Hassan Aziz began the meeting with an overview of the process and goals of SPARC II in this interview. SPARC members are gathering information on the ways in which the various divisions of the university are implementing the strategic plan. We are interested in specific examples of the work underway, the challenges that are being faced, and the collaborators involved in these initiatives. Hassan clarified that he would be actively facilitating the meeting, and might redirect the conversation as necessary.

David Carson began his remarks by defining the overall mission of Business and Finance as that of supporting the efforts of the faculty, students, and other divisions of the university. He noted that, in some cases, this will leave Business and Finance following the lead of other divisions as they implement the strategic plan.

David noted that some areas of the division remain in flux. Athletics, for instance, is operating under interim leadership after an unplanned departure, but within the next week or two, steps will be taken to clarify the role of Athletics in the strategic plan. David organized the rest of his comments around the five goals of the Armstrong strategic plan.

Goal 1: Armstrong will impart the skills and habits of mind to motivated students that help them realize their potential as productive citizens of the world.

Plant operations is central to maintaining the climate and equipment necessary to foster an environment of learning. They are also developing sustainability practices for the residence halls, including a website which will allow users to see the energy usage of any campus building. In Compass Point, some residents will be given the chance to participate in a sustainable living community, involving use of solar water heaters and perhaps gray water for some purposes. This will be undertaken in collaboration with Student Affairs. Students may be employed in summer student jobs with Plant Operations as well, whether painting, pressure washing, or landscaping.
the campus. This initiative would provide students with needed income and would enable some to reside on campus during the summer.

Overall, Business and Finance strives to provide better customer service. In collaboration with IT, Business and Finance has several initiatives underway that will incorporate new technologies to improve the student experience. TouchNet, the online invoicing and payment system, will soon include a mobile application, allowing students to pay bills from their phones. A package is being purchased that will allow students to order parking permits online. A Frequently Asked Questions page will be added to the website for ease of use.

**Goal 2: Armstrong will build upon and strengthen its foundational commitment to teaching, ensuring that transformative student learning occurs inside and outside the classroom.**

The Learning Commons will be situated in the current ITS area, providing students resources for learning. The patio area outside will also be refreshed with new patio furniture and wireless service.

**Goal 3: Armstrong will enhance existing campus technologies, expanding both its technological capabilities and reach, to meet current and emerging needs.**

Online budgeting software iStrategy will provide real time budget information, facilitating financial transparency and allowing data-driven decisions. Armstrong is currently the only campus to distribute iStrategy directly to the campus, and is being highlighted by the Board of Regents as a model of best practices in this regard.

**Goal 4: Armstrong will strengthen its financial base, diversity university resources, and wisely invest in initiatives in order to ensure long-term sustainability.**

The renovations to the Science Center (heat recovery systems, fume hoods, etc.) were funded by a $1.4 million energy grant. The Business and Finance division is also developing a comprehensive energy policy, which will involve set thermostat points and the use of gray water for watering.

The bookstore is being outsourced. The RFP will be issued April 15 and the transition should be effective July 1. This transition will provide better prices and more options for our students, who will also be able to rent books or choose an eBook option. It will also improve university revenues, alleviating the need for Armstrong to carry the bookstore’s inventory. The transition will allow faculty to opt for online book adoption.

Armstrong’s investments were previously in CDs, which have now been cashed out and invested in state-approved mutual funds, generating higher returns. Interest income can be used for capital improvements, such as renovations, new floors, etc.
Goal 5: Armstrong will increase its visibility across the state and region by transforming its most compelling strengths, values, and offerings into resonant messaging that inspires loyalty among internal stakeholders and alumni and builds lasting relationships with the local community.

One significant initiative that is garnering visibility is the Georgia Department of Transportation pedestrian path and bikeway project. Path 1 is complete. Path 2 should be complete by May. A proposal has been submitted for Path 3, to loop the paths together and connect them to the City of Savannah’s bikeway. This initiative is earning community attention and positive feedback. It is a joint effort with Student Affairs, the City of Savannah, and the State of Georgia.

Hassan noted that the candidates in the recent VPAA search all praised the design and maintenance of the Armstrong campus. David agreed, noting that his future plans include engaging faculty committee input on prioritizing lists of deferred maintenance goals to address.

John McGuthry opened his remarks with the observation that in his six years at Armstrong, he has seen increasing interest in technology across campus. He sees a need to enhance the students’ electronic experience. While the new website is sleek and well designed (like Neiman-Marcus), some of the related technological systems, including S.H.I.P., are more on par with Costco. Upgrades to these collateral systems will improve the student experience.

John described the IT Masterplan, which will be kicked off next month and completed by the end of the calendar year. Appropriate technological innovation will require multiple inputs from constituent groups, especially the faculty. Some faculty members have been involved in drafting a survey, which will be refined and then disseminated to the larger faculty body. Several classrooms in Gamble Hall and University Hall have been brought up to current standards in classroom technology. After gathering faculty feedback on these classrooms, the plan will be revised. The IT Masterplan will include provisions for continuous assessment encompassing all campus groups. It will also be process oriented rather than specifying technological innovations.

Trey Lawrence asked about ways to provide students with improved access to software and library materials. David noted that virtual labs are being discussed, which would allow students to log into campus resources from any remote or campus location.

Rebecca Carroll began her remarks by describing Human Resources as providing support to faculty, staff, and student employees of the university. She appreciates the value: “We value an environment of mutual trust and collegiality that builds an inclusive community.” She presented four initiatives that embody the goals of the plan.
1. HR, in collaboration with ITS, has developed an online directory of faculty and staff that includes all relevant contact information, including names, titles, phone numbers, email addresses, and office locations. The directory also includes part-time faculty, and will be regularly updated.

2. HR is implementing No Wrong Door: Exceptional Customer Service Training, run by campus facilitators. Offered in 16 sections, the workshop will help 294 staff members improve their customer service skills, offering them strategies for dealing with difficult customers, and tips on relationship building. This initiative will ultimately contribute to student retention. The PowerPoint for No Wrong Door will also include four slides highlighting the Armstrong strategic plan. Participants will discuss in small groups how their role in the plan affects student success.

3. No Wrong Door will ask participants which old traditions they want to revive. New traditions will also be implemented, with a goal of facilitating positive campus interactions. The You Made Someone Smile campaign will be reprised, as well.

4. Staff committees are being formed to improve morale: the Recognition Committee and the Welcome Committee.

Chief Willcox began his comments by describing the community outreach programs underway. These are problem based programs designed to market University Police services and expertise to students. The popular, well-received series reflects a partnership between University Police, Students, Plant Operations, and Student Affairs. Programs include Cooking with Cops (fire safety), Cops and Critters (snakes and animal handling), Cops and Car Care, Cops and Carts (golf cart training), and Cops and Cocktails (alcohol awareness).

Wayne described various risk management assessment initiatives, including those addressing fire safety and behavioral issues, such as crisis intervention training. He discussed the RAD-Date classes which offer women strategies to avoid date rape.

Hassan asked if Armstrong is promoted as a safe campus. Wayne replied that the campus is quite safe and is marketed accordingly.

Wayne described some Cybersecurity initiatives that connect to the academic community. A Graduate Certificate Program is offered in Cybersecurity Affairs. This program has been revived and two courses are being offered this term. Future goals for the program will include taking it online in conjunction with the Criminal Justice program. A Continuing Education component is currently offered for criminal justice professionals.
Hassan asked what challenges the division faces in implementing these initiatives.

Wayne replied that campus communications impede progress, although communications within the Business and Finance division are greatly improved.

John remarked that he used to think his greatest challenge was connecting with the campus, but that now he sees the greatest challenge as being able to meet increased campus expectations without increased staff.

Rebecca observed that HR and the University Police are understaffed, which impairs their ability to meet their goals.

David argued that, while increased staffing would be nice, the greatest challenge for Business and Finance is that of public perception. The Armstrong community has a negative perception of the division, often making false assumptions and anticipating the worst. David observed that we all share the common goal of seeing students through to graduation.

Hassan asked how David might envision changing this situation.

David remarked that he hopes to be seen as approachable and visible. He dines in the cafeteria, hoping to be able to meet with campus constituents. While this strategy was successful at his last institution, he finds few join him in the Armstrong Galley. In order to be more approachable and visible, he plans to start a blog, on which he will share updated news and information, and announce the times when he will be available for conversation over lunch.

Trey raised a final point, questioning the limited visibility of graduate students in the Armstrong strategic plan. David expressed interest in looking for ways in which his division could incorporate the concerns of graduate students, including possible uses of designated campus space.