Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

— FINAL —

Strengths

1. **Quality educational programs** - Idaho State University offers a wide variety of nationally-ranked and highly-regarded programs that serve a broad range of student needs, including traditional academic training, the development of the mind and formation of good citizens, preparation for advanced education, and technical and professional training and career preparation.

2. **Access** - Through student outreach programs and institutional positioning, the University serves a traditional and non-traditional student population throughout a broad geographic area, including across multiple campuses and states. Idaho State’s online and distance-based learning technology served students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. **Value** - Idaho State offers smaller class sizes, more opportunity for faculty-student focused interactions, safe communities, and a relatively low tuition and cost of living when compared to other in-state and bordering regions. This value provides a high ROI for students.

4. **Student support services** - ISU offers a large variety of support services for prospective and current students ranging from basic needs, mental/physical health, to leadership and involvement opportunities and our unique Career Path Internship program. Our lower student-to-faculty ratio provides increased opportunity for faculty to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. **Institutional culture and values** - ISU’s broad student population includes a large proportion of non-traditional students and students from rural environments who show commitment to their education, and a strong work ethic. ISU faculty, staff and leadership are resourceful, and continually show commitment to caring for, investing in, and supporting students, as was evident when the campus further united as a team and maintained momentum during the pandemic. We are improving the culture through fresh perspectives, new ideas, and increasing transparency.
6. **Faculty involvement in classroom and research** - ISU's faculty are committed to helping students succeed at all levels, engaged in caring for and mentoring students, and are hardworking and dedicated. In addition to being highly regarded in their fields, they facilitate classroom instruction at all levels and create hands-on research experiences, which is unique for an institution of our size.

7. **Opportunities for unique educational, research, and recreational experiences** - ISU provides a wide variety of degrees (from technical certificates to PhD programs), yet is small enough to provide a personal experience. Unique research and educational facilities support specialized undergraduate and graduate research opportunities, and our CPI program supports paid internships for students to gain real world work experience. ISU's unique geographic location provides access to rich outdoor recreational experiences for physical/mental health, and pathways to pursue research grants for rural regions and the Intermountain west.

8. **Community engagement** - Recent initiatives are improving engagement with the local community, alumni, and partnerships with federal entities (INL), regional corporations/stakeholders, K-12 school districts, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes.

9. **Industry and educational partnerships** - Positive, strong relationships and partnerships with federal entities, other educational institutions, local industry, and hospitals/healthcare help students meet the demands of today's workforce. These partnerships also support student research and internship opportunities through efficient and effective support of statewide education.

10. **Identity** - Recent initiatives to strengthen identity through updated branding and marketing are increasing visibility of Idaho State, providing a highly professional image to support student, faculty, and staff recruitment and retention efforts. These efforts also strengthen the University's reputation as a Carnegie Research Institution.

**Weaknesses**

1. **Student recruitment and retention** - ISU has struggled with declining undergraduate enrollment and retention, lack of awareness of student-centric programs, lack of diversity in students served, and meaningfully engaging students in interventions to help them succeed.

2. **Identity, spirit, and culture** - ISU faces historical perceptions and lack of awareness about the University's positive impact in the State and communities.
3. **Resources** - Historical budget deficits and uncertainty have emphasized the need for an updated transparent, equitable, and consistent budget model and process.

4. **Faculty and staff recruitment and retention** - ISU is challenged by the ability to recruit and retain talent due to low wages, inefficient processes, perceived lack of development and advancement opportunities, and workload/burnout impacts. Efforts must be made to recruit and retain a diverse workforce and create an equitable and inclusive environment. For some, faculty morale is lower than ideal and some organizations and individuals do not feel valued.

5. **Facilities** - ISU has aging and outdated facilities/infrastructure with extensive deferred maintenance needs. Efficiencies and improvements to optimize scheduling and utilization of spaces and improve technologies are needed.

6. **Structures and systems** - Outdated policies, structures and systems cause inefficiencies between departments and campuses. There is a need for updated policies and organizational structures/systems to encourage and foster collaborative work, find efficiencies, and create a more flexible/adaptable organization. Cross training is needed throughout operations to increase depth in supporting structure.

7. **Communication** - There is a need for improved methods for internal and external communication to effectively and transparently convey information throughout the organization. A lack of clarity around opportunities for input and decision-making processes creates mixed messages between departments, colleges and across the university.

8. **Data and technology** - Outdated systems and challenging integration and operability have led to inefficiencies, redundancies, and a lack of accessible and meaningful data for decision support. Technology support resources must improve to keep pace with rapid technological evolution.

9. **Academic programming and structures** - The wide variety of academic programming stretches resources across programs, and can dilute organizational effectiveness and workforce connectivity. Complex tuition and fee structures create frustration for students. Efficiencies are needed in reducing duplication of classes across disciplines, and ensuring that class scheduling is student-centric.

10. **Research support** - Teaching loads (compared to similar Carnegie institutions) and lack of resources negatively impact research as a priority.

**Opportunities**
1. **Academic programming** - Through iterative program assessment, evaluation, and resource allocation merge and strengthen programs with collaboration to make programs more sustainable. Have more cross-listing throughout the institution. Create Interdisciplinary programs.

2. **Resource utilization** - Increase efficiencies, without compromising quality, in all aspects of the University by using existing and expanding technologies, ISU's multiple campuses, and effectively leveraging partnerships while developing new ones. Expand upon a variety of activities other than teaching: identify ways to optimize internal procedures; use a variety of pedagogical methods; increase student participation and opportunities.

3. **Online programs** - Expand program delivery modalities, increase flexibility in start time and semester length, extend program access in our service region and beyond, and offer start-to-finish online degree options in addition to existing in-person programs.

4. **Research and development** - Take advantage of research opportunities by expanding partnerships with industries and partners like INL and expanding partnerships with new industries. Develop interdisciplinary programs that encourage research opportunities. Strengthen the intellectual property process that enables technology transfer from the University setting to a commercial setting. As faculty and staff conduct research and establish patents, intellectual property can be transferred to the private and public sector resulting in a benefit to the university and economic development. Leverage ISU's robust creative and artistic research capabilities.

5. **Student experience** - Engage students to strengthen their relationships with ISU by fostering a college experience that in return also strengthens their relationships as alumni.

6. **Community and industry partnerships** - Expand and develop current community and business partnerships throughout the state and nation. Create opportunities to partner with business to help develop interdisciplinary programs. Increase opportunities for faculty and students to connect with state agencies and industry partners.

7. **College partnerships** - Strengthen partnerships with other community colleges and Universities to make students' transitions more efficient and effective. ISU can do this by developing more 2 + 2, 3 + 3, and 4 + 1 programs and enhancing upper-division and graduate offerings at the outreach centers.

8. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity** - Increase the diverse backgrounds of faculty and students by creating and supporting underserved and underrepresented populations. Use targeted and measurable outreach strategies to expand inclusivity, expand remote work opportunities, strengthen relationships, expand fundraising, and recruit graduate students.
9. **Marketing and recruitment** - Establish Idaho State as a destination campus. Market the University's beauty and proximity to outdoor activities, low-cost tuition, affordable cost of living, campus safety, and quality of life. Take advantage of the attention given to health professions programs during COVID-19. Utilize faculty and students from different backgrounds in marketing materials to demonstrate inclusion. Focus on attracting student populations from larger urban areas.

10. **Fundraising and advancement** - Grow relationships and fundraising by effectively connecting with alumni and industry. Create a system to track alumni throughout their careers.

**Threats**

1. **Economic** - The rising cost of higher education is obstructing student enrollment. The replacement of appropriated funding by tuition and fees is hampering ISU's ability to deliver an affordable education for our students and pursue its research mission.

2. **Value proposition** - Idaho's higher education institutions are facing recruiting and retention challenges, due to increasing costs associated with reductions in public and private funding partially caused by the public's diminished perception of a higher education's value. Many students struggle with the idea of continuing on in their education as wages increase for unskilled labor after COVID.

3. **State support** - In recent years, the increase in political strife nationally and locally has been compounding negative perceptions of the role and value of higher education in Idaho. If the current tone toward higher education continues, it will affect the institution's ability to recruit and retain qualified faculty and to sustain student success.

4. **Community support and engagement** - Waning community support and engagement have complicated ISU's ability to provide a quality student experience. ISU has not fully overcome recruiting and retention challenges caused by lingering and outdated public perceptions of its academic standing as well as people's broader, negative perceptions about Pocatello and the Southeast Idaho region.

5. **Competition** - ISU faces strong competition for students from regional institutions, and online programs. ISU will face increased competition by out-of-state universities related to the changing demographic shift (decreasing number of high school graduates). There is increased competition for community, professional, and philanthropic partnerships. ISU must compete in the marketplace to recruit and retain faculty and staff.
6. **Student pipeline issues** - A strong economy and students moving straight into the workforce is amplifying a struggling “go-on” rate among Idaho high school graduates and significantly impacts the number of students in our recruitment pipelines. Some students who wish to attend ISU are not fully prepared, and that creates a significant hurdle to overcome for student and institutional success.

7. **Lack of diversity** - The University needs to increase its representation to better reflect the demographics of Idaho and beyond. Similarly, ISU needs to build a more inclusive campus to increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students, staff, and faculty.

8. **Societal Impacts** - The negative mental health impacts associated with recent events on students, faculty, and staff (e.g., pandemic and political and social unrest) have increasingly harmed our ability to recruit students successfully into higher education and retain them once admitted.

9. **External regulatory constraints** - The external policies and processes that safeguard and protect higher education have also limited some of ISU’s ability to act nimbly and responsively to student and institutional needs.

10. **Natural hazards** - ISU is vulnerable to natural disasters related to our geological environment, climate change, etc.