FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last winter, the University of Hartford launched a three-pronged strategy to bring regional prominence and national visibility to our programs in science, engineering, and technology. It’s an ambitious plan, to be sure, but I believe we are well on our way to seeing a dramatic change in the face of our campus, both architecturally and academically.

Here’s what we have done. First, we have combined the College of Engineering and Ward College of Technology into one new College of Engineering and Technology. We have always had strong programs in these two colleges, but the relatively small size of each did not give us enough critical mass to achieve real distinction. The new college, which will be initiated this summer, will have approximately 800 students; that will make it roughly the size of The Hartt School.

The engineering and technology faculty and Dean Alan Hadad have launched a yearlong planning cycle that will determine the academic structure of the new college. While it is too soon to tell you what all the results will be, this new college will dramatically improve our profile in these critically important fields.

In May the Board of Regents approved our plans for the second prong of this strategy, a new complex that will house all of our science, engineering, and technology programs. I have written previously about this project, which we refer to as the Integrated Science, Engineering, and Technology Complex (ISET). It will result in a new addition to Dana Hall to house all of our wet labs and a variety of new high-tech classrooms as well as a complete renovation of Dana. We are well under way in planning the new complex with William Wilson and Associated Architects, a Boston firm that has designed science, engineering, and technology buildings on college campuses across the country, ranging from Harvard to Tulane.

The key to the new complex is to bring all of our programs in these academic fields into the same physical space. Ward College will move from East Hall into new space in Dana, adjacent to the new engineering labs there and the current engineering space in United Technologies Hall. The basic sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences will also have all new space in the facility, as will the health professions in the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions.

New and improved space is a tangible result of this plan, but the intangible results will be even more important to our future. Our faculty and students in these areas will now share common space, and the results of living and working together should produce big dividends. The word synergy is much used these days, so much so that many have forgotten that it came into common parlance from the field of physiology: the cooperative action of two or more muscles or nerves. That describes well what I hope will result from giving our science, engineering, and technology disciplines the opportunity to work in close proximity. We hope to break ground on this $32 million complex in late winter or early spring and to complete the entire project within four years.

While these two pieces of our strategy are dramatic, the third prong is even more of a departure from our past practices—or, in fact, those of other colleges and universities. We have received a $400,000 planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop a new magnet high school on our campus. To be called the University High School of Science and Engineering, this new public school will give high school students from throughout the Greater Hartford region the opportunity to combine four years of high school with up to two years of college credit in science and engineering.

The Gates Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, with whom we are working on this project, have begun an initiative, called the early college program, to stimulate such high schools around the country. I am proud to say that the University of Hartford is among their earliest awardees, the first private university to receive such an award. We are currently working hard with the Hartford public schools, the Capitol Region Education Council, and the State of Connecticut to develop the plans and to apply for the funding to construct and operate the school. Our model in planning this school is the famed Bronx High School of Science in New York City, and we hope to achieve the same prominence for this school, this University, and the Hartford region.

We will need the help of our alumni and friends to make this initiative a success. You’ll be hearing more about that in coming months. So stay tuned: stronger programs in science, engineering, and technology will change the University and our society in very important ways for years to come.

Walter Harrison