Planning for Preferred Future gets mid-term review

The SAES strategic plan, “Planning Our Preferred Future,” is a five-year plan now entering its third year. That means a mid-term grade is due in the next few months. I don’t think we need to wait. Looking back to accomplishments from the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years, several deserve high grades for how well they support the Strategic Plan’s 11 primary themes.

The first two themes of the SAES Strategic Plan fittingly put the student learning environment at the forefront. The SAES got high marks for an 8 percent enrollment increase in 2006-07, and a 14.4 percent increase in credit hours generated. We’ve been keeping up the good work, as SAES enrollment hit an all-time high of 799 students at the start of fall semester in 2006.

The Landscape Architecture Program was reaccredited in 2005-06, and four Family and Consumer Sciences programs and the Agricultural Education Program were reaccredited in the 2006-07 academic year. The nine of our 13 bachelor’s programs for which there are national accrediting bodies have all made the grade.

The third, fourth and fifth themes of the Strategic Plan address minority health, food safety, and family and community development. The Cooperative Extension Program was a major contributor to accomplishments in all these areas. This past year, Cooperative Extension put added emphasis on diabetes education and heart disease in minorities. Extension’s financial literacy program has been helping families with limited financial resources reduce debt and increase savings.

Scientists with the Agricultural Research Program had breakthroughs in post-harvest handling, poultry production and agromedicine in 2005-06 that gave the SAES some banner marks in its food and health promotion themes. High marks continued past academic year with research into mushroom, peanut and dairy cattle production. A considerable chunk of the credit for the $4.1 million in external funds the SAES generated this past year aligns with the food sciences and health promotion themes.

There are themes in the Strategic Plan which chart courses for the SAES to “Advance Biotechnology and Biodiversity” and also to “Use Innovative Technologies.” A landmark—for the entire University as well as the SAES—overlapped into both areas, as A&T announced its first spinoff company emanating from campus research, and the research began with a patent-producing biotechnology process developed by Dr. John Allen.

Agricultural Education led SAES distance learning in courses and enrollment in both the past two academic years, but a program coup unique to 2006-07—and the entire 16-institution UNC system—came when four Agricultural Education majors became the first students to receive bachelor’s degrees through the online 2+2 Program, which partners four-year schools in the UNC system with North Carolina community colleges.

In 2006, the N.C. General Assembly asked the North Carolina Biotechnology Center for a comprehensive plan for developing biofuels and speeding them into production, and the Center turned the project over to five individuals, including Dr. Ghasem Shahbazi of the SAES faculty, for a blueprint. Shahbazi’s research and expertise that have been fitting the bill for a Strategic Plan theme—“Protect the Environment and Natural Resources”—now also figure strongly into the overarching statewide initiative for reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Cooperative Extension made a number of noteworthy contributions to the Strategic Plan theme calling on the SAES to “ Ensure the Viability of Small-Scale Agriculture.” Extension helped North Carolina farmers increase their profits by approximately $4.2 million with training in marketing. The Animal Sciences faculty has also added to the small-scale agriculture and biotechnology themes by coordinating goat herd management workshops for farmers that covered genetics as well as breed selection and marketing.

The SAES Strategic Plan has a global perspective, with a theme that calls for us to “Promote International Trade and Economic Development.” In the 2005-06 academic year, Dr. Manuel Reyes led the way in answering that call as he was named principal investigator for a $1.2 million grant for research into new and sustainable agroforestry methods for developing nations in Southeast Asia. Reyes’ project helped set the groundwork for the SAES to sign memorandums of understanding with leading agricultural universities in Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines this most recent academic year. These agreements have enormous potential for joint research, and student and faculty exchanges for the SAES.

While we are halfway, much work remains. This is where all of us have to step in. Refer often to your plan and make sure you are doing your part towards helping us plan our preferred future.
Looking back through the SAES annual report for the 2006-07 academic year, some major milestones were achieved and some landmark foundation work was set in place. Correlating these milestones and landmarks to the themes the SAES Strategic Plan yields a revealing report card on how the SAES’s progress is stacking up with the 11 primary themes in the SAES Strategic Plan:

- The first two major themes in the SAES Strategic Plan are to “Maintain a Responsive Learning Environment” and to “Attract and Graduate Outstanding Students.” The numbers speak for themselves: SAES enrollment for the fall semester of 2006 was an all-time high of 799 students (704 undergraduate and 95 graduate). The SAES is now the largest HBCU agriculture program in the nation and the third largest producer of African American graduates receiving bachelor’s degrees in agricultural sciences. The SAES generated approximately $4.1 million in external competitive funds to complement the SAES base and formula funding of $25.8 million. The SAES is A&T’s largest producer of external grants per capita.

- The Nutrition and Dietetics Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Agricultural Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Family Studies (B-K) Program, the Child Development Early Education and Family and

- The SAES became a major partner at the N.C. Research Campus with the development of a Center of Excellence for Post-Harvest Technologies. The 350-acre N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis will eventually have a biotech hub, as many as 100 companies and 5,520 jobs. It will have facilities for several of the state’s universities in addition to A&T. The SAES and other university partners inaugurated the facility by co-hosting an international conference in metabolomics and neutrigenomics. A management plan for the SAES’s role at the N.C. Research Campus is now fully developed, an interim director is on staff, and space has been allocated to the SAES in a building under new building operations. Equipment has been purchased in anticipation of occupying the building in 2008. All of this fits quite nicely into one of the 11 major Strategic Plan Themes: “Ensure a Nutritious, Safe And Secure Food Supply.”

- A&T announced its first spinoff company emanating from research, developed by an SAES research scientist, Dr. John Allen. Allen will serve as president of the spinoff company, which will produce a product used for purifying antibodies that are used in a number of diagnostic procedures and disease treatments. The company’s name is Provagen, and the company motto could very well be one of the SAES Strategic Plan themes, “Use Innovative Technologies.”

- In the spring of 2007, the SAES signed memorandums of understanding with leading agricultural universities in Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. These agreements will increase research and student exchange opportunities between A&T and the four southeast Asian institutions. These agreements also mesh tightly with the objectives of a $1.2 million project, funded by USAID and directed by Dr. Manuel Reyes, for research into sustainable agriculture and natural resources management in Southeast Asia. And the MOUs and Dr. Reyes’ project in turn mesh completely with the SAES Strategic Plan’s “Promote International Trade and Economic Development” theme.

- The Agricultural Education Program graduated the first students in the UNC system to receive bachelor’s degrees through the online 2+2 agreement with the North Carolina Community College System. The landmark is also a key listing for 2006-07 achievements falling beneath the “Maintain a Responsive Learning Environment” theme in the Strategic Plan. Another landmark contribution to this theme is the Department of Family & Consumer Sciences leadership for a consortium of eight 190 land-grants in a new online certificate program in family financial planning—the first online collaboration of its kind for HBCUs.

- The SAES participated in the National Academy of Sciences competitive leadership summit to effect change in teaching and learning, and to help define the future of undergraduate education in the agricultural, cultural, environmental and life sciences. SAES was one of only three 190 institutions in this elite group.

- The scholarly activities in support of the all-important commitment to “Maintain a Responsive Learning Environment” were impressive, as the SAES faculty published one book, five book chapters, 46 refereed articles, and 59 other articles. Faculty showcased SAES through more than 149 presentations at national conferences of learned societies and 259 appearances at public events—significant contributions to the Strategic Plan’s “Expand Resource Base and Maximize Relationships” theme.

- Among the Strategic Plan’s themes is a commitment to “Ensure the Viability of Small-scale Agriculture.” Through the Cooperative Extension Program’s work to help limited-resource farmers improve marketing strategies, their revenues grew by approximately $4.2 million.

- The N.C. General Assembly turned to the North Carolina Biotechnology Center for a comprehensive plan for developing biofuels and speeding them into production, and the Center’s steering committee turned the project over to five co-conveners for a blueprint for “Fueling North Carolina’s Future: North Carolina’s Strategic Plan for Biofuels Leadership.” Among the plan’s five principal authors is Dr. Ghaisem Shokhatari, a member of the SAES faculty who directs the Bioengineering Program. The SAES Strategic Plan has a key theme pledging to “Protect the Environment and Natural Resources,” and the state’s new plan for biofuel development was a leading beneficiary this past academic year.

• SAES researchers filed 14 invention disclosures; eight patents are pending; and two patents were approved in the 2006-07 academic year. Many of these breakthroughs fill the bill for the Strategic Plan’s “Advance Biotechnology and Biodiversity” theme, and several of them also will help to “Ensure a Nutritious, Safe and Secure Food Supply.”
Mark Your Calendar

- First day of fall semester classes: Aug. 20
- Fall break: Oct. 8 & 9
- Homecoming 2007: Oct. 27

Dr. Mohamed Ahmedna’s research got Year III of the SAES Strategic Plan off to a roaring start. News was officially released of a patent pending for an allergin-inactivating peanut process. All major TV networks in the U.S. grabbed the story and dozens of local affiliates from coast to coast included footage of Ahmedna in his Carver Hall lab in their newscasts. Newspaper coverage has been even more extensive, with articles on Ahmedna’s research breakthrough appearing in major dailies around the world in addition to across the U.S.