PRESENTATION TO THE STATE COLLEGE-DOWNTOWN ROTARY CLUB
DR. NICHOLAS P. JONES, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2015 @ 12:35 p.m.
GALLERY ROOM – RAMADA INN AND CONFERENCE CENTER
Good afternoon everyone, and thank you, Jason, for the opportunity to speak during this meeting of the State College/Downtown Rotary Club. It’s a pleasure to get off campus for a bit and to meet with engaged members of our local community.

For those of you who may not be well acquainted with me or fully understand my role, here’s a quick primer. As Executive Vice President and Provost, I report directly to the President of Penn State, Dr. Eric Barron, and am the University's chief academic officer. I also serve as chief executive officer in the President's absence, and am involved, at least peripherally, in nearly all University operations.

I work closely with the President, other vice presidents, the vice provosts responsible for various functional areas of the University, the deans of academic colleges, and other units. I also work with academic staff, the University Faculty Senate, the University Budget Office and several committees in setting academic priorities for Penn State and allocating funds to move priorities forward.

I am responsible for all the academic units – colleges, schools, and campuses – as well as major academic support units, such as the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment, Information Technology Services, and University Libraries.

Beyond the aforementioned responsibilities, I am also involved with several groups that help to guide the University. Among them is the Academic Leadership Council, which provides vital advice and counsel on academic matters. The Council’s membership includes college deans; campus chancellors; and leaders of units representing not only the University Libraries, but also the Graduate School, Educational Equity, Information Technology, and Undergraduate Education, among others.

So, when I said it’s a pleasure to get off campus for a spell … well, now I suppose you know why!
Seriously, of course, I like to seize opportunities to share what Penn State is doing – and planning to do – with community leaders such as you. Rotary Clubs are vital organizations in more than 200 countries and regions, and the work you do here continues to be relevant and impactful. As a proud member of the broader State College and Penn State community since 2013, I thank you for your dedication and service.

**Slide 2: Service Above Self**

In thinking about Rotary International, and the meaningful work done by members through local clubs, the concept of “Service Above Self” resonates strongly with me. Rotary brings together people from all corners of the world – people who celebrate harmony, diversity, and a shared vision for service. Rotarians worldwide help in their own unique ways to not only make the global organization stronger, but also to have a positive impact in their local communities. Because Penn State’s University Park campus has a substantial presence in this community, it’s paramount that the institution values service as well, and that its constituents – from administrators and faculty to staff and students – work with community leaders to ensure the university plays a role in ensuring positive outcomes in all we do.

**SLIDE 3: Penn State’s Strategic Plan: Defining the Institution’s Future**

Today I want to share with you some details of Penn State’s Strategic Plan for the calendar years 2016 to 2020. I’m managing the development of this plan, along with the University Strategic Planning Council, with the intent of rolling it out in the next few months. The strategic planning process involves vision and outside-of-the-box thinking, describing where we want Penn State to go, but not necessarily how, specifically, we’re going to get there. Like all other “travel plans,” if we don’t establish clearly where we want to go, the details on how we’ll get there are meaningless. Put simply, strategic planning defines our institution’s future, and that future will be important to local Rotarians and other community leaders.

**SLIDE 4: University Strategic Planning: Why It Matters**

Strategic planning for universities is perhaps more important now than ever before, in part because they are anchor institutions – and often the top employers – in communities challenged by the pace of disruptive change. Our fast-moving world
requires that we break free of static plans to be even more agile, adaptive, and directive. Creating strategies that are truly adaptive requires that we give up on many long-held assumptions. As the complexity of our physical and social systems make the world more unpredictable, we have to abandon our focus on predictions and shift into rapid prototyping and experimentation so that we learn very quickly what actually works.

Consider how much Rotary Clubs – their strategies, offerings, infrastructure means of outreach and communication, and more – have changed in only the past 20 to 25 years. Like Penn State, this Rotary Club is now part of a culture of constant innovation, and ongoing assessment is a must to ensure we deliver not just what is needed, but demanded by our constituents and communities. Where will we focus our efforts? What capabilities will we need? How will we succeed, and how will we determine we have ultimately succeeded in what we set out to do?

In working with the University Strategic Planning Council to finalize the content of Penn State’s new plan, I’ve realized that the effort has extraordinary meaning and relevance not just in terms of framing our broad plans for the next five years, but also in continuing to support and engage the local community through organizations such as Rotary. The strong convergence of Penn State’s mission, vision, and strategic priorities with the local community’s plans and activities will continue to have a huge impact, especially when it comes to public service.

**SLIDE 5: Strategic Planning for 2016-2020: “A Commitment to Impact”**

The University-wide Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, tentatively titled “A Commitment to Impact,” represents our blueprint for the future – articulating not only our institution’s mission, vision and values, but also its foundational principles, imperatives, and strategic priorities that will enable Penn State to continue to thrive. It also reveals how Penn State will continue to have positive impacts not only in the local community and throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but also across the United States and worldwide. Embedded throughout the plan are references to Penn State’s roles and responsibilities beyond our campuses, and how we can and must evolve them to engender new, positive social impacts.
We state our University vision statement first: “Penn State will be a global leader in learning, discovery, and engagement that fosters innovation, embraces diversity in all its forms, and inspires achievement that will change the world in positive and enduring ways.”

Then, our mission: “The Pennsylvania State University is a multi-campus, land-grant public research institution that educates students from Pennsylvania, the United States, and around the world, and supports individuals and communities through integrated programs of teaching, research, and service.”

We underpin our plan with six foundational principles: Enabling Access to Education, Engaging Our Students, Embracing a Diverse World, Enhancing Global Engagement, Driving Economic Development, and Endowing a Sustainable Future. It’s impossible to imagine how we can support those principles – not to mention the vision and mission – without the involvement of community leaders.

**SLIDE 6: The Plan’s Five Thematic Priorities**

This brings me to the five essential thematic priorities of Penn State’s forthcoming strategic plan — Transforming Education, Elevating the Arts and Humanities, Enhancing Health, Managing Resources, and Leveraging Digital Innovation. Each represents an area of substantial opportunity, in addition to other areas – such as scientific research – where we’ll continue to invest considerable time and money. Each priority also reflects a breadth and depth of expertise and interest across multiple Penn State units where the University is well positioned, with strategic investment of resources, to make profound and measurable impacts. The themes intersect unit plans and draw from the human capital, infrastructure, and programs they represent. They also leverage collective energy and resources to enable previously unimaginable outcomes. That collective energy will come not only from Penn State constituents, but from community leaders as well.

These strategic themes are not meant to be prescriptive, but visionary. A strategic plan for an academic institution must serve as a consensus-driven beacon for future directions, but without the prescriptiveness that can stifle innovation and the
emergence of new opportunities. Entwined with them are the aforementioned six foundational principles, which provide a scaffold on which they rest and a common framework for implementation.

A closer examination reveals how the State College community and leaders such as Rotarians are integral to and interwoven within all five themes in our forthcoming plan. Put simply: We’re in this together!

**SLIDE 7: Transforming Education**

By “Transforming Education,” we maintain that Penn State will be a leader in the transformation of and access to higher education as it fulfills its land-grant mission in a 21st-century context. This will require Penn State to use its size, scope, reach, intellectual capital, and resources to help reimagine higher education, making it accessible to all sectors of society, and thereby indelibly marking the local community, the Commonwealth, the United States, and the world.

Groups like Rotary will play a substantial role here. There is a growing recognition that universities care about and can be an important resource for their communities. In addition, however, strong, vibrant communities are sources of strength for local campuses. Beyond the University itself, the vitality and vibrancy of State College attract students from around the world, many of whom also considered other top institutions before choosing Penn State to pursue their higher education.

In transforming education, Penn State must prepare thoughtful, committed citizens to help overcome the various challenges facing communities today. But more than just teaching basic civics lessons, we want to boost students’ knowledge and resources to strengthen the communities in which they reside. Engaging students in community service instills citizenship in a way that no classroom experience can. It ignites imaginations, engages minds and bodies, and gives students a sense of pride and inspiration.
SLIDE 8: Elevating the Impact of the Arts and Humanities

By “Elevating the Impact of the Arts and Humanities,” Penn State will be a leader in these areas and consider them core to its institutional mission, applying them, along with the sciences, as agents of change in solving complex global issues. In recent years, the arts and humanities have taken their place among the University’s outstanding and globally recognized offerings, such as the sciences, engineering, and business. Like its strongest peers, Penn State has vibrant arts, humanities, and design programs that are vital to their students, their disciplines, and to the larger community, and they can be strengthened further. We believe it is time to selectively invest to bring more programs into the top tier and to increase the impact of already sterling programs.

Of course, the State College community is highly invested in the arts and humanities, and such commitments will only increase. From concerts and theater offerings to the annual Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, State College has become a cultural destination, and recognition of that continues to grow.

SLIDE 9: Enhancing Health

Our third thematic focus is “Enhancing Health,” through which Penn State will promote a better quality of life through holistic approaches to enhancing individual and population wellness. The centerpiece of this vision is recognition of the need to understand individuals in all their complexity, including the social contexts in which they live and work, and to leverage that knowledge to create innovative programs, policies, products, and practices that will improve individuals’ health and well-being.

With Penn State’s Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and other entities that fall under the new “Penn State Health” umbrella, the University is already a recognized leader in the field of personalized health. Nevertheless, we have ample room for growth.

Rotary’s longtime focus on mental and physical health initiatives in State College will support and fortify the Penn State Health brand and accelerate this critical area of focus. Ultimately, health is a global humanitarian issue about which universities such as Penn State and service-minded groups such as Rotary will collaborate to achieve milestone successes worldwide.
SLIDE 10: Managing Resources

By “Managing Resources,” Penn State will lead in creating comprehensive solutions to the fundamental challenges of mitigating the detrimental impacts of climate change, as well as providing safe and abundant water, clean and accessible energy, and plentiful and nutritious food for future generations. Because of the University’s breadth of relevant expertise and capacities, enormous opportunities exist for us to address these challenges not only locally, but also nationally and globally.

Rotary Clubs worldwide already are tackling these issues in substantial and meaningful ways. In lesser-developed countries, people go into dirty streams or rivers with makeshift containers, take the water from there, and get sick from drinking it. Now, because of focused, long-term efforts from groups such as Rotary, many of them now have clean water to drink. Even in more developed countries, like the United States, many families still do not have enough to eat. Thanks to Rotary, however, they can more easily get nutritious meals from local food banks. I understand that one of this Club’s initiatives, the Farmers to Food Bank project, has in only three years delivered more than 17,000 pounds of nutritious, fresh fruits and vegetables, transported weekly from the Farmer’s Market to the Food Bank. That is impressive and impactful – and reveals what’s possible when like minds commit to a cause.

SLIDE 11: Leveraging Digital Innovation

Finally, with our fifth area of thematic focus, “Leveraging Digital Innovation,” Penn State will prepare students for success in the digital age and use digital extension to foster economic prosperity locally, across Pennsylvania and beyond. We also will lead in defining how digital tools and capabilities can optimally support a research-intensive university.

Just last week, more than 50 CEOs and representatives from educational technology companies – including Apple, IBM, and Inside Track-- were in attendance when the Penn State EdTech Network hosted a summit for thought leaders at the Penn Stater Conference Center and Hotel. The summit provided an opportunity for the University to consider areas of potential collaboration with select companies to improve
student learning and success. Jaime Casap, chief education evangelist at Google and part of the original team that launched Google Apps for universities, was the keynote speaker. His message: Technology is not the sole solution in reimagining education, but it is a powerful enabling and supporting capability. It is meant to be used by teachers to think about how they can use these tools to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to thrive in our globally connected, knowledge-based economy.

Similarly, technology and digital innovations enable groups like Rotary to do great things – in faster, smarter, and more resourceful ways. They also connect Rotary Clubs worldwide in ways virtually unimaginable only a decade ago.

**SLIDE 12: From Plan to Action to Impact: Key Takeaways**

Ultimately, with our ambitious new strategic plan slated for release by year’s end, Penn State is at an exciting crossroads. We are well situated to maintain and even advance our position as a premier research university with many positive impacts on the communities we serve. As we prepare our graduates not just for life in their professions, we also will prepare them for life as highly educated global citizens with robustly diverse perspectives, providing richness and quality to their own lives and to those around them.

**SLIDE 13: Engaging with the Community**

When it comes to local engagement and collaboration, the line between the so-called “town and gown” is getting much thinner as Penn State University Park and State College Borough continue to partner on important initiatives and practical projects that benefit to the community. A new Office of Governmental Affairs initiative is bolstering town-gown relations by streamlining points of contact with local officials and building on extensive community relations efforts already in place. Launched in February, the Local Government and Community Relations initiative is a dedicated University resource to promote and support strategic and coordinated engagement with local governments and community organizations, such as the State College-Downtown Rotary Club.
Penn State touches every part of the Commonwealth in some way, and locally our interactions with State College leadership are imperative not only to Penn State’s well-being, but also to the well-being of this community and its citizens. Together, we can promote and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes on University- and community-related initiatives.

SLIDE 14 – Thank You, Questions, Comments

I now can take a couple of questions or comments regarding Penn State’s new strategic plan and related topics. Thank you for your attention and for having me join you today. It’s been a pleasure.

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