Dear Southwestern University Community Members,

This year marks the fifth year of our 2016 Strategic Plan, and the fourth year of our fundraising efforts in support of our “Thinking First” campaign that have raised to date approximately seventy-five million dollars in new gifts and pledges. This is an optimal time to develop in collaboration with all campus constituency groups a concrete budgeting and fundraising plan for the next 5 years.

An Ad Hoc Tactical Planning Task Force has been formed after consultation between President Trombley and Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). The Task Force includes the current members of SPC as well as a few additional members to broaden out the constituencies and expertise areas represented: Ronnye Vargas Stidvent, representing the Trustees; Miguel Zorrilla ‘92, representing the Alumni Council; Kellie Henderson ‘23, representing the Coalition for Diversity & Social Justice; Paul Secord, Vice President for University Relations and the University’s Chief Development Officer; Heath Roberie, Financial Planning & Analysis Manager; and Natasha Williams, ex-officio member of SPC and Director of Institutional Research, who will serve as the main administrative support person for the Task Force. Bob Bednar, Chair of SPC, and I will be Co-Chairs.

The purpose of the Task Force is to produce a 5-year Tactical Plan for Southwestern. Whereas the existing Strategic Plan articulates goals and objectives, but not the pathway for achieving them, the Tactical Plan we produce will articulate a much stronger set of direct and measurable connections between institutional priorities, budgetary constraints, fundraising opportunities, and administrative responsibilities. This will be an institutional plan that is developed and finalized during this academic year, affirmed by the faculty, and brought forward as a recommendation for approval to the Board of Trustees at the April, 2021 meeting.

The Tactical Plan will identify the necessary resources for achieving identified priorities in a way that takes into consideration the University’s current and projected budgetary environment, realistic but bold expectations of fundraising, and reasonable projections of endowment earnings. The Tactical Plan and the Campaign for Southwestern must be aligned in their goals. The Tactical Plan will recognize our current University Strategic Plan and the Facilities Master Plan as well as any and all currently approved and in operation strategic plans at every scale of the University.

In creating this Tactical Plan, the Task Force will examine all appropriate areas of the University and decide what critical initiatives are of central importance for the health, growth, and quality of Southwestern. The Tactical Plan the Task Force produces will be focused, inclusive, and comprehensive. The priorities contained within it will be interrelated, central, and strategic. It is anticipated that this planning process will result
in some recommendations that will not require additional resources, other
recommendations that will require minor additional resources, and several
recommendations that will require major new commitments of resources. The Tactical
Plan will be funded through these three channels: an adherence to meeting budgeted
targets to generate an annual surplus; new debt; and fundraising.

As Southwestern begins implementing this 5-year Tactical Plan, starting July 1, 2021, it
will do so with a culture of fiscal responsibility, and its success will be driven by both
internal and external economic factors. By using these three elements as its
foundation—within the budget, achievable through borrowing, and achievable through
fundraising—it is possible to model alternative forecasts based on different capital
investment approaches, different funding assumptions, and different forecasting
assumptions.

Southwestern’s Core Values will undergird this plan, in particular our commitment to
offering a superb liberal arts education and emphasis on inclusion and diversity. At
every phase of this process, the Task Force will involve stakeholders as much as possible
so that we ensure a legitimate and authentic process and outcome. Therefore, there will
be great deal of organized activity to fully consult with the campus community and it is
understood that subcommittees of the Tactical Planning Task Force will likely be formed
in order to meet with focus groups, committees, student groups, and hold individual
meetings as necessary to make sure that every consultation group has a chance to
influence the outcome of the process.

Once the Task Force identifies priorities, it will sort the goals/strategies into one of the
following five categories:

1. Assign as an administrative task;
2. Currently in progress;
3. To be costed out—direct;
4. To be costed out—complex; or
5. In need of extended study

Over the course of the academic year, the Task Force will examine and discuss cost
estimates of every priority, objective, and strategy in the combined academic, student,
staff, and Board plans and rank order the plan within budgetary guidelines. The
expectation is that through this process, the Task Force will reflect the mission and most
visionary expression of Southwestern’s institutional priorities. The Tactical Plan will be
pragmatic and conservatively budgeted. In addition to the funding priorities of the plan,
secondary priorities will be budgeted should additional funding become available. Once
the plan is approved by the Board of Trustees, it will be posted on the institution’s
intranet and measured actively, with categories, goals, projected annual costs, totals of how much has been spent to date, and the percentage that has been funded.

The Task Force will spend the fall reviewing existing strategic plans at all levels of the institution as well as gathering input about institutional priorities from everyone involved with Southwestern. By the spring, we will move to drafting, discussing, and finalizing the Tactical Plan so that it can be adopted at the April 2021 Board meeting. We are including an infographic timeline that we are projecting at this point.

We understand this is a difficult and stressful year for everyone in myriad ways and we thank you in advance for your participation. This is an important project that will be ongoing for five years once it is established, but we know it will require a significant commitment on our entire community’s part during the year ahead to meet important milestones. We are pleased to announce that a gift of $500,000 has already been raised and we will continue to work with Paul Secord and the entire Development team to increase funding so that the priorities included in the Tactical Plan will be realized.

Laura Trombley and Bob Bednar
Co-Chairs, Ad Hoc Tactical Planning Task Force