



# UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

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Dear Colleagues,

I write to provide you with an update on two significant and related initiatives that focus on the same fundamental question: To be a premier research university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should Notre Dame devote greater attention to biomedicine and health care policy, areas that present some of the most significant, far-reaching, morally challenging, and financially costly issues facing our country and world today? In particular, I write about (1) the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Bioethics and Healthcare Policy, and (2) preliminary consultations about whether to develop a medical school or some other means for making a contribution to biomedical education and for providing the growing number of Notre Dame faculty doing biomedical research with greater access to clinical resources. While these efforts proceeded separately, the concerns of each are related, which is why I address both in this letter.

### *I. Ad Hoc Committee on Bioethics and Healthcare Policy*

Last January I announced the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Bioethics and Healthcare Policy and shared with you its charge: to evaluate whether Notre Dame can and should provide a distinctive and influential voice in the national dialogue on biomedical ethics and U.S. healthcare policy, and whether the University should consider establishing or expanding educational and research programs in these areas. The Committee has completed its work and submitted a report, which is available at the following link: <https://www3.nd.edu/~provost/for-current-faculty/current-initiatives/bioethics/index.shtml>.

The Committee's report presents Notre Dame with a range of possibilities and options that might be explored, from enhancing certain educational offerings to establishing a new institute or school, such as a school of public health. After reviewing the report with the Committee at length and discussing it with the deans, we agreed on two next steps.

First, we all agreed that additional faculty input is essential to evaluating the possible actions described in the Committee's report. **Hence, I invite you to submit directly to your dean or to me ([tburish@nd.edu](mailto:tburish@nd.edu)) your thoughts about the report and its recommendations. I would appreciate receiving your comments no later than May 3, 2010.** Representatives of the Committee and I also will hold two open meetings to discuss the report and receive your

suggestions. These meetings are scheduled for Thursday, April 15 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and for Friday, April 16 from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in Andrews Auditorium of Geddes Hall.

The second step is to gather additional information on the topics of health care policy education and research. The deans believe, and I agree, that this step is necessary to ensure that our discussion is well informed, especially with regard to the option of establishing a school of public health. Toward this end, I have asked Bob Bernhard, Vice President for Research, and Greg Crawford, Dean of the College of Science, to gather more information on the costs, benefits, and feasibility of the report's options related to health care policy. After consulting with faculty colleagues on campus and with experts around the country, Bob and Greg will submit a supplementary report.

On behalf of the entire University community, I thank the Ad Hoc Committee for the enormous amount of time, effort, and thought it put into its report. The Committee members diligently collected information about relevant activities at Notre Dame; consulted with experts inside and outside the University; and set forth multiple options for addressing the identified needs and opportunities, providing an objective analysis of the pros and cons of each. They met frequently and debated respectfully, openly, and thoroughly the many sensitive, controversial, and challenging issues surrounding their charge. Along with all of the Committee members, I especially thank the Chair, Fr. Tim Scully, for his focused and effective leadership.

## *II. Biomedical Education and Research*

The other activity on which I would like to update you involves initial consultations on whether Notre Dame should develop a medical school or some other means for making a contribution to biomedical education and for providing the growing number of Notre Dame faculty doing biomedical research with greater access to clinical resources. The possibility of establishing a medical school is not new to Notre Dame. When securing the charter for the University, Fr. Sorin apparently sought, and received, approval to establish what today would be called a medical school. Although the University has never chosen this course, many faculty members working in the biomedical area have in recent years sought greater access to the resources that medical schools and other health care facilities (e.g., hospitals and clinics) can provide, both to advance their current research (e.g., on cancer, medical devices, or rare diseases) and to take advantage of increasingly sizable and attractive funding opportunities for translating laboratory work into biomedical applications and testing discoveries in clinical settings. In addition, the changing landscape of medical education provides Notre Dame an opportunity to consider whether it can and should provide a distinctive approach to training future physicians and physician-scientists. There are many ways to meet these research and educational needs and opportunities, of which creating a medical school is only one. What should Notre Dame do, if anything?

To supplement the expertise and experience of colleagues on campus in evaluating such issues, I asked three distinguished alumni of Notre Dame to visit campus and offer their advice. These consultants, all highly respected and experienced in the field of biomedical research and medical education, met with several faculty and deans to discuss the current state and future of biomedical research at Notre Dame; with the CEOs of the two local hospitals; and with the

Deans of the Indiana School of Medicine in Indianapolis and in South Bend. I asked the consultants what options we should consider, the pros and cons of each, the questions we would need to ask to reach an informed decision about any of them, and what they would recommend as next steps. I specifically asked them whether the University is advantageously positioned to consider establishing a medical school and, if so, how the University should proceed in exploring the possibility. I also sought advice on these same questions from several academics and professionals at other universities and medical centers who specialize in biomedical research and education.

As a result of these consultations and conversations I have had with Fr. Jenkins, John Affleck-Graves, and the deans, I have concluded that, for several reasons, it is unwise and impracticable at this time for the University to assume the cost, effort, commitment, and risk associated with creating a four-year medical school at Notre Dame. This was also the unanimous view of the consultants, though they admitted that they had hoped they could justify a recommendation to create a new medical school. Notwithstanding this conclusion, we must remain open to the possibility that changed circumstances, new information, or new developments in healthcare could prompt revisiting this topic in the future.

Although we will not proceed at the present time with further inquiry into developing a medical school at Notre Dame, I will work with Bob Bernhard, the appropriate deans, and interested faculty to identify other strategies for assisting faculty whose research could benefit from having access to clinical opportunities, biomedical materials, and patient populations. Even with the idea of a new four-year medical school not presently on the table, there are many potentially exciting options to explore. Identifying the right one (or ones) will require significant faculty involvement and agreement on focused strategic initiatives for the future. Bob and the deans will help lead these discussions and initiatives.

### *III. Conclusion*

Because of the energy and success of the faculty in pushing the boundaries of learning and discovery, the investments of our supporters in a bold vision for the University, and the changing world faced by each generation of students, we must always be open to considering ways to expand and enhance the programs and academic reach of Notre Dame. The University will never have the resources to do everything, especially at a high level of quality, but it must never cease exploring new possibilities. Determining what to change and what to keep the same, what to invest in and what to forgo, always guided by exacting standards and mindful of our special mission, is the challenge, and the joy, of being at Notre Dame. If we remain faithful to the University's pursuit of its promise, it will never be otherwise.

Sincerely yours,



Thomas G. Burish

cc: Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.