Iowa State is in the process of forming a strategic plan that will help direct the university's future through the year 2000. The process of reviewing, thinking ahead, asking questions and looking at the university in its totality is very important, ISU President Martin Jischke said. It is a template for decision making, it creates a sense of community and confidence and it communicates internally and externally that we have a goal.

In this, the second in a two-part series of articles about this development of a five-year plan that will carry Iowa State into the 21st century, ethos staff writer Colleen Hamilton takes a look at the university's review process and a few of the committee's recommendations.

“This is very important work,” Jischke said in an announcement about the review process. “We are deciding what kind of university we will be and setting our overall direction for a number of years to come. Everything we do—from budget requests and allocations to evaluation of academic programs to the recruitment of students, faculty and staff—should stem from the goals and directions laid out in the strategic plan.”

Thus began the open forums on March 30 and 31, at which Jischke encouraged input from university faculty, staff and students present at each session.

These forums were part of the process that began with the appointment of a Strategic Planning Review Committee to analyze and make recommendations on the current strategic plan.

To generate additional feedback, 34 position papers written by ISU faculty and staff were published. Issues included in the papers were internationalization, diversity, athletics, organizational effectiveness, recruitment and retention, Iowa's economy, programmatic opportunities in ISU's eight colleges and other concerns that could impact the university in the next decade.

While Jischke said he didn't personally agree with all that was written, he said the papers were “very interesting pieces of work and made for provocative reading.” Jischke encouraged those present at the forums to comment on the position papers and the review committee's recommendations (See Part I of “Iowa State in Transition” in the April edition of ethos), as well as to raise concerns that should be addressed in the next strategic plan.

A brainstorming session followed which included a wide range of issues, such as funding for athletics, the need for horizontal planning across the university units, gender equity, retention and improving undergraduate and graduate education. Also discussed were technology and change, faculty improvement leave, emphasis on international programs and the need for technology and quality of life at Iowa State to progress hand-in-hand.
BREAKING DOWN WALLS

One of the Strategic Planning Review Committee’s recommendations, to “require department-college-and-university-level planning to be concurrent and interactive,” was seen as an important factor in improving services and breaking down walls between the various university levels.

Jane Peterson, interim DEO for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, suggested using the ISU Faculty Senate, which includes a representative from each college, for horizontal planning and as a tool to set goals, learn more about each other, get past misconceptions and provide students with the “best delivery of education” possible.

IMPROVING RETENTION

Successful retention of students goes beyond recruiting those with the best ACT scores and class rank, George Jackson, assistant vice president for Student Affairs, said.

At the same time, the university should avoid becoming “watered down” in its curriculum, said David Martin, professor of materials science and engineering. Jackson agreed that students don’t need a “bargain basement degree,” but that instead the university should increase its efforts to help students adjust without lowering its standards.

RECOGNIZING THE NONTRADITIONAL POPULATION

Pat Green, program coordinator for the Office of International Students and Scholars, noted the need for underrepresented groups to be included in the new strategic planning process.

Green also emphasized the importance of recognizing the university student apartment community as a “different sort of environment with different needs.” Careful thought should be given to the various needs of ISU’s nontraditional student population as the next plan is implemented, he said.

THE FINAL PHASE

Jischke will appoint a Strategic Planning Committee to draft the next university strategic plan, which in October 1994 should be completed and widely distributed among the university community for comments and suggestions. The final draft will be submitted to the Board of Regents in April or May 1995, with the new plan becoming effective in July 1995.

The process, Jischke said, will be “open, inclusive and deliberate.” But there will also be closure, he said, because the process will not and cannot continue indefinitely.

Jischke suggested that ISU students “jump in—don’t be afraid to get involved. In a fundamental sense,” he said, “this is all for you.”