

In the **P**W**Words** of the **P**rovost

An Interview with Executive Vice President and Provost Elizabeth Hoffman

Editor's Note: On November 7, 2007, Elizabeth Hoffman, executive vice president and provost at Iowa State University, answered questions and offered insights about the newly named PhD program in the College of Business. Hoffman had been dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Iowa State University 10 years ago, when talk of such a program was little more than speculation. After serving as University of Colorado president, Hoffman returned to Iowa State in her present role and thus had the opportunity to present the PhD proposal to the Board of Regents, State of Iowa.

What does this new program mean to the university?

It really means that the College of Business has taken its place in the research university. Yes, a lot of important research has come out of this college, but without a PhD program, it's difficult to recruit and retain the level of faculty that will be doing pathbreaking research.

We've had a strong tradition in transportation logistics and it's great that we've been able to maintain this, but in the long run to be able to recruit and retain quality faculty in that area really requires that they be able to work with graduate students. It also means that when business faculty work with other faculty across the university on interdisciplinary



EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST BETSY HOFFMAN SPEAKS TO COLLEGE OF BUSINESS FACULTY AND STAFF AS PART OF HER AND PRESIDENT GEOFFROY'S ANNUAL VISIT TO THE COLLEGE.

research grants, what they will be able to bring to the table in the future is graduate student involvement in supply chain logistics. That's important

to the bioeconomy, and important to food safety and security. They'll be able to bring a higher, deeper level of expertise than they've been able to bring before.

How will PhD work complement or resonate with business research in the college?

When you have doctoral students, it allows faculty to explore broader areas and keeps faculty working at a much higher level because they have to be absolutely at the cutting edge of their disciplines in order to effectively teach and mentor. And this level of graduate students challenges faculty because they bring new ideas and new approaches; they challenge faculty to think differently and to be with the

times. Our faculty is aging, and incoming graduate students force the faculty to think differently. And they do it in different ways than undergraduates do: yes, undergraduates bring fresh and new perspectives, but they don't tend to get into the kind of deep intellectual conversations with faculty that PhD students would.

What was your role in guiding the development and implementation of a PhD program?

I certainly encouraged (former College of Business Dean) Ben Allen when I was here as dean of LAS 10 years ago to think about a long-term strategy for a PhD program, but I also knew then that given the makeup of the board (of regents) and of the university administration, I wasn't sure that it was going to fly—but it was something to think about, especially the focus. Iowa State would need to differentiate itself from the University of Iowa. And in fact, I think that by differentiating itself in the way that focuses on the long-term strength of this college, the college really positioned itself to be unique. Now it can attract students who might otherwise have gone to much more highly ranked business schools but will come here to study supply chain logistics because we're going to be better at that than most other institutions.

When I came back the program was pretty far along, so I can't claim I had a lot to do with getting it through the university. But I presented it to the council of provosts and to the board (of regents). I was very supportive of it and so I'm sure

that made some difference, but the board has changed a lot in the last 15 years. Fifteen years ago it was very hard for Iowa State to get PhD programs approved outside of our traditional areas of agriculture, engineering, and hard sciences. I think a couple of things have changed—the University of Iowa used to be much more protective of its role as the research university, and I think recent administrations have been much more respectful of the importance of Iowa State. So since I came back, I just haven't seen the level of questioning by the University of Iowa that I saw in the mid-90s.

The college really did its homework. They put together an outstanding proposal, they shepherded it through all the university processes, and I think the board has changed and the University of Iowa has changed, and those came together at the right time.

Will the provost play a role from this point until implementation?

Definitely. I trust the college in developing their curriculum, but I certainly will provide some financial assistance to the college as they make marginal increases in their faculty size. The main thing is to implement the PhD program without hampering the accreditation of their undergraduate degree and MBA programs, which are the bread and butter of this college.

Will there be ongoing financial support?

That becomes their responsibility under the new budget model. (Iowa

State University is in the process of implementing a budget model that more closely links financial support to the ability of a program to generate revenue.)

What is the role of the PhD program in the strategic plan of the university?

It certainly fits in with the science and technology approach of the university by focusing on technology in business, especially supply chain management. The fact that we are a research university puts the college of business in the same category as, say, engineering, in being recognized as a college with a research mission. And they focus on an area that fits very well with interdisciplinary initiatives such as the bioeconomy and food safety, which both have supply chain logistics issues. This allows business faculty to participate much more broadly in university-wide proposals.

I'm really excited about this, and I just want to express the fact that I think this is a wonderful opportunity for the college. I think the investments that the provost's office and the college are going to make in this will pay off for the university very, very well both in terms of prestige for the college and in terms of more faculty involvement in obtaining research grants. I see the faculty in this college contributing to funded research and interdisciplinary work in ways that we're not even thinking about today because we haven't had the experience. ■