

# A Shared Vision

*By engaging the entire campus community in the process and creating ownership in the outcome, the creation of a new strategic plan puts Upstate on a course to become the educator, employer, and health-care provider of choice.*

As an avid gardener, Donna Joyner couldn't help but notice the empty planter boxes. Day after day, year after year, she imagined bringing gardens to life in those spaces as she came to and from work at Weiskotten Hall.

So when Upstate President David R. Smith, MD, challenged his employees to create the best workplace possible, Joyner figured, "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Joyner, producer/director of video and

multimedia in Educational Communications, sent Dr. Smith an email suggesting the formation of an Upstate Garden Society that would plant and tend to gardens in the Weiskotten Hall courtyard. And what better way to draw out gardener-types from throughout the Upstate community than by sponsoring a garden contest to design those planter boxes.

Within days, Joyner received a call from Deb Stehle, assistant vice president

for strategic planning and management in the President's Office. She, and Dr. Smith, loved the idea. So did the groundskeepers in the Physical Plant. Joyner had the go-ahead to proceed.

In short order, the Upstate Garden Society was formed, and its inaugural project launched—a contest to design the concrete planter boxes flanking the Weiskotten entryway. In May, the Garden Society filled the planters with colorful spring blooms and also planted flowering containers in front of the Setnor Building.

"I imagined this as a workplace beautification project," says Joyner, who has worked at Upstate for 10 years. "For people who love to garden, what could be more fun?"

Those new beautiful garden boxes are what's known at Upstate these days as a "quick win," one of 70-some quick wins implemented since January 2007, all part of a larger effort known as Engaging Excellence.

It's the brainchild of Smith. A firm believer in the power of the individual, Smith launched the Engaging Excellence campaign shortly after taking the helm at SUNY Upstate, his invitation to the entire Upstate community to create the best possible place to learn, work, and serve. The centerpiece of Engaging Excellence is the development of a 10-year strategic plan to prepare the campus for growth. Fueled by employee and student recommendations, the focus is simple: build on what works; fix what doesn't.

In part, Engaging Excellence was spawned by Smith's experience as Chancellor of the



Texas Tech University System from 2001 to 2006. There he developed a strategic plan including both a student-based focus (Students First) and patient-based focus (Patients First) that included an accountability scorecard for the System. Under his leadership, the Texas Tech System launched an aggressive five-year \$450 million academic and research initiative designed to garner and invest resources in three critical areas: people, technology and facilities.

"When I came to Upstate I was impressed with the people," says Smith. "I am amazed by our inner strength and continue to rely on it. Faculty, staff, and students really have had a chance to come together through this process, and it broke down some of our silos as well."

The Engaging Excellence process began with an "environmental scan" of the University. Outside consultants interviewed faculty, staff, students and past and current administrators about the Upstate policies and procedures that have the greatest impact. At the same time, Smith and his Executive Council participated in an internal analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as well as an analysis of current initiatives already underway across the university. From the information gathered, the president named five cross-functional teams for the Engaging Excellence process: Student, Faculty, Clinical Enterprise, Research Enterprise, and Employer of Choice, each with a charter to suggest improvements in their area that would shape a shared vision for all of Upstate.





## Engaging Excellence Timeline

**Phase I—Environmental Scan (Sept.-Dec. 2006)** Consultants interviewed faculty, staff, students, board members and past presidents about Upstate processes and procedures that have the greatest impact.

**Phase II—Task Teams Develop Recommendations (Jan.-June 2007)** Dr. Smith commissioned five Presidential Select Task Teams to suggest improvements that would shape a shared vision for all SUNY Upstate. The teams held open forums and researched and analyzed ideas from employees, students, and customers. In June, each team presented its recommendations to President Smith and his Executive Council.

**Phase III—Administrative Response (July-Dec. 2007)** Executive Council Sponsors evaluated the recommendations and senior administration created the timeline and financial allocation for implementation.

**Phase IV—Strategic Plan Developed and Implemented (Jan. 2008 onward)** The Strategic Plan began implementation in early 2008 with semi-annual progress reports.

The teams held open forums and researched and analyzed ideas from faculty, staff, students, and patients. In June 2007, each team presented its recommendations to President Smith and his Executive Council. The teams collectively provided close to 400 recommendations and strategies for consideration.

“The process raised awareness in all sectors that leadership is committed to examining our organization, garnering input from everyone irrespective of job duties, assessing what we do well, noting where there is an opportunity for improvement, and asking for creative suggestions from the work force as to how we can indeed improve,” says Colleen O’Leary, MD ’78, associate professor of anesthesiology and a member of the Clinical Enterprise Task Team and Clinical Enterprise Steering Committee.

Over the next six months, the Executive Council developed cross-functional teams to study and respond to each of the recommendations presented by the teams. Those suggested for implementation went on to President Smith and his senior administrators to review for approval and assignment of financial, human, information technology, and operational resources. By January 2008, the President and his Leadership Council had approved most of the recommendations for implementation.

While it may sound like a dry, administrative process, it’s actually been an exciting time that has created an esprit de corps across the campus. “Many people have been brought



together who would not usually work toward a common goal,” says Deb Stehle, assistant vice president for strategic planning and management. “It’s created unique opportunities to engage our employees, students, and faculty in helping to shape our future, encourage a sense of ownership, and to ask them to make decisions and have an impact on how we operate.”

As Dr. Smith said early on, “The success of a campus-wide initiative of this scale depends on the ability for all to have a voice in the process.”

While many team suggestions dealt with specific processes, policies or facilities, recommendations also emerged that were common to the mission of the institution as a whole. These include:

- Coordinating strategic planning efforts to ensure collaboration and coordination of resources throughout the entire university.
- Establishing a performance-oriented culture where individuals strive to improve and maintain operational effectiveness and efficiency, and that measure success against industry standards and objective benchmarks.
- Developing a system that ensures a uniform process for development, implementation, and ongoing review/continuation of programs.
- Establishing a long-term capital and campus-wide master facilities plan that supports the clinical, education and research missions.



Throughout the process, the individual teams were charged with identifying “low-hanging fruit,” ideas that could be implemented quickly that didn’t require significant space, planning, or money but might have big impact. The more than 65 projects implemented have already made a measurable effect on student, employee, and patient satisfaction.

One of the first issues identified by the Student Team was the lack of a “first impression” space for prospective students and their families visiting Upstate. Now visitors and students entering the South entrance to Weiskotten Hall find themselves in a handsome lounge with comfortable chairs, created mostly by the construction of a low wall, which gave the space definition, and a coat of paint. Now in constant use, the space replaces a mostly unused portion of the lobby. “We’ve gotten excellent response from our visitors,” says Donna Vavonese of Student Admissions, who previously hosted students and parents in a one-chair space outside her office. “This is comfortable and inviting.”

Another issue was the campus exercise facilities, particularly the basketball court. “It was made out of some very strange material,” says former PhD student David Auerbach, MD ’08. A new court, including backboard, rims, and lighting, was installed last spring. In addition, four new treadmills and a Multi-Exercise Cable System were installed and the tennis court on the Campus Activities Building roof rehabbed.

Simply finding the campus has become

easier, thanks to a highway sign on Interstate 81, identifying exit 18 as Upstate Medical University, as well as new light posts and Upstate banners that will help delineate Upstate from its surrounding medical and educational community.

In addition to “quick wins,” more substantive changes are also beginning to take place.

With more than 7,000 employees and students, many with young families, reliable day care is a key issue. While Upstate’s day care facility is one of the few in the area to achieve accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, it can only accommodate 66 children and almost always has a waiting list. Identified as an important issue by the Employer of Choice Team, the day care facility will be expanding. Upstate has purchased the former Four Winds facility less than a mile from campus, which opens the possibility to care for as many as 150 children and offer extended hours. “This expansion shows the ongoing commitment to keep parents in close proximity to their children,” says director Clare White.

Efforts at faculty recruitment and retention have been energized. Last fall, Upstate announced an effort to attract 46 new faculty members in an attempt to strengthen its academic mission. Since then, 20 hires have been made, with additional searches underway.

“I tell prospective faculty that it’s a good time to join us as we are serious about



## Our Shared Values

The Shared Values initiative sprang from the recommendations of the Engaging Excellence Teams. Many suggested the creation of a set of shared values to build on the foundation of Upstate’s mission for education, research, and patient care that spans the entire university.

Thus, the “shared values” initiative was launched—a university-wide discussion for creating institutional shared values.

The following values statements were announced at a Town Meeting in May:

**We drive innovation and discovery** by empowering our university family to bring forth new ideas and to ensure quality.

**We respect people** by treating all with grace and dignity and embracing diversity.

**We serve our community** by living our mission.

**We value integrity** by being open and honest to build trust and teamwork.



making positive changes,” says Paula Trief, PhD, senior associate dean for Faculty Affairs and Faculty Development. While changes for faculty have been ongoing, the Engaging Excellence team is building on such efforts as the University’s new trackless promotion and tenure system—which allows greater flexibility and recognizes clinical, educational, and research excellence—and Dean’s Grand Rounds. The newest initiatives include monthly town hall meetings for faculty,

improved recruitment and a streamlined hiring process, and an e-Letter called “The Faculty Commons,” which provides greater recognition for faculty achievements.

To respond to healthcare provider needs in the region, the Upstate College of Nursing launched a new RN First Assistant program last fall to prepare registered nurses to assist surgeons before, during, and after surgery. “Our first class was full and we have a waiting list for fall 2008,” says Barbara Black, clinical

associate professor at the College of Nursing and coordinator of the program. The College was able to develop, attain national approval, recruit for and launch the two-semester program in just six months.

At University Hospital, a Resident’s Lounge has been dramatically improved and two seldom used prep rooms at the Center for Children’s Surgery have been converted to needed recovery space.

All of these incremental improvements—suggested by faculty, staff, and students—are making for a happy workforce, and one that is open and responsive to change.

“In all my years here, I have not been brought together with so many people with different purposes to affect change,” says Maxwell Mozell, Dean of Graduate Studies and a member of the Upstate community for 40 years. “It’s been a good experience and is good for our future.”

Creating that sense of ownership should pay big dividends. “I believe there will be a culture change where employees will feel accountable for and take even greater pride in the work they do,” says Dr. O’Leary. “I believe we *will* become the health-care employer of choice, and the place where patients *want* to come to receive their medical care.”

## Quick Wins Summary: Ideas Suggested by Employees and Students

### Campus-wide Quick Wins

- Matching gift program launched; \$1.6M will turn into \$3.2M
- Research fundraising prototype developed
- IMT analyst to support research approved
- Route 81 highway sign erected
- New light posts and banner rods installed
- Four Winds property purchased to expand child care facility
- CAB snack bar renovated

### Student Quick Wins

- New Medical Imaging lab in Silverman Hall
- New Student lounge in Silverman Hall
- Renovated lobby in Weiskotten Hall
- Bike racks, two locations
- Simulation Task Force. \$250,000 in funding identified
- Student Health Insurance available. All Upstate physicians now participate under the Empire Plan
- “A” lot now open after 4 p.m. and on weekends
- New gym floor, equipment in CAB
- Tennis court improvements underway
- Weiskotten classrooms renovated
- RMED support — \$250,000 in funding

### Faculty Quick Wins

- Consultant visited regarding unified campus teams and faculty development programs
- Dual career assistance program available
- Dean’s Town Hall meetings for COM, CHP, CON
- Faculty recognition process underway
- Committee memberships online
- Online recruitment system streamlined
- Resources approved for improved off campus network
- IMT to implement faculty information database with ePortfolio/CV

### Research Quick Wins

- Empire Scholar Search Committee established
- Research Cabinet changing to a steering committee

- COM Dean to emphasize research planning and development in clinical chairs’ review
- New research space policy underway
- Temporary facility for inpatient clinical research now being renovated in UH
- The Center for Clinical and Translational Research is this year’s Gala beneficiary
- Electronic purchasing system approved

### Employer of Choice Quick Wins

- Performance evaluation process enhancements (on line reporting, reducing length of forms) and workshops for managers
- 45- day new hire follow up program established
- Affirmative action plans on web in Jan. 2008
- Absenteeism reporting tool to show unit/dept rates in testing
- Reduced oversight by the Position Control Committee for UH positions
- Exit survey implemented for campus employees; enhancements made to UH survey
- Customer service standards implemented for UH Employees; will be applied to all Upstate employees

- Employee satisfaction survey results on Upstate web
- HR Customer Service Survey completed, on Upstate website
- Physical Plant upgrades to be featured regularly in *Upstate Update*
- On-call rooms being assessed, maintenance standards to be established
- Training needs assessment for hospital, campus and shared services completed
- Plan to establish a common phone number for calls regarding facilities
- UH lobby ATM to be replaced; two more for WH and CAB

### Clinical Enterprise Quick Wins

- New resident lounge opened
- Now publicizing patient compliments to UH community
- Customer service standards now part of performance reviews for clinical personnel. Handbook developed and distributed
- Implemented service recovery (positively handling dissatisfied clinical customers) for “Patient First” initiative
- Two offices to serve patients in financial need
- Use Patient Family Centered Care — established standards for all new construction and renovation

