

Report from The University of Iowa's 2020 Academic Organizational Structure Task Force

Submitted on September 8, 2017, by: Daniel Clay, Sarah Gardial, John Keller, Alec Scranton; a subcommittee of the Collegiate Deans.

PROCESS:

The work of the 2020 Academic Organizational Structure Task Force (2020TF) began in January 2017 with a campus-wide memorandum distributed by then Provost Barry Butler. Relevant excerpts from Provost Butler's memo of 1/19/2017 charged the committee to:

- Conduct reorganization listening sessions with constituent groups through summer 2017,
- Develop criteria to evaluate UI's academic units,
- Recommend possibilities for reorganization of academic units.

The overall goal of the work of the 2020TF was to: "help us become a more forward looking, nimble university that focuses our limited resources in support of academic excellence". The committee composition was: Sue Curry (SC), College of Public Health (departed March 2017); Daniel Clay, College of Education (successor to SC); Sarah Gardial, Tippie College of Business; John Keller, Graduate College; and Alec Scranton, College of Engineering.

The 2020TF began meeting with various groups in February 2017, and upon her appointment as Interim Provost, Sue Curry distributed a renewed charge (4/25/2017) with the following pertinent excerpts:

- Identify academic structures that are serving us well,
- Identify opportunities for positive change to advance strategic priorities,
- Evaluate and make recommendations regarding possible changes to strengthen our teaching, research and engagement missions.

The 2020TF also took the current UI Strategic Plan (UISP) into consideration during our meetings with campus constituents. Some of the key factors in the UISP were the excerpted statements:

- The UISP facilitates change, innovation and growth,
- The UISP aids in charting a course for a more distinctive UI (integrating strengths into opportunities for innovation and competitive advantage),
- The UISP is focused and promotes action,
- The UISP creates an ecosystem that enables the UI to confront the "grand challenges" of the 21st century.

Throughout the spring and summer the 2020TF met with a number of individuals including (not in chronological order): President Harrel; VP Research Reed; former Provost Butler; Interim Provost Curry; Deans Agrawal, Culshaw, Djalali (two meetings), Johnsen, Letendre, and

Winokur; former Interim Dean Wilson; Associate Provosts Kregel and Moeller, Professors Charles Brenner, David Ryfe and Diane Slusarski. 2020TF also met with former Dean Linda Maxson.

2020TF also met with a number of groups, including a those representing the Arts (two meetings); the CLAS 20/20 committee (with their subsequent draft report); the CLAS Faculty Assembly; the CLAS Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee; Center for the Book faculty; Urban and Regional Planning faculty; Staff Council officers and members; Faculty Senate officers and members, UI Student Government officers; Graduate and Professional Student Government officers; and representatives from the Public Policy Center.

While this list of contributors is not exhaustive, it served the 2020TF well in preparing the following Principles, Themes, and Challenging Issues that constitute the 2020TF report.

PRINCIPLES:

The overall principle for any academic structure change of University of Iowa is to **enhance the excellence and distinction of the institution**. First and foremost, the UI needs to **remain a robust AAU institution**. This means building from current strengths and enabling our faculty to create innovative solutions in response to the research, scholarship, and educational needs and opportunities of the 21st century. In addressing these principles, we must focus on the future needs of our students and build academic structures that best meet these needs. There was a universal recognition by those interviewed that the structure of the university should foster and promote inter-disciplinary collaborations in both research and educational programs, and that the **status quo is not a desirable option**. To support these broad principles, the following more specific principles emerged:

Recognize and build from the unique identity and strengths of the University of Iowa to enhance our competitiveness and impact.

Foster and promote new and existing interdisciplinary collaborations by removing impediments and supporting innovative interdisciplinary collaborations in scholarship and education.

Enable strategic programs by empowering faculty with the resources they need to succeed and thrive. Our collegiate units should provide decision makers with knowledge of the current state of our programs so that priorities can be determined and resources can be allocated to enhance the scope and impact of our most strategic programs.

Promote innovative programs by enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of communication and collaboration at all levels – within and across colleges.

Strengthen departments and colleges by consolidating units into flexible and nimble units with shared vision for curriculum, research and service.

Enable strategic growth by encouraging priority programs to enhance the scope, impact, and visibility of their activities. The structure should empower departments and programs to

strategically grow and enhance their programs while holding them accountable for the outcomes and achievements.

THEMES:

The University of Iowa must determine and focus on strategic areas that address the Grand Challenges for Iowans, and we must determine what structures are needed to support the future UI mission. While a variety of alternative structures were offered, none are specifically recommended by this report. Instead, we choose to relay the themes that arose by specific area.

Unit size needs to be optimized to promote faculty productivity and student success. A common concern heard during the campus discussions was whether our current collegiate and administrative units optimized our future research and teaching potential. Especially where colleges were over-large and disparate in the assortment of academic units, several disadvantages were noted. First, it was perceived that individual unit needs (especially smaller units) are not sufficiently addressed in large colleges. Second, it was suggested that collegiate units function best if they are united by a common theme. Third, there was a sense of a loss of unit accountability in such colleges. Fourth, such colleges are inherently more difficult to lead. Finally, students expressed a lack of perceived community in large, disparate colleges with an overly broad mission.

Changes in enrollments, pursuit of degree majors and student interests mandate a continuing review of academic programs and curricula that support student success for the future. These factors should be continually reviewed with department, collegiate and university perspectives in mind.

Re-envision the General Education (GE) curriculum to take advantage of a broader university perspective overseen by a central university office. Considering that many undergraduates enroll at Iowa to pursue graduate and professional degrees, many more colleges could play an active role in the delivery of this important academic component.

Evaluate the role of University College in the evaluation and future implementation of our “high impact” experiences. Central offices and programs such as Honors, Pomerantz Career Center, Student Advising, First Year Seminars, among others need to be reviewed to determine their current value-added, as well as their potential for future enhancement.

CHALLENGING ISSUES:

Like many longstanding academic organizations the UI faces many issues as we strive to maintain our AAU status, advance our teaching and research mission to promote the current and future success of our students, and to address the important issues confronting our society. To do so will require an honest appraisal of our strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. This perspective will challenge the institutional thinking which is steeped in tradition and mired in territorialism. In order to accomplish our goals, the faculty and staff need to embrace a

collaborative, holistic approach to accomplish the goals of the UISP. A number of key points were made throughout our campus discussions:

The definitions of “success” and appropriate performance metrics need to be determined such that high-performing units may be rewarded or supported based on their progress. Just as important is the identification of units which are underperforming in teaching and research expectations.

Accountability in performance measures will help shape areas of strength and those that need to re-define their vision. For instance, it is possible that non-research productive units may re-focus on strengthening their contributions to the teaching mission of the UI.

Small units should focus on collaboration and consolidation with forward re-envisioning to promote faculty productivity and student success. Examples of such possibilities arose from the Review of Doctoral Graduate Programs Final Reports (2016 & 2010).

Strengthening via consolidation, coalescing or a renewed interdisciplinary perspective were identified for a number of units across the UI campus.

Policies and procedures (performance “credit,” financial structures, etc.) must be developed if the UI is to realize its opportunities for collaboration and the expansion of interdisciplinary work.

Some governance issues impede progress. For example, rotating DEO structures in some areas impede progress. Mechanisms to develop leaders needs to be established. A common theme articulated throughout our conversations was that junior faculty were prematurely thrust into leadership positions (often without proper development) inhibiting their progress towards promotion.

Some administrative offices originally designed to promote student success have actually impeded overall student success by becoming disconnected from the breadth of academic programs on campus, including undergraduate and graduate programs.

Opportunities for enhanced faculty and student involvement with central service units (e.g. Hancher, Libraries, Museums, State Archaeologist, Hygienist, etc.) have gone unrealized, despite being campus partners.

SUMMARY:

It was clear from the conversations thus far that the **UI has many strengths, but also many challenges**, to remain a robust university worthy of AAU status. There was recognition that to do so, the **status quo is unacceptable**. The UI needs to look to the future to accomplish the Strategic Plan. This calls for renewed **mechanisms to collaborate and to create multi- and interdisciplinary opportunities** to fully realize success in the teaching, research and

engagement strategic priorities. There was a consistent view that **future academic structure(s) must have units that are manageable in size, scope and mission. Strong leadership demanding realistic accountability for performance is mandatory at every level.** These parameters are important in order to make strategic decisions regarding the future of the UI.