Collaboration & Engagement Focus Group

Industry & Chambers Meeting

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15 Participants

1. **What do you feel makes UND unique from other universities across the state? In other words: ‘Why UND’?**
   1. What makes UND valuable and unique to us is the type of talent it produces. In our part of the state, our largest employer needs are in the medical field and government. UND helps offer a high caliber of talent with the School of Medicine and the Law School that fills these needs. This is what sets UND apart in the Bismarck and Mandan area, even though it is 4 hours away.
   2. UND helps us in terms with workforce, particularly in engineering. Having students attend UND and become familiar with the state (to see if they like it) is a huge part of keeping a workforce here. UND’s Petroleum Engineering Department is the strongest in the state and the relationship we have with the EERC is incredibly valuable. These stand out to me as unique offerings at UND.
   3. UND stands out in terms of aerospace and energy. Also, they are strong in helping professionals advance their careers no matter what profession they are in. The well-rounded education they acquire at UND is unique and helps them be adaptable.
   4. Aerospace and UAS are unique and important to my business, and we are excited about the strengths that UND offers in these areas. We deal with policy quite a bit, and we appreciate the partnership with the School of Law. Also, the intern program for the legislative council and the research the EERC does. No other institution in the state offers this and it sets it apart not only in North Dakota but also across the nation.
   5. We hire a lot of UND grads – probably around 80% of the people I manage come from UND. We have a hometown feel here- it takes a special type of person to live in this part of the country. Many people that we recruit from out of state don’t stay more than a year. Those we hire from UND we have better luck with- they want to be here, and they know what it is like to live here.
   6. UND Engineering has been a great partner and has done some impactful research. We would like to do more of this, but we use them as we can. The aerospace program is fantastic, and we would like to partner with this college more, just need to figure out what it is that we can do in terms of a partnership.
   7. We hire a lot of UND grads – we know that they are willing to stay in the area. We have had trouble keeping people here that are from further away but had great luck hiring upcoming engineers via the internship program. They develop into great engineers for us. We have had good success and talented engineers come out of UND. So that is what makes UND unique to us: good quality engineers that are willing to stay in the area.
   8. The ability to integrate the commercialization potential at EERC and the more theoretical research happening in the school of engineering is unmatched. We have the expertise and capability to try things in the energy sector that would not be possible in other states. It leverages us and gives us the confidence to try big things.
   9. UND’s innovative programming is what sets it apart: UAS, EERC, Petroleum Engineering are all remarkable programs. But, at UND they also get a well-rounded education that allows people to be flexible in the workforce. Also, I agree that the North Dakota weather makes it difficult to move here (and stay) if you are not used to it.
   10. A lot of what has been said rings true with the agriculture sector as well. UND is a great place to get business background that students take back when they return to help run the farm. This is valuable. If they are not with the farm, they are working with the farm credit system. In addition, biology, chemistry etc. all help advance the ag sector as well.
2. **What would be your vision for UND’s future? Do you have any big dreams that you would like to see UND take on in the future?** 
   1. Higher education is at a crossroad right now. The day of a 4-year student living in the dorms is starting to pass. UND can be a leader in hybrid education and meet students where they are at. Look at distance education, online and how we can be innovative and a leader in a hybrid, innovative curriculum – that is really the key to moving forward. Look at workers that want to upskill while they remain employed in their hometowns. This would help the worker, the company, and the community.
   2. I agree- need to reach students who are already working and in the field. UND can be supportive in helping these people advance within their companies. At same time, my life and career were shaped during the time I spent while I was on the UND campus. Don’t lose the on-campus experience all together, it is important to creating a well-rounded person and employee for those that are interested/able to be a part of this.
   3. We are interested in partnering to find ways to increase the talent pipeline, but also to developing existing folks that are working for us. We have people that may not have considered continuing their education, but we want to grow them within our company. How can we do this with your programs? How can we, as a business, educate ourselves on the programs you offer and how can we guide our folks to see what is possible at UND? We want to do this, but we are having problems finding the time. Stronger partnership would be better where we can get some help with this. Also, bring back women’s hockey.
   4. UND needs to continue to be a creator of knowledge through your research. Being able to transfer that knowledge to students in the classroom and to business partnerships is essential. Creating and transferring knowledge is where universities have been and needs to be in the future.
   5. Programs and partnerships that are happening like what the EERC and Law School are doing with Energy Hawk. Cross disciplinary programming is so helpful. The EERC is doing these big things, and we are taking note, so having EERC help set that example for what is possible across the institution.
   6. We need to find a way for UND to become more tangible to the rest of state. If you use Bismarck/Mandan areas as an example, most of the exposure UND has is due to our alumni. In terms of business partnerships, we don’t have as tight of a connection. UND can do very specific things- and can partner with specific companies out here- where you can be more tangible outside of just having a connection as an alumni or hockey fan.
   7. Continue with the branding ‘leaders in action’ because it covers all the majors. Good job on the UND branding- need to keep this up.
   8. I would like to see UND become more of a leader across the nation in offering competency-based credits. We have great talent in the state that would have enough competency from past work experience that UND should be able to offer credit for this. You are starting to see this more in other places across the nation. If you have an engineer that has experience you don’t need to go back and get some of these credits again. I would like to see people get more advanced degrees based, in part, on the competencies they gained in the workplace. We need to make this easier for people.
   9. This (competency-based credits) resonates with me. At our company we have people with a lot of life/work experience and if some of that can be applied towards credit, allowing them to focus on the content they still need at UND, would be useful. It would allow them to get ‘recharged’ and advance their knowledge base and help move them (and our company) forward in ways we may not have thought of before.
   10. We need to be more aware and proactive of the things happening at UND and get industry engaged more.
3. **Communication has come up in several conversations. Are there ways to increase the knowledge of what is happening at UND? How do you think people know where to go when they want to engage/partner with UND?** 
   1. If I had a member of my chamber reach out to me with a question about UND or about a specific program, I would not know where to send them. This gets back to being accessible/tangible to the people outside of Grand Forks. This is the challenge from our side of the state.
   2. I can second that. I have a lot of UND contacts, and I would start with who I know and hope they can point me in the right direction. Having a UND contact/touch point with business would be beneficial. But we know this is a two-way street- it cannot just be you knocking on our door. Everyone is tight on resources. We need to see how we can support these things so both UND and our North Dakota businesses win.
   3. We often compare ourselves to NDSU. They have natural branding centers with the NDSU extension offices. I think that UND has done a good job at increasing their marketability across the state over the last two presidential terms. But, NDSU has that front door to a lot of our communities with the ag extension program
   4. It’s been beneficial to have UND and the EERC recognized nationally in the energy field. The EERC and the College of Engineering have done amazing work. Where is gets challenging is during the legislative sessions when you see other schools that want to recreate the infrastructure that already exists within this space. It is not helpful and dilutes state resources. There are certain strengths we can leverage at each institution- we do not need to fight over resources. In the end the state loses when we do that.
   5. It feels like there is a more collaborative relationship forming between the two major institutions in the state. I think this can be attributed to Dr. Armacost and Dr. Cook- they seem to want to work together and find areas where each university can shine. UND has law, health care, energy for NDSU it is ag. Collaboration between the entire 11 North Dakota institutions needs to be something that UND aspires to.
4. **How do we grow relationships with business and industry to build strong relationships where UND is an automatic go-to? What would be beneficial to building these relationships?**
   1. As far as the marketability and letting industry leaders and businesses know what is available at UND, perhaps something like a sponsored road show that takes people (including athletes) out to these places where you can talk about the offerings UND has and how it can help our companies and communities grow and prosper. This gives exposure to the programs and the university and helps us know what you can offer.
   2. Help with internship and experiential learning opportunities. Many of our smaller companies do not have the wherewithal to know what is needed in terms of academic requirements to offer internships. We need help with connecting us to students that need experiential learning opportunities. We can use help to get the technical details on the university end to make this work.
   3. There has to identifiable touchpoints across the state and identifiable points of contacts. It cannot just be in Grand Forks; it must be around the state. Every county needs to have a place where I can go and have a connection to UND. If you don’t have those places identifiable in these communities, then you need to have somebody take UND on a road show which would be time and money intensive.
   4. ‘Operation Intern’ has been underfunded from the start. We need to increase these funds to keep people in our workforce and remain in the state post-graduation.
   5. How do we get involved with our companies early on in their academic career? We have a lot of great businesses in the state and a lot of people are hiring. How do we find that student that is only 2 years into their program and start to build that bridge? The key is to keep people in the state. How do we keep them here after they are done with college and have not interacted with our companies before graduation?
   6. Help grow development opportunities for our professionals. Instead of them quitting and moving to other states we need to develop them while they work with us, so they can move to other opportunities within our company. If you want UND to be the automatic go-to we need help with these things. We have contacts in engineering, but we need this for other positions outside of our engineers as well.
5. **As we think about how to nurture partnerships/relationships, are there other ways that we can partner with other parts of the state?** 
   1. Have quarterly or bi-annual townhall/”Collaboration Expo” meetings or lunches, in person, in our areas. It doesn’t to be the President each time but make the drive and get out here, bring student athletes to speak. Invite alumni and businesses. We need a better idea of what is going on at the UND campus and what you can offer us. Change out who is speaking, this would be a good way to get the word out.
   2. Would be interesting to learn more about how other companies are engaged at UND. This would help us think more about how to be engaged with the university. How are other companies partnering with you- help us think outside of the box. Show us the partnership successes you have had in the past so we can build on these ideas.
   3. Anytime that you can bring university people together with the community that is a good thing. Not everybody will participate in these but the more events you do and bring people together can really go a long way.
   4. UND is doing a good job in many ways- the legal community is doing well, but I just know about my area. I think that we have this happening in pockets across the institution. See where you are doing this well and use this as an example on how to do this across the institution.
6. **What about opportunities to nurture partnerships across the nation?**
   1. My townhall concept would include regional places that we draw students from.
   2. The EERC partners with national and international groups- how do they get that outreach? It is boots on the ground which is how we need to think about this.
   3. If UND can partner with us and show how we can deliver on key things such as educational development for our employees, we would be very interested. I am sure many of the North Dakota and regional companies would also say this. We have national and global ties and if we can show how this is a successful model here then people will come back to UND to help fill this need.