

Good afternoon, Bobcats!

Since assuming the role of your interim president last month, I have undertaken a listening and learning tour of the campus to better understand what makes Frostburg tick. To date, I have actively engaged in interviews with senior level administrators, met with the deans, had discussions with department chairs and meetings with faculty, staff and members of the SGA. The exit report from the Middle States team coupled with FSU's self-study report and evidence inventory have also helped me familiarize myself with the University.

As I mentioned in one of my first messages to the Bobcat community, I have identified four strategic priorities that I plan to focus on during my tenure at Frostburg, but because my estimated time here is short, some of these action items will need to be accelerated to ensure that we keep FSU moving forward. I have briefly touched on these priorities in various meetings with shared governance bodies, but I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on each:

1. **Extend the Current FSU Strategic Plan to 2027**
2. **Enrollment Growth**
3. **Review and Realign Academic and Administrative Structure and Programs**
4. **Financial Sustainability**

Per the guidance of Middle States, we will initiate a process to enhance our current strategic plan and extend it to 2027. I have asked Dr. Justin Dunmyer, associate professor and chair of the Faculty Senate, and Dr. Sara-Beth Bettinger, associate vice president in the Division of Student Success, to co-chair a strategic planning committee comprised of faculty, staff, students, and members of senior leadership from the UAC. This group will be tasked with producing a report by August 15 to be shared with shared governance units for review and endorsement in September.

We also need to establish a more comprehensive three-year enrollment plan with measurable benchmarks. Together with the Enrollment Management team, the provost and the deans, we will work to develop ways to enhance student recruitment efforts and increase undergraduate and graduate student enrollment. We will invest in our admissions and marketing departments to strengthen outreach to potential students. We are also evaluating the feasibility of replacing TargetX with an alternate platform better suited to managing the student experience from first contact with FSU through the admission and enrollment cycle.

Related initiatives include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Hire a director of graduate admissions and a graduate enrollment coach to allow the Admissions Department to function more efficiently.

- Increase funding for marketing and advertising to support more print and digital outreach and freshen the FSU brand -- an “affordably excellent” university that cares deeply for its students.
- Reopen Brownsville no later than Fall 2026.

Additionally, we must continue our work to streamline FSU’s operations by reviewing our administrative and academic departments to identify opportunities for greater efficiency. I will work with leadership across the campus to identify actions necessary to protect and sustain FSU’s financial viability. Some areas I have identified for organizational improvement include:

- Evaluate the possibility of relocating the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Tutoring Center to the library to create a Learning Commons for students.
- Strengthen student support services, fully adopt Navigate, and ensure appropriate advising support for our students.
- Combine smaller but related administrative departments to achieve greater collaboration, synergy and cost savings.

Moving forward, we have an opportunity to realign our academic department structure to optimize intellectual synergies within our colleges while ensuring that our programs align with current and future market needs. Additionally, I am tasking the deans to engage in more fundraising efforts for their respective colleges to allow for increased support for faculty research and teaching. To that end, a new faculty research and development fund has been established to help support initiatives that drive innovation and that are vital to advancing knowledge.

We must all work together to identify efficiencies to strengthen FSU’s budget model because the deliberate stewardship of resources to ensure long-term viability is paramount to our mission and our success. I will provide more information in the coming weeks regarding FSU’s budget; however, my message to you is this – try not to worry. Frostburg did the hard work last year that many universities are just now beginning, and while we have some fine tuning yet to do, FSU has a solid and sustainable plan that will carry us forward as we continue to navigate the economic and budgetary uncertainties at the state and federal levels.

With FSU pride,

Darlene Brannigan Smith