DRS Task Force and New College Planning

On December 12, 2018, in a summary of the campus conversations that took place over the Fall 2018 semester, President Koubek announced a set of nine strategic initiatives known collectively as Tech Forward. For each of these strategic initiatives, a task force leader was identified, and the task forces were charged to develop visionary proposals over the Spring 2019 semester. The proposals will describe how the University might make an investment in each area over the next four to five years in order to promote long-term growth in the strength, quality, and visibility of Michigan Tech’s degree programs and research. Based on the outcome of a proposal review process, investment will begin in five of the nine areas in FY20, and investment in the remaining four will begin in FY21.

One of the strategic initiative areas is termed Data Revolution and Sensing (DRS), and the task force leader is Daniel R. Fuhrmann, Dave House Professor and chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. Simultaneous with naming this strategic initiative area, President Koubek announced that he was accepting the recommendation of the Computing and Information Sciences Working Group, submitted in May 2018, to establish a new academic unit devoted to computing. In a follow-on update in Tech Today on January 15, 2019, President Koubek affirmed that Fuhrmann and Zhenlin Wang, interim chair of the Department of Computer Science, would lead a working group “to develop the implementation plan, including the detailed structure of the new academic unit and how we envision new degrees and the associated instructional support needed to deliver the degree program(s).”

The DRS task force and the working group for planning the new computing unit are one and the same, and will be referred to below as simply the DRS Task Force. Fuhrmann is the chair and Wang is the co-chair. The task force comprises 25 members of the Michigan Tech community, including faculty from 12 different academic departments, schools, and research institutes (BME, CEE, CS, CEE, CLS, ECE, GMES, Math, ME-EM, MTRI, SBE, and SoT), staff members from Information Technology, Career Services, and Advancement, and two representatives from student government. As described above, there are two distinct tasks:

1) Working closely with the University Senate, develop a plan for the new computing unit, and present recommendations to Provost Huntoon and President Koubek which, upon acceptance and possible modification, will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

2) As part of the Tech Forward initiatives, develop a proposal for how the University might make an investment over the next four to five years to ensure the success of and prominence for the new unit.
The timelines for these two tasks are slightly different, but the DRS Task Force expects to complete its work on both by the end of the Spring 2019 semester.

Adrienne Minerick, dean of the School of Technology, will take on the role of dean of the new academic unit related to computing effective July 1, 2019. Minerick will continue to lead the new unit for as long as is necessary to: establish clear administrative and programmatic structures within the unit, and develop and disseminate a compelling message about the new unit that will be used to communicate information about the unit to recruit and on-board a new dean.

The DRS Task Force has begun laying the groundwork by reviewing the CIS Working Group recommendations and gathering additional background information. Most notably, task force members Fuhrmann, Wang, and Minerick recently visited the Rochester Institute of Technology, which has had a successful College of Computing and Information Sciences since 2001. A report from that visit is available from Fuhrmann. That same group of three, along with President Koubek, also participated in a telephone call with Anantha Chandrakasan, dean of the School of Engineering at MIT. In October 2018, MIT announced the formation of the Stephen Schwarzman College of Computing with a $1 billion investment, and there is much to be learned from the process underway at MIT. Representatives from the DRS Task Force will attend a launch event for this new college February 27-28.

The DRS Task Force is working to flesh out several alternative structures for the new college and will make these available for public discussion. The culmination of this effort will be a series of meetings February 13-15 to be facilitated by Pavan Muzumdar, COO of Automation Alley, an Industry 4.0 networking organization and small/medium-sized business incubator in Troy, Michigan. Those interested in attending will have time to review advance information from the DRS Task Force. Muzumdar, as facilitator, will encourage frank, open, and well-moderated discussion of all the relevant issues. The results of those discussions will be incorporated into the DRS Task Force’s proposal for University investment.

The DRS Task Force would like to thank President Koubek for the trust he has put in us for this critically important job for the future of Michigan Tech. We would also like to thank the entire campus community in advance for their well-considered and thoughtful opinions, as well as their patience and collegiality as we go through a process that is at once stressful and energizing. If we do our job right, the result will be a Michigan Tech that is stronger and more true to our mission and our vision than ever before.