Periodic Presidential Evaluation  
President Stephen G. Wells  
Desert Research Institute  
July 9-12, 2012

Introduction  
The meeting with the DRI Presidential Evaluation Committee convened on Monday, July 9, 2012 in the Maxey Addition Conference Room at DRI in Reno and by videoconference in the Southern Nevada Science Center Conference Center Room 182 in Las Vegas to begin the process of the Periodic Presidential Evaluation of President Stephen G. Wells who has served the Desert Research Institute for thirteen years.

Committee members Regent Ron Knecht (Chair of the Presidential Periodic Evaluation Committee), Mr. Ian Rogoff, Community representative, and Mr. Steve Gronstal, Student representative, were present in Reno and joined by NSHE Chancellor Daniel Klaich, Mr. Scott Wasserman, Chief of Staff to the Board of Regents, Nanette Merlino and Eileen Biosi, staff from the President’s and Chancellor’s Offices, respectively. Regent Robert Blakely, Regent Dr. Mark Doubrava, Mr. Mike Benjamin, Community Representative and Keri Nikolajewski, Special Assistant and Coordinator to the Board of Regents participated from Las Vegas. Also in attendance in Reno was Dr. David Decker Chair of the DRI Faculty Senate and Dr. Karen Holbrook who is serving as the Evaluation Consultant. Dr. Decker was present for the opening remarks and PUBLIC COMMENT sections only.

The meeting agenda as outlined by Board of Regents Bylaws was followed. During Section I PUBLIC COMMENT, Dr. Decker presented the Committee members, Chancellor Klaich and Mr. Wasserman with paper copies of a 68 page document summarizing the results of an anonymous survey designed to assess the performance of Dr. Wells from the faculty and staff perspective. The survey was identical to the one issued in 2009. Seven specific categories of performance were addressed. Some of them overlapped with major sections of the BOR performance criteria. Others were subsections of those primary categories. Dr. Decker reported on the process and timing of the survey (released February, 2012 with data summarized in March, 2012). The response rate was 61.1 percent (vs. 70 percent in 2009).

The process for the Committee’s evaluation was reviewed. Dr. Wells was then invited to join the group for the INITIAL MEETING WITH PRESIDENT WELLS to present the major points of his self-evaluation which had been reviewed by committee members prior to the meeting. Dr. Wells addressed his Goals and Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities and Other Information he deemed relevant to his performance in addition
to providing information in the categories defined as Board criteria established for the evaluation: Budgetary and Fiscal Management, Academic Administration and Academic Planning, Student Affairs, Personnel Management, Decision Making and Problem Solving, External Relations and Fund-raising, Relationship to the Board and Progress Toward Master Plan and other performance goals. The categories were designed to be used for all presidential reviews, but due to the unique nature of DRI and its President¹, there will be different emphases on some of the categories than might be expected if reviewing the President of UNR, for example.

Dr. Wells provided an informative PowerPoint presentation that was interrupted with helpful questions, comments and discussion from the meeting participants. No NEW BUSINESS items were brought forth and no further PUBLIC COMMENT was offered. The meeting was adjourned. The process of one-on-one interviews began in the afternoon and continued through the morning of Thursday, July 12, 2012.

DRI stakeholders from executive level administrators, other senior level leaders such as Division and Center Directors, graduate students, faculty, foundation trustees, community representatives, Presidents of NSHE institutions and government officials were interviewed. The group was well chosen and appropriate to provide a range of perspectives.

In addition to Dr. Wells’ self-evaluation and the Dandini Master Plan, the documents reviewed, included the report prepared by the National Science Advisory Committee “Research Activities and Operations of the Desert Research Institute,” June, 2012; The “Periodic Evaluation of the President of the Desert Research Institute”, March 2012, prepared by The Faculty Senate Chair, representative faculty and a staff member; the DRI FY13 Operating Budget and annual reports prepared during the review period.

**Preamble**
The current evaluation of President Wells covers the last three years of his thirteen years as President which, as he points out, has arguably been the most difficult period of his tenure. The economic downturn of the state and nation has affected every aspect of DRI. Reduced state support and diminished federal funding for research have necessitated downsizing of operations, influenced progress toward institutional goals, required difficult decisions to be made, and tempered faculty morale. Every action of

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¹ DRI, primarily soft-money, research institute is seen as both a business and a university. It has been suggested to function like an “employee owned” company where there is major involvement of employees who generate a significant portion of the funding, but also strong leadership within the organization. The level of state support to DRI is not significantly different from that of most state universities today, although it is apparently higher to NSHE universities than to DRI.
the President and his administration has been scrutinized and evaluated by those who were impacted. Those who connected with Dr. Wells in environments external to DRI did not feel the effects directly and had a different perception of the three years’ efforts compared with those whose day-to-day livelihoods depend upon decisions made by the President and his team.

The report will include occasional marked contradictions between the opinions of those who work with Dr. Wells externally and those who are employed in DRI, and within the latter group, there are also differing views among members of the administrative team and the faculty researchers.

The President has a very difficult role in “catering” to both internal and external constituencies. He must have genuine passion for building a bridge between them and engaging the confidence of the multiplicity of stakeholders to make it happen. Moreover, he needs to help each faction understand the importance of his actions to the other group. Dr. Wells’ position, respect and visibility in the local, state, national and international communities help connect and provide advantages to the DRI investigators. The credibility of the faculty and their outstanding science is the foundation upon which the reputation for DRI is – and will continue to be – built. Dr. Wells’ work with both groups is essential to the future of DRI.

Although the immediate past three years are the focus of this evaluation, it should be kept in mind how the institution has fared over the thirteen years of Dr. Wells’ leadership, and the prospect for continued advancement.

For the most part, this report will follow the format outlined by the BOR for *Evaluation of Presidents*. The majority of interviews, however, strayed from the prescribed topics or focused on only one or a few of them.

**GENERAL STATEMENT ABOUT DRI**

It is important to emphasize the unanimous pride and respect for what has been accomplished and is currently ongoing at DRI, a truly exceptional research institution with talented individuals who want to see DRI flourish and continue its upward trajectory to an ever more prestigious position for the benefit of personal careers, societal good and the role of the institution in providing solutions to Nevada’s and to global challenges. The research is the foundation for DRI’s achievements, but effective leadership is essential to support the research and to translate the accomplishments externally.

“DRI is a quality facility and has quality people and the flexibility to work on a range of projects in an outstanding environment that would be hard to duplicate.”
There is immense talent at DRI. The faculty believe in themselves, desire freedom to follow their scientific and intellectual passions and are confident of competing successfully for research funding.

Dr. Wells is credited for hiring talented people and for providing an environment where cutting edge research is accomplished. DRI is a “big family;” individual relationships make collaboration easy and DRI the place to work to accomplish science. “The goal is to assure DRI continues to be a fully, healthy, functional organization.”

GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Wells re-engineered DRI structure towards stability early on and at critical junctures of the institution (five units became three). He developed four interdisciplinary Centers and worked to obtain O&M funding from the state to support the facilities.

When DRI was at risk of losing top level researchers due to budget cuts, Dr. Wells worked through the Board of Regents to save faculty positions, provide equity raises and stop the furlough process that was to be imposed on the institutions which have salaries largely funded by the state. He made it clear that DRI was different from the other institutions within NSHE, but this action was a risk and act of courage that was handled correctly.

Dr. Wells has been highly successful in obtaining federal earmarks. DRI grew through these initiatives and several faculty gained research support. Although this source of funding has ended (for all), DRI has continued to be well funded through competitive success.

The Board of Regents seriously considered a consolidation process that would make DRI a component of UNR and UNLV. This action would be financially advantageous for the state. Dr. Wells fought vigorously to preserve the independence of DRI, gathering faculty, community members and other supporters to explain the damage that would be done to DRI if it lost its independence. His insight and knowledge, experience and strong relationships led to a positive outcome. The importance of his action cannot be overstated.

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AND SUCCESS AS A LEADER:

Dr. Wells wears many hats – as a scientist/investigator, external advocate and community leader, fund raiser, manager and Institute President.

2 Comments made by faculty members.
"Institutions are often judged on their leader and Dr. Wells provides an outstanding image of his institution."

A multitude of positive statements about Dr. Wells' interactions with the stakeholders of DRI and his leadership skills were heard repeatedly during the interviews: Dr. Wells is an articulate and personable gentleman who treats all individuals with respect and dignity, no matter what the situation. A story was offered in illustration: The former President of DRI joined UNR after stepping down. Dr. Wells invited him to become an emeritus member of the institution, to maintain an office access to the facilities at DRI. He explained that his experience and guidance were valued. This thoughtful and practical action is not characteristic of many new presidents as they strive to develop their own recognition in the job.

Dr. Wells is calm and patient, pleasant and effective, but he is also high energy. He takes his responsibilities very seriously and is tireless in his efforts for DRI. He is caring, quick and witty – a good listener, personable, gracious and a genuinely good person. He has integrity, professionalism, motivates people and keeps them focused and engaged in their mission. He works to grow new ideas and uses his networks effectively to benefit the Institute. He has helped to build an organization that has a sense of pride and academic excellence. No one believes more in DRI than Dr. Wells.

“He is an extraordinary guy – sincere and honest – and juggles many balls without losing direction.” (Community member's comment)

As a scientist himself, Dr. Wells is very knowledgeable about the scientific and academic programs at DRI. A faculty member who attended a meeting to preview DRI programs with a member of the Governor’s staff was impressed with Dr. Wells’ keen understanding of DRI researchers and programs. “He knew what we all do, more than I do about my own department.” It is a great asset to have a President who is also a scientist.

“DRI would be lacking in the scientific world without him. He is the right person for the position, well qualified and doing an exceptional job. I give him an A+. Dr. Wells would be hard to replace.” “We need more Steve Wells.” (Community member opinion)

Dr. Wells’ history at DRI, knowledge of the players and longevity in the system gives him the tools and credibility to be a strong advocate for DRI with the Board, the legislature and the community. “They do wonderful work at DRI and the excitement about DRI is the result of Steve’s work” was a comment by one of his fellow presidents in NSHE.

The faculty are well aware and laudatory of Dr. Wells’ positive connections in the state and with the Board, community members and other key decision makers and how he
draws upon those relationships to promote the knowledge of and work accomplished by DRI scientists. They would like to see the same positive interactions with them and to have a more open dialogue about the research and direction of DRI with Dr. Wells.

Faculty and staff commented that Dr. Wells often appears to be in crisis-mode, reacting to issues that could have been anticipated. It was suggested that he might better calibrate problems as not all of them are significant enough to warrant his attention. Others could deal with a number of the smaller issues that do not need to rise to his level. He is the only one who can deal with the high level issues and this should be his top priority.

**BALANCE OF TIME AND EFFORT**

It is important for Dr. Wells to find the right balance in the use of his time and it is equally important that the various constituencies understand the demands on his time and why and where he is investing it to benefit DRI.

Dr. Wells must be focused both internally and externally. He must understand his institution and the people who contribute to its success; he needs to be engaged in the external world in Nevada, and even more broadly, to promote the visibility of DRI. The demands on this time are enormous and each stakeholder has his/her perception of where his time should be invested. As President of DRI North (Reno) and South (Las Vegas) campuses and installations at Steamboat Springs, Colorado and elsewhere he must work to assure DRI is a single institution. There was unequivocal sentiment expressed by individuals interviewed at all sites that DRI is one institution and that Dr. Wells works to promote this view.

There was some faculty sentiment that it would be an advantage for Dr. Wells to spend more time on the Reno campus and that they need to better understand how his international travel benefits the institution (see p. 18). To some observers, the global connections contribute to DRI’s and Nevada’s credibility, to others they detract from his work at home.

**A. BUDGETARY MATTERS & FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

Dr. Wells has managed the budgetary challenges and fiscal constraints very successfully, downsizing the administration, enacting layoffs, eliminating some long standing programs, and allowing for reallocation of resources to meet the greatest needs. He understands the way this organization runs financially and works to balance the needs of both the faculty and the administration. He is aware of all finances at DRI

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3 Boulder City, Stead, and Englestad Cancer Research in Summerlin, NV.
but selective in his involvement in such matters, focusing on the critical issues and
depending upon his Senior VP for Finance and Administration and upper level staff to
deal with the details.

He established a new direct charge model to replace indirect costs and created
reserves from overhead, accessed other resources from the investment income and
gained O&M support from the state.

B. ADMINISTRATION, MANAGEMENT & PLANNING (Title modified by Dr. Wells to
fit DRI)

Senior Leadership Management: Dr. Wells has developed an administrative structure
that works well and he has selected skilled managers who are motivated and inspired
by his leadership and vision to accomplish their (and the institution’s) goals. He gives
them the opportunity to be proactive and autonomous in decision-making. For the most
part, he encourages others to grow in their positions and become successful. He listens
to ideas brought to him by his leadership team and is encouraging but also direct and
candid when he believes an idea is off center. He does not pass blame to others and
takes on damage control personally. There is a sense of mutual trust among members
of the senior leadership team.

The budget cuts have expanded responsibilities of his administrators. While this
situation has added stress to their work, it could also be seen as a benefit by allowing
them to add new skills, design creative ways to cut costs and to gain more
independence and authority.

A minority view was expressed by a senior administrator that senior leaders have a
limited rein of freedom and autonomy.

Interim Positions: There are several interim appointments – especially at the senior and
mid-level management levels. Some of the positions have been in an interim status for
a significant period of time; one position was interim for four years and has only recently
been filled.

Key positions unfilled by permanent employees create a sub-optimal situation as interim
leaders typically have limited authority to make decisions that move programs forward.
President Wells is aware of the concern and is working to change it. He has been
appropriately careful, however, to assure that interim senior administrators are not

4 The Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration is in an interim role, but the search is likely to have
been concluded at the time this report is filed. Other interim positions include the Vice President for Academic
Affairs, one Division Director and two Center Directors.
placed in a situation where they might jeopardize their own futures as candidates for the permanent positions. He recognized, for example, that the NVCI acquisition was his calculated risk and he did not want others to be damaged if there were an unfavorable outcome.

Leadership Turnover: There has also been significant turnover in senior administrative positions in the last several years. This, too, is destabilizing. It should be pointed out, however, that a number of senior members of Dr. Wells’ team have moved on to impressive leadership positions elsewhere. This is to the credit of the institution for helping them advance their careers through experience at DRI.

Facilities Development: No new capital projects were funded during this period, but several ongoing projects were completed.

Strategic Planning: Dr. Wells is credited with having a good understanding and clear vision of the research environment, where it is headed in the future, and how the institution is positioned within Nevada. One faculty member commented that:

“Steve is the visionary for the institution. The faculty are the agents of change.”

Nonetheless, there is ambiguity among the faculty and staff as to whether there is a coherent vision for the institution and whether such a vision coincides with that of the Divisions and faculty, or whether every faculty member is on his/her own to recruit funding according to “individual” strategic plans.

The Divisions and Centers establish direction that is both intuitive and defined based on the key areas for their work. Major research themes bring faculty together across Divisions, often with colleagues in other institutions, to collaborate and compete for large initiatives. Several faculty commented that they rarely win these kinds of awards for example, from federal agencies. Communication between the faculty and the administration is important (see p. 23) to identify opportunity and to promote success. The President knows what is going on the Nevada in terms of significant initiatives (e.g., water); the EVPR is (or should be) a member of national networks which have insight into opportunities that match DRI expertise, and faculty often learn from other colleagues about opportunities to be released in the future, or they may even play a role in designing them. Dr. Wells, the EVPR and the Director of Government Relations should also provide a level of assistance and support to faculty in identifying and supporting opportunities and then putting their weight behind them in Carson City and Washington.

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5 This would seem to be a pessimistic view of the faculty, and unwarranted, as many large contracts and grants are cited in annual reports of DRI.
Dr. Wells has made challenging growth goals for DRI which are viewed with varying opinions that range from: DRI has a small number of high producers. It needs to become larger by adding quality faculty and replacing those who are not engaged, to the opposite view that “we are in a contest to afford ourselves at present.” This is an important discussion for DRI, especially with the constrained budget.

A strategic plan for DRI was completed and accepted by the BOR in 2007, updated between 2009 and 2010, and repositioned and accepted by the BOR for 2011-1015 with five tracks identified:

- Environmental Research Mission
- Education Policy and Economic Development
- Financial Support
- Institutional Administration
- Facilities and Infrastructure

It was apparent from the interviews that faculty were either unaware of an institutional strategic plan or, if aware of the existence of a plan, they were not necessarily informed about the substance. Comments were made such as:

“DRI has a strategic plan but it is not being implemented.”
“We have a strategic plan but it is not coordinated with other faculty efforts.”
“Faculty have no idea of such a plan and have never seen one.”
“Our strategic plan – our core value – is to bring in money.”
“Top down strategic planning doesn’t work because we are responsible for our own success.”

Whether these comments have merit is less important than the fact that the strategic plan as it exists is not readily apparent to them. Moreover, their focus on a strategic plan would appear to be related primarily to the research agenda and not the other tracks.

Strategic planning typically sets the direction for the institution for a five year period. The planning process, if engaged in fully by the faculty, allows the organization to scan the horizon to determine how the institution can best position itself to capture a larger share of the “market,” in this case the environmental research arena, and to allow existing groups, or to develop new groups, to be ready to respond to significant opportunities. A good strategic plan also directs the investment of available resources.

Faculty indicated they would embrace a strategic plan that can be operationalized and includes metrics to track and evaluate success objectively each year.
It would appear that the DRI Strategic Plan for 2011 – 2015 should be at the forefront of a discussion with the faculty – even now. While the plan has been set with the BOR, it would still be possible for Dr. Wells and a key group of faculty and other administrators to consider developing a “leadership agenda” for each year. In this way a limited set of priorities can be defined that can be accomplished within a year’s period and evaluated at the end of that year.

C. STUDENT AFFAIRS

DRI hosts 50-60 graduate students who contribute to the research of the faculty as they earn their master’s or doctoral degrees from UNR and UNLV\textsuperscript{6} and DRI faculty teach in the graduate programs. DRI graduates obtain positions with Nevada state agencies, serve as postdoctoral fellows, secure faculty positions at good universities, and join consulting firms (for example).

It is well known that Dr. Wells is especially concerned about students and the students indicated that Dr. Wells is readily available to meet with them. When the group asked Dr. Wells about his vision for the students at DRI – whether they were “hands” for faculty to accomplish work – if it was a goal to create researchers who might stay at DRI – or if they could to prepare for other careers besides academia and DRI, the answer was “yes” – to all of the choices. This was interpreted as strong support from Dr. Wells to encourage students’ goals in a variety of career directions.

President Wells is engaged in graduate program issues that connect DRI and UNR. Due to fiscal constraints, UNR proposed cutting interdisciplinary graduate programs. They are small and a relatively easy target for budget reduction. They are, nonetheless, important to the students who are in them at present and to future DRI students who apply to Nevada universities because of them. Recognizing the value of these programs, Dr. Wells is working to see that they continue. The tuition paid by DRI to UNR\textsuperscript{7} for the students in DRI labs helps fund such programs. If the programs end, this funding leaves UNR. Although it was suggested that DRI might establish its own degree-granting graduate program, the current situation with UNR works well.

GRAD, the graduate student organization, was an idea of students that was finally realized in 2009 with the assistance of Dr. Wells. The organization connects the students working at DRI in discussion of issues that affect them all. For example:

- Funding gaps when an advisor loses research support
- Impact of the loss of the UNR interdisciplinary graduate programs

\textsuperscript{6} There is a closer academic relationship with UNR than UNLV.
\textsuperscript{7} $1.4M non-state funding is invested by DRI in the support of student and teaching programs.
• Handling of adversarial issues that arise between student and advisor. At present, students who are in an unfavorable situation are afraid to speak up.
• Annual reviews of graduate students’ progress
• Orientation for new students to help them assimilate more rapidly into the life and culture of DRI
• Mentoring of graduate students. Should there be a procedure for faculty to qualify as graduate faculty?

The students praised Dr. Wells for gaining a seat for the president of GRAD on the Nevada Board of Regents and for including student representatives in DRI’s Executive Staff Meetings.

The students are passionate about their relationship with DRI and stated that they chose UNR for their graduate work because of the opportunity to work at DRI. When they graduate, they will cite DRI as their primary affiliation and suggested, therefore, that it would be highly beneficial to initiate an alumni organization. Russel Kost, VP for Development, is taking this under advisement (see below, p. 21).

Issues were raised in the open forum about enhanced support for postdoctoral fellows. They would like greater involvement in teaching, for example, and for Dr. Wells to have a greater awareness of their presence and needs. It is possible that the postdoctoral fellows and graduate students could do more together and the VPAA could play a role in promoting such activities.

Dr. Wells and Mrs. Wells are strong supporters and advocates for STEM disciplines in the Nevada schools. Green Power is an example of an activity among DRI, DRI Foundation and NV Energy that brings green concepts to K-12 students. Dr. Wells is also President of G² Inc. which brought the International Science Fair to Nevada, and he is building the Nevada STEM Coalition.

D. PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Two executive vice presidents and a few other vice presidents are members of Dr. Well’s team. The senior leadership group (EVPR, SVPF&A and President Wells) meets at least twice a week and informally as much as needed. The purpose of describing these roles in the report is that they are critically important to many facets of the operations and advancement of DRI and affect Dr. Wells’ performance.

Executive Vice President for Research (EVPR)
This has been a high turnover position for DRI and the current EVPR recently announced his departure. The importance of filing this position quickly was repeatedly
expressed. It is also essential to define the roles for the new EVPR more precisely before recruiting Dr. Surles’ replacement.

Dr. Wells has relied upon the EVPR for “operations,” research advocacy, DRI oversight and as a spokesperson to promote DRI, thus at present, the role of the EVPR ranges from a true EVPR, to an individual who is the chief operating officer to a provost and right hand lieutenant for the President. In the view of some faculty, the EVPR today plays a less significant role in the research arena than in operations. The position must serve the faculty, the president/administration and the institution overall in the research domain particularly to ensure longevity and success of the institution’s primary mission in research.

Faculty feel the EVPR needs to be well connected with the scientists and the research enterprise and to function less as a general officer for operations. The EVPR should (at least):

- Serve as an influential leader in research
- Have demonstrated effectiveness in grant success in his/her own career
- Know the faculty and the research programs from first-hand experience
- Identify opportunity and work with faculty to develop successful responses
- Serve as a spokesperson for DRI research programs
- Interact with his/her peers in NSHE and nationally
- Collaborate closely with the Director for Government Affairs and the VP for Development
- Have sufficient resources to develop new and strategic initiatives
- Serve as a bridge between the faculty and administration in developing research events on campus
- Interact with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows
- Reactivate the Research Affairs Council (which has only met once in two years)

All of these roles have a primary focus on research productivity.

Faculty did not mention the EVPR’s role in promoting technology transfer and commercialization activities, but it was indicated by the Director of the Office of Technology Transfer (OTT) that this activity has diminished at DRI in the last two years and that seminars on such topics would be valuable to promote more engagement with the private sector at DRI.

Faculty would like to have input into the process and to help develop the position description. They, in turn, would benefit by learning about the needs of the President Wells and the administration for the new EVPR and his/her benefit DRI overall.
Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration
The SVPF&A, Ellie Oppenheim was praised for her availability to faculty at both the Reno and Las Vegas campuses. She often attends meetings in lieu of Dr. Wells.

Vice President for Academic Affairs
The recruitment of a new EVPR could be an ideal time for Dr. Wells to clearly differentiate the positions of VP for Academic Affairs (VPAA) and EVPR, and possibly to re-evaluate the time commitment for the VPAA (20 percent FTE)⁸ to allow him/her to become more strategic in academic issues related to graduate student (and perhaps post-doc) life on campus (see STUDENT AFFAIRS).

While the VPAA would typically hold the title of provost at a research university, this is not appropriate at DRI because students earn their degrees through UNR and DRI does not have an academic curriculum in-house or an undergraduate program. The VPAA, however, does have significant responsibility in terms of the graduate research programs and there are important matters on the agenda of graduate students that need to be addressed. He could also organize workshops for students re: career choices in industry, government or academia, interacting with government, and communicating science to the public, etc. and have a greater role in interacting with Division Heads. The Division Heads might have a dotted line reporting relationship to the VPAA, although their primary reporting line is to the EVPR. It is important that the VPAA works effectively with Dr. Read, the VPR and Graduate Dean at UNR. It is uncertain whether he also connects with the same office at UNLV.

VP for Development (see p. 20)

Director of Communications and Government Affairs: The Director, Mr. Greg Bortolin, spends more than half of his time on media relations and outreach. He coordinates visits of governmental officials to DRI North and South to make them aware of the physical and intellectual assets of the institution. The goal is to arrange visits for one Reno and one Las Vegas Legislator on campus each month. The Secretary of State, for example, planned a retreat at DRI, Reno. The “CAVE” is an asset at DRI Reno that attracts visitors, but it is also a source of contention between Dr. Wells and the faculty (see p. 15).

During the session, Mr. Bortolin is a lobbyist in Carson City. He also accompanies Dr. Wells to Washington where they present DRI’s agendas to members of the Nevada Delegation. These efforts were highly successful in the era of earmarks and are now designed to seek advocacy for obtaining competitive funds for DRI and entering

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⁸ A comment was made that 20 percent time commitment is not adequate to manage anything.
programs into legislation. One of Dr. Wells’ Presidential colleagues stated that Dr. Wells “navigates the political waters as well as anyone can.”

The long-term Cloud seeding program was eliminated from the state budget, although it has been of tremendous advantage to Nevada for many years. With the help of the Director of Communications and Government Affairs and some members of the faculty, the project was saved with a specific structure and patch-work funding.

**COO**

The position of Chief Operating Officer does not currently exist in DRI’s administration but was suggested by a number of those interviewed. Such a position could relieve both the President and the EVPR from more routine but important administrative tasks. Dr. Wells has also indicated that he sees such a position of value.

**Interaction with Mid-level Management:** Dr. Wells supports the actions of mid-level managers (Division and Center Directors) and has helped them accomplish their goals. Division Executive Directors are a very important link with the faculty and are highly regarded for their efforts in “vision and planning, creative thinking and financial management.”

The Division leaders indicated that they don’t always have the authority to resolve their own issues. There have been situations when the President or EVPR responds to a faculty issue taken directly to them rather than allowing the Director to resolve the matter within the unit. This undermines their authority. It was also pointed out that new Division heads are not always clear about the expectations and responsibilities of the position. There is no formal training and learning occurs on the job. It is difficult for HR in DRI to provide leadership training workshops/sessions because there is no financial source to be billed for the time. It is important to find a source of funding so these very important leaders do not need to “by trial and error.”

It might be desirable for Dr. Wells to regularly schedule meetings with the three Division leaders (including the EVPR and with or without the Center Directors) to provide an opportunity to discuss institution direction and research opportunities and progress.

**Interaction with Faculty Leadership/Shared Governance:**

Dr. Wells takes shared governance seriously and the faculty are happy with the process most of the time. He meets with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee monthly, providing for the exchange of important information and developing transparency as much as is practical. It was stated that Dr. Wells does a good job sharing information on timely and rising topics and has perhaps shared more information than any other
President in the past. On certain occasions, however, the information that is shared by the President is confidential and cannot be transmitted to the senate membership, thus limits the communication chain and the goal of shared governance.

Dr. Wells may make suggestions about issues for the Senate to discuss, but he has no role in setting the agenda. Both the SVPF&A and President work with the Senate Program and Budget Committee. Although faculty were positive about the interaction, they also indicated that some of the decisions made were done without faculty input and caused concern. The Nevada Cancer Institute (NVCI) (see below, p. 15) and the CAVE facility were cited many times as decisions that indicated top-down governance rather than shared governance.

**Interaction with Staff (Technologist Advisory Council - TAC):** The President meets with the TAC when requested and/or he may send the EVPR to join them. He has been more open in the past year than previously but there are often layers to go through before meeting with him. TAC members feel less connected to the central administration than to the Faculty Senate leadership which is closer to their operations.

**E. DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING**

From an external perspective it is felt that Dr. Wells is seasoned and effective in problem solving. He carefully evaluates the necessary background information on important matters that need resolution.

Dr. Wells has some faculty detractors with regard to major decisions he has made, two in particular are the NVCI acquisition and the development of the Center for Computational Research and Visualization facility (CAVE). The latter is not a new issue for this review period but is still brought up by faculty as an example of top-down decision making that was not necessarily positive for DRI. While there is criticism for the development of the latter facility, it was pointed out that this initiative began as a faculty initiative supported by an earmark from DoD then was taken over by the administration. It is a facility that can benefit faculty and others by simulating environments, modeling atmospheric conditions and other phenomena presumed to be of interest to DRI, agencies, the military and the public. It is clearly a unique resource for DRI, but it is also costly to maintain and to upgrade the technology. The military did not continue their interest and a sustainability plan was not put in place, and thus the CAVE is seen as a financial liability by the faculty.

The NVCI decision is singled out for more extensive discussion because it provides an example of risk-taking and managing risk, decision making and problem solving, communicating plans and strategy, seeking input, and correction of actions (recovery) –
all of which are in the portfolio of a president. Acquiring the NVCI research faculty was an action that has been viewed with very strong opinions and it dominated a good deal of conversation during the interviews with members of the faculty. The topic remains highly contentious.

In 2011, The Nevada Cancer Institute (NVCI) filed for bankruptcy and in 2012, the University of California San Diego (UCSD) Health System purchased the clinical practice. The basic science faculty of the Institute (MDs, PhDs and MD/PhDs) needed to affiliate with a new partner. On the surface, DRI would not seem to be the logical choice of a partner, nonetheless, NVCI reached out to DRI and through a highly confidential process it became a component of DRI shortly after the UCSD sale closed. This was a high risk proposition for Dr. Wells and DRI.

Members of the Nevada community outside of DRI viewed the decision favorably as an effort to “rescue” the NVCI, a Nevada resource and a source of high income jobs. It also appeared to be an opportunity for DRI to diversify its scientific focus in a direction that had some overlap with health-related environmental research. The two organizations are both not-for-profit and, to a great extent, survive on soft money.

Within DRI, this action was seen as an example of a top-down decision making without consultation with those who would be most impacted. This is not entirely fair as Dr. Wells had signed a nondisclosure agreement and could not discuss the opportunity openly. Nonetheless, he did seek input from key administrators and a small group of DRI leaders and Faculty Senate Executive leadership who were asked to maintain confidentiality.

Those consulted in DRI suggested that the potential acquisition had many pitfalls and recommended that the Institute pass on the opportunity. To support the President, however, it was suggested that DRI might “cherry pick” the best investigators (versus wholesale acquisition) and that under any circumstance an exit strategy needed to be established. At least one member of DRI engaged NVCI faculty in conversations and followed up by summarizing opinions, possible challenges and risks for Dr. Wells and his administrative team to consider. Dr. Wells appreciated the suggestions and some of them were taken seriously. It was the opinion of at least one DRI administrator that there has been inadequate due diligence before making the decision and poor understanding of how a biomedical operation and an environmental sciences organization would “fit” together. He suggested that there was a level of “arrogance and ignorance” in assuming the NVCI basic science cancer program could join with DRI seamlessly.
Dr. Wells announced the negotiated arrangement to DRI faculty at an all-hands meeting. Although there was little enthusiasm for the announcement, the Division directors were encouraged by the structure in which the NVCI team would become a new Division, Human Health and the Environment (HHE), and therefore would not be as significant a financial burden as if the 19 investigators were merged into Divisions that existed presently. There was concern, nonetheless, that new people were being brought into DRI at the time when there were discussions of letting people go. The plan had an exit strategy, however, and the first date for review was July 1, 2012. Today, the HHE Division is gone and only three NVCI investigators and a postdoctoral scientist remain at DRI and have been folded into the existing Divisions.

The following issues summarize the concerns related to this decision:

1) The process of acquiring NVCI was secretive; few people were involved in a decision that had financial implications for the institution and the investigators.
2) The organization is a poor fit with DRI. A number of the NVCI faculty also found this to be the case and left.
3) The acquisition of NVCI cost time, money and missed opportunity. Staff added new responsibilities and demands on their time in dealing with leases, facilities, HR, IT, and EHS issues.
4) The financial impact of the decision was substantial, especially in a year of budget cuts.

On the positive side, however, an exit strategy was developed and some of the funds that were expended (close to $1 M initially) have been restored (the current deficit is $400K) as the grants and contracts of the NVCI faculty were transferred to DRI, and there is the potential for new awards. Dr. Well’s actions are in the right direction to mitigate the losses and there have been lessons learned all around. It is now possible to be completely transparent about the situation, explain the status of the acquisition, and what is being done going forward in terms of financial recovery and personnel, although most people seem to know both.

Faculty suggested that not all top down decisions are bad, but communication is needed for decision making to provide an understanding of why decisions are made (see p. 22).

F. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND FUND-RAISING

External Relationships and Visibility for DRI – General:
“Much of the success of DRI can be attributed to the relationships Dr. Wells has built.”\(^9\)

External advocacy for DRI is essential and Dr. Wells is widely acknowledged for being remarkably effective with the Regents, State Legislators, Nevada’s Congressional Delegation, and business and community leaders in promoting DRI’s accomplishments locally, nationally and globally to build the positive reputation of DRI. It was stated that Dr. Wells is among the most important people in the state.

In contrast, others suggested that DRI deserves greater recognition in Nevada where the Institute is well known only to those who are scientists. DRI is considered a well kept secret.

**Business Leaders and Community Relations**

Dr. Wells has engaged with the business community, especially through economic development activities where DRI can play a central role in bringing new businesses to the state. He supports Governor Sandoval’s “Diversified Nevada” plan to expand the state’s economy by capitalizing on technology and research, focusing specifically on sustainable and alternative energy, improvements in transportation and water. DRI plays a prominent role in the water initiatives of Nevada – and the world.

Dr. Wells is working with the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) to develop a Hydro Tech Center in Las Vegas where DRI (and others) can connect with industry to conduct applied research and test technologies at the energy/water nexus. A plan or this activity is well developed. The Center, however, needs to attract private investment.

Dr. Wells and Dr. Surles joined a delegation to Israel that included Pat Mulroy (SNWA), Michael Saltman, Steve Hill, Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, other business leaders and elected officials who were to attend a major WATEC conference in the context of developing the water-energy-aridity Research and Technology Park in Las Vegas. Dr. Wells was involved in the development of the Israeli MOU and that would connect Israel and the Hydro Tech Center as a global initiative. The delegation also visited Ben Gurion University and Hebrew University where Dr. Wells had connections. Through this visit, the Nevada leaders learned of the global respect for Dr. Wells and DRI among academic leaders around the world.

**International Activities:** Dr. Wells promotes DRI’s efforts in working towards solutions to global challenges, particularly as related to water. He has arranged international field

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\(^9\) This statement does not downplay the work accomplished at DRI – only a view expressed regarding the importance of Dr. Wells’ connections to DRI.
trips, conferences and engaged in personal research. He participates on international boards and travels to promote collaborative relationships for DRI. He is an invited keynote speaker at international meetings. DRI has a wide array of programs in India, the Middle East, Singapore and Hong Kong, China, Egypt and Latin America, and other countries – an impressive agenda for a relatively small institution. The Ghana initiative, for example, helped the Ghanaians develop fresh wells which has curtailed illness related to contaminated water and provided an economic benefit to the people. Faculty are making an important impact globally.

**Relationships with Institutional Presidents:** Dr. Wells has good relationships with the other institution presidents. He is collegial and trusted and respected for “doing the right thing.”

There are elements of both collaboration and competition among the NSHE institutions, especially among UNR, UNLV and DRI where the competition is reasonably healthy and the cooperation focuses around state-wide initiatives such as the Center of Excellence for Geothermal Energy, the Nevada Renewable Energy Consortium (UNLV, UNR, DRI and certain community colleges) and unmanned spacecraft. The presidents also work together on a unified agenda promoted by Chancellor Klaich for the state legislature although individual lobbying also occurs. All institutions are committed to playing a role in Nevada’s effort to diversify the economy and to demonstrate to the legislature how the NSHE schools are an investment versus a cost.

His presidential colleagues stated that Dr. Wells works to promote the viability and sustainability of a soft money institute that has to create most of its funding – a major responsibility. He deserves credit for keeping his organization intact during the economic downturn. He is a strong and fierce defender of DRI who has done a good job in the worst of times and has weathered numerous challenges.

One president commented that Dr. Wells occasionally by-passes his colleagues on issues and goes directly to the Regents and Chancellor to gain a competitive advantage on an opportunity that could be shared (likely an allusion to the NVCI situation).

**Advancement/Fund-Raising:** Development is a relatively new venture for DRI and creating a culture of development and relationship-building takes time. The VP for Development, Russel Kost, was recruited from UNLV three years ago and is located at DRI-LV. He works closely with, and under the direction of Dr. Wells to increase DRI’s endowment and to escalate annual giving. Dr. Wells is committed to the success of this activity and has taken a very active role in both friend raising and fundraising.
Dr. Wells and Mr. Kost are working to obtain a few transformative gifts, cultivate and provide stewardship for an active and expanding donor pool and to work with the DRI Foundation on these and other outreach activities. Specific goals include a $3M endowed chair to support the salary of the president (creating stability for the Foundation), endowed environmental chairs for faculty at the $1.25M level, naming of a building and the plaza, increasing the annual giving of Foundation Trustees and obtaining a permanent endowment for the Nevada Medal Award Dinner, the primary fund-raising event for DRI. The award dinner was started by DRI many years ago. It is well orchestrated and highly successful. Last year about $150,000 was raised after expenses, and importantly, Governor Sandoval attended three events and around 1000 people were attracted to the Reno and Las Vegas dinners. This is also an occasion for Dr. Wells to promote his vision for DRI to the community.

It is difficult to assess the level of success of the annual fundraising unless there are comparisons with a peer group. A peer group was not provided, and faculty are unaware that one exists, but Dr. Wells indicated there is such a group. It would be helpful for faculty to know this not only for benchmarking development dollars but also for comparing research accomplishments. If such a group is not well established, this could be an important activity in which Dr. Wells could engage faculty.

The VP for Development appears to be funded from indirect cost recovery and thus presents some confusion to the faculty who assume his work is to identify donors who will support their projects. This, of course, can occur, but the top priority must be to discover the motivation and special interests for giving of donors. When a donor’s interest matches a faculty goal, there is often an opportunity for him/her to interact with the faculty member. It would be useful for Mr. Kost and Dr. Wells to better inform the faculty about the development process and DRI’s goals.

It was pointed out that the threat of consolidating DRI with other NSHE institutions created uncertainty about the future of DRI that resulted in the loss of a number of potential gifts last year. With that issue settled, and a guarantee of DRI’s permanence as a separate institution, there should be different, positive statistics in the future.

Students are interested in an alumni association. The graduate program has been in place about 15 years so the numbers are becoming significant enough to make this realistic. The initial challenge would be to “find” the graduates and begin a database to track them. Mr. Kost could perhaps enlist the VPAA to begin data collection and work with him on establishing such an organization. The Foundation Board sees this as important, but the size of the staff is insufficient to begin the project at present.
**The Foundation**
The Foundation is productive and prosperous. Prior to Dr. Wells’ Presidency, the relationship with the Foundation was described as dysfunctional, but with Dr. Wells’ vision for the Foundation in synch with the direction of the institution, a top notch Foundation Board of impactful people has been assembled. They, in turn, have empowered and supported him to develop an even stronger mission for DRI. The Board has also initiated activities to benefit the Institute.

The Foundation Board members, with President Wells, have planned a series of forums that position DRI as a driving force on topics of concern to the Nevada public. The first forum focused on water, engaging representatives from the Governor’s office, the community, statewide leaders and speakers and attendees external to Nevada. The second forum will be held in October, 2012 on the topic of energy, and again, locally and nationally prominent individuals will be invited. A subsequent forum in the planning stage will concentrate on STEM education.

Typically, a foundation would manage the Institution’s endowment, but in Nevada it is performed centrally by NSHE.

**G. RELATIONSHIP TO THE BOARD**
Members of DRI and the community have the impression that Dr. Wells has strong and positive relationships with the Board of Regents. One indication of their support is that the members attend DRI events. The Regents interviewed echoed the statements made earlier about Dr. Well’s successful external relationships, excellent knowledge of DRI activities, vision, diplomacy, intelligence and integrity. He displays a high degree of professionalism and inspires confidence. In general, he advises the Board of important issues on a timely basis. The NVCI matter fell short in this aspect, however, lessons were learned. His entrepreneurial thrust is valued and his “courage” for taking a strong proactive stand in seeking deviation from the Regents’ position on faculty salaries was praised. He is also admired for the “merger crisis.”

**H. PROGRESS TOWARD MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PERFORMANCE GOALS**
The Dandini Park is a 328 acre tract of land leased by the Board of Regents to the Research Parks, Ltd. to be developed as a joint facility among DRI, TMCC and UNR. At present, the Park is primarily a real estate venture with the only ongoing activity a wind power generation project with GE Energy, NV Energy and Clean Energy Center, LLC.
Jeff Pickett works to market the Research Park, interface with the community, limit spending, work on the master plan, and seek grants to cover expenses. He successfully obtained two federal EDA grants to develop the master plan\(^{10}\) and to build roads and infrastructure. Dr. Wells is the President of a 501(3c) corporation that manages the Park with the support of a board comprised of real estate brokers, bankers, BOR members, economic development leaders and individuals from the participating institutions. The Park was started in the 1980s and although still in its infancy in terms of build out, it never falls off Dr. Wells’ radar.

It was suggested that there may need to be a culture change at DRI and UNR that would promote research and innovation along with business and job creation to a greater extent. This is clearly the agenda of the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) co-funded by the two institutions but located at UNR. The TTO is a minimalist operation\(^{11}\) that processes disclosures, MTAs, license agreements and patent applications for the two institutions. Community leaders are also involved with the TTO and engage MBA and engineering students at UNR to help with an inventory of opportunity and other business-related activities. It has been suggested that the community members establish a Research Venture Company to promote activities that can aid in commercialization of technologies that develop from the research enterprise at both institutions.

**COMMUNICATION WITH KEY CONSTITUENTS**

It is imperative for the success and future of the institution that the President and faculty are on the same page in general, and especially during tight budget times when relationships and partnerships that position DRI to compete successfully for major funding initiatives need to be built. DRI has an extraordinary opportunity to capitalize on its scientific expertise to aggressively go after many opportunities.

Success requires tight coordination among the President, the VPs for Research and Development, the Director of Government Affairs, the faculty, the community and the State of Nevada to market their strengths in Washington and elsewhere. The issues on DRI’s research agenda that are of immense concern to the state are also priorities for the nation and the world. In fact, DRI is in the “sweet spot” as the topics within DRI’s purview – water, climate change, energy, air pollution, environment and health, are today’s global challenges (UN Millennium Development Goals for 2015 and the Rio+20 focus). The question is...how can a small organization like DRI be successful in obtaining the large initiatives that are also on the agendas of large research groups in the major research universities and national labs. The answer has to be through

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\(^{10}\) The five zones for the Park were designed in the visualization space of the Cave facility.

\(^{11}\) The TTO includes the Director, an administrative assistant and an individual who helps with marketing.
strategic partnerships with other institutions and the private sector. This requires real and continuous communication.

It has already been mentioned that Dr. Wells is an outstanding communicator to the outside, including the media, bringing attention and notoriety to DRI. However, for virtually all institutions, including DRI, it seems to be a chronic issue of what, how much, and how to communicate internally. The “how” is especially important because different groups across the institution have different expectations and needs, and even when there is communication, it often stops at a level that doesn’t reach the faculty and staff. There is clearly some work to be done on internal communications at DRI. Faculty and staff uniformly stated that Dr. Wells and other members of the administration need to communicate more effectively within DRI. Seminars and social events that contributed to collegiality were held more frequently in the past but have decreased over time. All hands meetings are not two way conversations, and emails from the President are interpreted as formal and patronizing. A gulf between the faculty and administration has developed.

An executive staff meeting (~30 total) is held every month in an effort to communicate information of interest to the DRI leadership, but it was stated that the time allotted for questions and discussion has limited value because an opinion that does not agree with that of the administration results in open criticism. It was further stated that Dr. Wells is defensive, feedback is not appreciated, and candid exchange is lacking. Faculty, therefore, minimize comments that do not coincide with those of the President for fear of rejection or embarrassment. This was said to be true not only for these meetings but also in open forum meetings and other interactions. It is important for Dr. Wells to have people around him who are good listeners as well as sounding boards…and he would likely benefit from being more open to criticism.

Positive statements about Dr. Wells’ efforts re: internal communications were offered from the Las Vegas DRI faculty and staff. He always has an open door, meets with faculty who want to see him when he visits DRI-Las Vegas, and joins faculty for informal conversation in the lunch room. Dr. Wells is aware that some believe DRI-LV, a smaller unit than DRI-Reno, is of a lesser priority than DRI-R and he works to address this inaccurate perception.

There are several possibilities for Dr. Wells to enhance the confidence of faculty through more open and direct communication:

- Institute a faculty fellow program whereby a faculty member could be selected to work with Dr. Wells or in another administrative office (most likely with the EVPR) – an in-house version of the ACE Fellows program. The opportunity would
provide insight and experience for a faculty member to learn about administration and to better appreciate the roles, responsibilities and pressures of the offices.

- Reinstate the previous seminar series and social events.
- Walk the halls and visit faculty laboratories for informal discussion.
- Establish a weekly or twice monthly “lunch and learn” with the President in his office or conference room as a no-agenda meeting simply to exchange ideas, concerns and thoughts about DRI over a sandwich.
- It might be valuable for Dr. Wells to deliver a “state of DRI” address at the beginning of the academic year or calendar year to recount the successes of the institution overall. A reception could follow to celebrate the event.
- Dr. Wells might offer to attend Division meetings (which appear to be positive interactions), at least at the beginning, to offer words of encouragement or provide useful information from his external experiences.
- Explain the nature of international travel and value to the research and relationships for DRI….and certainly discuss the strategic plan.
- If the email communications are to continue, assure that they are less formal and more in the “voice” of the President.

CONCLUSION
It is often difficult to separate an evaluation of the president from that of the administration at large and, in fact, from actions and programs of the institution, and, in fact, from the activities and progress of the institution. For many individuals who do not interact with the President on a regular basis – or even periodically, the distinctions are unclear.

General Conclusions:

1) Dr. Wells has earned enormous respect for his leadership of DRI, his personal qualities as a leader and his ability to work with the stakeholders of DRI in the community, Nevada, nationally and around the globe. The reputation and success of DRI and the quality of his team and the faculty are a testament to his efforts.

2) Internal and external perceptions (and needs) vary widely

3) Information flow within the institution reaches only a certain level. It is at the same level that criticism of the administration begins.

4) Recent events that are perceived as having a negative impact of DRI in this down-turned economy overshadow other marked accomplishments of Dr. Wells, but are viewed by some as symptomatic of the leadership.

5) Most of the concerns have to do with internal relationship management.
6) In contrast to the views of several faculty, and in consideration of the size of DRI and its strategic importance to the state and beyond, the administration is remarkable lean. There is no depth, putting Dr. Wells in a more operational mode on multiple fronts that would be characteristic for the president of this large of an organization.

7) At present, a more internal focus by Dr. Wells would appear to be advantageous.

8) Faculty would appreciate a greater role in decision making where appropriate.

9) Dr. Wells’ self evaluation is a valuable document that clearly outlines the accomplishments of the last three years and the wide range of activities in which he is involved. It is slightly out of date at this time, but if updated (where outcomes are now known) it might be good for the faculty to read. It may already be a practice of NSHE to make this available, but in the event it is not, this might be considered.

The intent has been to present the information obtained for this evaluation from the prepared documents and through direct interviews in as objective and impartial manner as possible. This reviewer also recognizes the visit was a snapshot of a complex organization and complex relationships and that misinterpretations and misconceptions may occur. It may also be relevant to state that in evaluating a president it is helpful to have walked in his shoes…and to have served in the roles that support the president as well as a faculty member engaged in sponsored research. I hope these experiences have served the process appropriately and fairly.