

**Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Performance of the University of Iowa's
Office of the President
March 2025**

INTRODUCTION

The University of Iowa (UI) Policy Manual requires that reviews of Central Administration be conducted regularly. Per this operating procedure, the president of the Faculty Senate formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Office of the President (the "Review Committee" or the "Committee," Appendix 1) and charged it to carry out the review and prepare this report. Materials prepared in advance of this review included two self-study documents, one prepared by President Wilson and the other prepared by the Office of the President ("the Office of the President" or "Office").

According to the UI Policy Manual, the primary purposes of these academic reviews are twofold: 1) to provide an occasion for central administration officers to evaluate their programs and sub-units and, in return, to explain the roles, functions, procedures, and activities of their offices and officers to the faculty; and 2) to permit a systematic faculty evaluation of these offices and officers aimed at making recommendations for improvements in administrative structure and/or performance. The review procedure is intended to improve the capacity of administrative offices and officers to support and enhance the teaching, research, and service goals of the University. Moreover, the academic review is intended to facilitate communication between administrative officials and the faculty, and to make it possible for the faculty to participate actively in the governance of the University.

The Process

The Office of the President should be reviewed at least once every seven years, as stated in the University's Policy Manual. However, the previous review of this Office was conducted in 2003. The Executive Vice President and Provost and the President of the Faculty Senate are jointly responsible for conducting the reviews of the Office of the President. The Office of the President provided the Committee with the names of individuals who, through frequent contact with the Office, could provide the Committee with relevant information for evaluating the Office's performance. The Review Committee interviewed the suggested individuals and other key stakeholders identified by the Committee.

The Review Committee met for the first time on May 7, 2024, to organize the review, and had regular meetings during May through August 2024. Those meetings were on Zoom to facilitate the participation of the Committee's external member.

The following chart shows how the Office is organized:

https://opsmanual.uiowa.edu/sites/opsmanual.uiowa.edu/files/wysiwyg_uploads/a01ui.pdf.

The committee examined a self-study document, prepared by the Office of the President (Appendix 3), and a self-assessment prepared by President Wilson (Appendix 4). The Review Committee collectively decided upon a general set of questions to be discussed with those who were interviewed. The Committee chair revised the questions, when needed, to correspond to the specific expertise of each respondent. For scheduling efficiency and to avoid prolonging the interview process, Committee members took turns conducting interviews during the summer. At least two Committee members participated in all interviews in addition to the Committee chair who, for consistency, attended all interviews while taking detailed interview notes that she then shared with the rest of the Committee. The chair also actively participated in interviews when necessary. The Review Committee conducted 34 Zoom interviews between June 17 and July 24. Individuals and groups interviewed by the Review Committee are listed in Appendix 2. Between September 2024–February 2025, the Committee met to discuss and revise the report before finalizing it.

General Charge

The Review Committee’s charge was to assess UI President Barbara J. Wilson and her Office and to make recommendations regarding its performance and effectiveness. This review addresses pertinent aspects of the Office’s and the president’s performance based on the Policy Manual guidelines (<https://opsmanual.uiowa.edu/community-policies/academic-review-new/reviews-central-administration> and <https://opsmanual.uiowa.edu/community-policies/academic-review-new/multi-year-academic-review-administrators>).

REVIEW FINDINGS

Comments about the Office of the President often referred back to President Wilson herself since interviewees perceive many of the Office’s current characteristics as a reflection of the values and attitudes instilled by the President. Therefore, the review of the Office necessarily needs to include a number of references to President Wilson.

A) Strengths of the Office of the President

The interviewees highlighted many strengths of the Office of the President and especially of President Wilson. Overall, respondents expressed consistent support and very positive views of her and her Office.

1. Leadership

President Wilson is an outstanding communicator. Her scholarship is in communication. She is engaging and makes people feel heard. She is an effective storyteller who is able to tell the story of the UI.

President Wilson advanced through the ranks of the academy, and her leadership experience at the University of Illinois prepared her well to lead the University of Iowa. The university community is very happy to have an academic in the role of president. She

understands the academic mission and culture of the academic community as well as the breadth and nuances of the University of Iowa.

The Review Committee heard many positive comments about President Wilson as a leader of her Office and of the UI. She is a good decision-maker and is accountable; she takes ownership of decisions. She takes an active interest in the budget.

The decisions made by the Office of the President are guided by the institution's strategic plan, which was developed during the first year of President Wilson's tenure (2021–2022). Interviewees said that President Wilson listens to and understands them, seeks input from individuals and groups, is collaborative, and looks to the strategic plan for guidance when making decisions. Overall, interviewees considered the President's decision-making process transparent and find her decisive.

2. Management

President Wilson has imprinted on the Office highly admirable characteristics. She is a true leader who is deeply invested in collaboration. Her way of looking at the world has improved the functioning of her Office.

Both the roles of 1) the vice president for external relations and senior advisor to the president, and 2) the associate vice president for administrative affairs and senior advisor to the president were highly praised in maintaining the effectiveness of the Office.

The long-term relationship that both the senior advisor to the president and vice president for external relations and the senior advisor to the president and associate vice president for administrative affairs have with the Board of Regents has been helpful to the president in strengthening relationships with the Board of Regents.

President Wilson and her Office are effective at trying to prevent and respond to crises. They think strategically about how to avoid crises; individuals reported that President Wilson "thinks six months ahead." When crises arise, the Office is decisive and handles them effectively. Issues associated with the Covid pandemic and the protests regarding political issues were repeatedly mentioned as examples of this strategic thinking.

The timely revision of the University's strategic plan, occurring at the start of President Wilson's tenure, has allowed her to express her vision and her priorities for the University. The strategic plan is a highly active document that is used to address needs and initiatives across campus. The Office of the President is using the strategic plan as a guiding document. For example, the information learned from the process led to the creation of groups to undertake the application of the Public-Private Partnership (P3). The President regularly asks how different people's work is connected to the institutional strategic plan and how the strategic plan is built into the fabric of their day-to-day work.

Other strengths of the Office include an effective division of labor and good institutional knowledge within the President’s Cabinet. President Wilson, the President’s Cabinet, and the Office are perceived to have a strong relationship with the UI Office of the Provost. Those who interact with the Office of the President report receiving consistent information from the President’s Cabinet members.

The trust that President Wilson has built during her first few years has paid off. Now that she has this foundation, she can pivot to other areas while—in her own words— “moving at the speed of trust.”

3. Relations with Stakeholders

President Wilson knows the importance of relationship building. Interviewees consistently stressed that she has a highly positive relationship with the university, local, and regional communities. She is highly accessible and frequently invites individuals and groups to the President’s house. She is genuinely engaged, attends a number of University activities, and shows a deep understanding about a variety of topics.

President Wilson has strong and improving relationships across the many different groups with whom she interacts, including students. Her commitment to first-generation students and mental health issues was highly praised.

She is very involved with all corners of campus and visited every UI college during the first year of her tenure (academic year 2021–2022). She plans to visit each college every other year going forward. She is an effective leader of the President’s Cabinet with whom she meets regularly. Those we interviewed consistently reported that she has been accessible to those who have reached out to her.

President Wilson works well with the Iowa legislature. She can identify the UI’s strengths and how they can be leveraged to serve the needs of the State of Iowa; one example that matches the UI’s strengths and the needs of the State is the Rural Healthcare Initiative.

President Wilson is very effective at telling the UI story for fundraising purposes, and she has a great ability to meet with different types of audiences, often simultaneously. She uses her platform to shine light on colleges and their personnel at public events. She communicates effectively with donors and alumni; her efforts and those of her Office in this regard were universally praised with no exceptions.

B) Challenges Faced by the Office of the President

1) Financial Model and Budget

The University budget is complex because it manages so many sources of revenue, including changing legislative appropriations and tuition dollars. The University has a budget model to allocate revenues, which was created by a previous administration. The current UI financial

model and budget policy is a recurring issue that was raised by multiple interviewees. The main concern raised about the budget is the difficulty in strategically implementing the budget model and aligning it with UI values. Some felt that there is not a strategic use of the budget model. The current budget model was criticized as creating disparities and competition within the university that are not productive because they do not promote or create collaboration and interdisciplinary work. The budget has been adjusted at times, but interviewees still reported inconsistencies across colleges. Some interviewees expressed a sense of unfairness of the budget, a feeling of “the haves and the have-nots.”

Communication about the budget model received mixed reviews. Some thought that there was limited transparency. Several interviewees indicated that UI colleges are in a deficit partly due to this financial model, and that it is difficult for colleges to be strategic and plan when they do not know what resources they will have. This problem has existed for a number of years, including before President Wilson’s tenure.

2) Internal Communication

Another challenge that the Office of the President faces is how information is communicated between central administration and collegiate leadership. Interviewees expressed some confusion about who to talk to about which issues when seeking assistance and guidance from the Office. Some deans would appreciate more information from the Office of the President or more consistent pathways for information to filter down to them. In the other direction, some deans thought that some of the information that they shared at Deans Council meetings was not getting to the Office of the President. Thus, the reporting structure and lines of communication between the Office and collegiate deans appears to be ripe for reevaluation.

While the institutional knowledge of the President’s Cabinet is high, some interviewees expressed concern about the lack of plurality of opinions of its members. Some interviewees inquired as to whether President Wilson’s longstanding Cabinet should be further revised.

The practice of putting out fewer statements has served the Office of the President well in navigating the political landscape of issues facing the country and the world. While interviewees uniformly thought that the President’s Office handled crises well, some interviewees expressed that the approach of putting out fewer statements might not work as effectively going forward due to the changing landscape in higher education.

C) Recommendations

1) Revisiting the implementation of budget model to address fairness and long-term financial viability

One opportunity for improved functioning of the UI is to strategically address financial constraints facing the University by developing a long-term and proactive plan for enrollment challenges. In addition, reevaluating the implementation of the budget

model and increasing the transparency in communications about it could help address current concerns about equity across the University and about the lack of incentives for interdisciplinary collaboration.

2) Strengthening internal communication

The UI can leverage the president's highly effective communication style and expand it to all parts of campus. For example, the Office of the President could work to build stronger relationships with collegiate deans, to communicate directly and more frequently with them to leverage the expertise and resources at the UI to push the institution further faster. The Committee would like to suggest working intentionally on improving internal communications between the Office of the President and the rest of campus, including collegiate deans.

Several interviewees suggested that, for certain decisions, the president should also seek the expertise and input of others outside the President's Cabinet—including deans, program directors, and leading faculty and staff. The President and her Office may consider creating a mechanism to ensure that new voices and perspectives are heard.

The committee heard during several interviews that the office of strategic communications prioritized external and not internal communications. This could be resolved by giving the office of strategic communications more responsibility to expand their internal outreach. Interviewees also expressed that the Office of the President should put out more internal communications about mission and values. This would serve to reiterate that the UI has been a leader throughout its history about such issues and explain the UI's approach, philosophy and values.

3) Commitment to the research mission

There is the opportunity for the UI to provide a more comprehensive approach to making research more visible to internal and external stakeholders. The opportunity exists for UI to share with the State of Iowa why it is important to have an R1 institution in our state.

The UI can improve research-related rankings by putting more resources into recruiting and retaining faculty. The UI should be cognizant about its ratio of tenure track to teaching-track faculty on its research mission.

4) Continuing to strengthen external relationships

The Office of the President has a unique ability to connect with key external constituents, and the Review Committee encourages the Office to organize their duties to maximize the amount of time they have for enhancing the university's reputation statewide, nationally, and internationally.

5) Long-term vision

There is an opportunity for a long-term, inspiring vision for the UI that guides its strategic investments and ensures financial sustainability across the entire university. Preparing the UI for the challenges coming in the next 5–10 years is of paramount importance. The President and her Office can be a national leader on issues in higher education, including the changing trends in enrollments, limitations to enrollment of international students, building relationships with the state legislature, and funding challenges.

The longevity of some members of the President’s Cabinet may have precluded different voices from being heard. Incorporating more new voices in the UI leadership to balance out the current institutional knowledge may provide enhanced perspective.

Conclusions

The review was consistently positive, and it was a pleasure for the Committee to hear so many complimentary and appreciative statements about President Wilson and her Office.

We suggest that reviews of the Office be carried out more often, at regularly scheduled intervals following the policy stating that Central Administration Offices should be reviewed at least once every seven years.

Appendix 1. Members the Review Committee

- Ana M Rodríguez-Rodríguez, Associate Dean of the UI Graduate College and Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—Committee chair.
- Dawn Anderson, Associate Dean of Innovation and Professor of Legal Analysis, Writing and Research, College of Law.
- David Hensley, Clinical Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship, Tippie College of Business.
- Craig Just, Donald E. Bently Professor of Engineering, College of Engineering.
- Michelle McQuistan, Associate Professor of Preventive and Community Dentistry, College of Dentistry.
- Michael Sauder, Chair and Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- Jon Steadland, Chief of Staff in the Office of the President, University of Minnesota—External Reviewer.

Appendix 2. Individuals and Groups Interviewed by the Review Committee

- Jeneane Beck (Assistant Vice President for External Relations)
- Mark Braun (Executive Director of the Board of Regents)
- Daniel Clay (Dean, College of Education)
- Gigi Durham (Faculty Ombudsperson)
- Brent Gage (Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Strategy)
- Russ Ganim (Associate Provost and Dean of International Programs)
- Beth Goetz (Athletics Director)
- Sarah Hansen (Vice President for Student Life)
- Denise Jamieson (Vice President for Medical Affairs and Dean of the College of Medicine)
- Terry Johnson (Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer)
- Jamie Jorgensen (Vice President for Legal Affairs and Legal Counsel)
- Kevin Kregel (Executive Vice President and Provost)
- Amy Kristof-Brown (Dean, College of Business)
- Rod Lehnertz (Senior Vice President and University Architect)
- Donald Letendre (Dean, College of Pharmacy)
- Lynette Marshall (President and Chief Executive Officer, UI Center for Advancement)
- Peter Matthes (Vice President for External Relations and Senior Advisor to the President)
- Ann McKenna (Dean, College of Engineering)
- Laura McLeran (Associate Vice President for Administrative Affairs and Senior Advisor to the President)
- Edith Parker (Dean, College of Public Health)
- Sara Sanders (Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences)
- Keith Saunders (Director of State Relations)
- Marty Scholtz (Vice President for Research)
- Clark Stanford (Dean, College of Dentistry)
- Bruce Teague (Iowa City Mayor)
- Amanda Thein (Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and Dean of the Graduate College)
- Liz Tovar (Executive Officer and Associate Vice President, Division of Access, Opportunity and Diversity)
- Tanya Uden-Holman (Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education and Dean of the University College)
- Kevin Washburn (Dean, College of Law)
- Julie Zerwic (Dean, College of Nursing)
- Alumni Leadership Council (Steve Firman, Lyndsay Harshman)
- Faculty Senate (Mary Charlton, Ed Gillan, Craig Just, Caroline Sheerin)
- Graduate and Professional Student Government (Abby Crabtree, Gadag Venkataramana)

- Staff Council (Neda Barrett, Makur Jain, James Jorris)
- Undergraduate Student Government (Carly O'Brien, Mitch Winterlin)