations
- Support Services
- Information Technology

- Marketing and Branding
- Facilities and Space Utilization

The five task teams will all be asked to consider these six cross-cutting areas as they conduct their important in-depth examinations. It is important to keep in mind, however, that a comprehensive examination of the major categories President Smith has identified cannot be thoroughly studied only through these six “lenses.” In fact, a seventh area came to light in the course of this study that has been labeled “Leadership and Culture.” The point is that the cross-cutting areas are meant to be “touchstones” or framing devices for the teams, but team members should not in any way feel compelled to limit their research to those six or seven areas of focus.

An important note of overriding importance; it has become clear through personal experience, as well as through in-depth dialogues with President Smith, that for the Engaging Excellence initiative to be truly and fully successful, commonalities of purpose and possibility must not just be discovered, they must be embraced. Personal engagement and accepting personal responsibility at every level of the organization are essential to success.

If Upstate is to successfully confront the many challenges facing it as a research institution, a clinical enterprise and perhaps most importantly an academic institution of the first order where knowledge is not just imparted, it is created, then methods must be found to erode any sense of “silos” or internal “us versus them” politics. The sense of a **community of interest** must be forged at the level of the entire university, not just in its many components, divisions, units and departments.

One final point; the recent recommendations by the Berger Commission are of great significance to Upstate’s future. Certainly the Berger recommendations alone could create an entirely new environmental perspective coming as it has at the close of this project. However, Upstate simply cannot allow this topic to dominate its continuing effort to improve. The information contributed by Upstate staff to support the development of this environmental scan remains pertinent and appropriate for action.