

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE WORKING GROUP

FINAL REPORT

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The Charge

On February 9, 2009, President Fogel assembled this Working Group and asked it to do the following:

1. Discuss the possible reorganization of the schools and colleges with undergraduate students for the purposes of:
 - a. Promoting increased retention and graduation rates
 - b. Promoting increased curricular excellence and flexibility
 - c. Promoting increased administrative and financial efficiencies
 - d. Cultivating and displaying our academic excellence
2. Report back to the President on these matters at, as he instructed, the level of “feasible concepts” rather than as “developed plans”
3. Include in our report a consideration of the President’s proposed reorganization scheme (the development of a single college) as well as up to two additional schemes, plus how our current organization may or may not be able to address the concerns he has identified

Since making this request, President Fogel has also made it clear that he would like the Working Group to recommend “next steps” in this process of considering possible university reorganization.

Preliminary Comments

The University’s vision is to “be among the nation’s premier small research universities, preeminent in our comprehensive commitment to liberal education, environment, health, and public service.” Our mission is to “create, evaluate, share, and apply knowledge and to prepare students to be accountable leaders who will bring to their work dedication to the global community, a grasp of complexity, effective problem-solving and communication skills, and an enduring commitment to learning and ethical conduct.” It is essential that any decision concerning the organization of the university be fully informed by and supportive of both our vision and mission. It is also essential to recognize that any academic reorganization of the undergraduate colleges will have significant implications for graduate programs and research activity; any such actions must be undertaken not

only to strengthen the undergraduate mission, but to enhance the graduate and research missions as well.

The Working Group is well aware that there has been a great deal of good work in recent years by other committees, consultants, faculty and administrators about ways we might improve our undergraduate program. Much attention has been given to how we might enhance the first year experience and student engagement, build a more cohesive general education program, cultivate better advising practices, develop residential learning communities to support the academic mission of the university, promote diversity in our curricular and co-curricular programs, and so forth. We believe many of these proposed reforms and policies have the potential to strengthen the university's academic program in ways that would likely lead to higher retention and graduation rates. There is no need for this committee to re-invent this wealth of analysis and policy recommendations. (Please see the Appendix to this report for a note about some of these important reports and surveys.)

There is also a strong feeling among some members of the committee that serious reform of current institutional practices could emphasize operational policy (i.e., administrative effectiveness) rather than academic reorganization. The key issue, from this view, is to develop a system of resource distribution more consistently supportive of the university's vision, strategic plan, and the agreed-upon metrics to which the deans are held. Indeed, some Working Group members have argued that academic reorganization – with all of its likely upheavals, anxiety, readjustments, and uncertain outcomes – might be putting the proverbial cart before the horse: reorganization without increased administrative accountability could not be expected to be successful; increased administrative accountability, in turn, might very well make reorganization look less necessary. Members of the committee noted that current resource allocation practices do not reflect the true costs of instruction in different colleges and schools. These members argued that it was time for UVM to adopt a budget model that more adequately funds the costs of instruction and related activities in all units, one that can be financially reset each year as enrollment is added or moves among the units. At the very least, some think that more effective management practices would make the dramatic step of academic reorganization seem less attractive or necessary.

In light of these two sets of considerations, the Working Group believes that regardless of any future decisions concerning academic organization, it is time for the university to act aggressively to make strategic decisions considering a number of policy or functional reforms that have been studied and recommended by other groups, consultants, and organizations in the past. Among these are:

1. Improvement of undergraduate curriculum requirements. Different scholarly cultures toward undergraduate education have developed in the different units, and this can inhibit scholarly communication and cooperation across units. Areas needing attention include:
 - a. Development of a core curriculum for all undergraduate students. This could include (i) requirements that emphasize exposure to particular

- disciplines and skills, (ii) various forms of learning (such as “writing-intensive” or “service-learning” courses), (iii) “vertical core” requirements that provide exposure to certain types of courses at increasing levels of sophistication over multiple years
- b. Improved advising and advising resources
 - c. Creating flexibility for changing majors within the first two years without losing time toward graduation
 - d. Improving communication and course acceptability across the units
 - e. Providing clear course requirements for all majors, particularly ones involving more than one unit
2. Resource Allocation Reform. Designing a budget model with greater ability to serve our strategic goals, and with more flexibility in adjusting to the changing enrollment patterns across academic units.
 3. Development of a more cohesive “first year experience” (both curricular and co-curricular) for all first year students.
 4. Development of a centralized advising center that would be a one-stop (academic and vocational) advising location for all undergraduate students. The committee believes that although this may be a promising way to significantly improve the student advising campus wide, more input is needed from the advising professionals in all the schools and colleges before a fully informed decision can be made on this issue.
 5. Expansion of Residential Learning Community options, and the exploration of the (financial and other) feasibility of developing a full-scale residential college system.

Other committees, university constituencies, or consultants to the university have discussed these matters in detail in other contexts; our current task is not to further develop these recommendations. However, we believe all these matters present the potential to aid in addressing the President’s concerns about retention and graduation rates, and improving the overall academic quality of our educational program.

With these preliminary comments in mind, we now offer a series of observations about the strengths and weaknesses of three different organizational models for the University: the current organization, the President’s recommended single college system, and a less radical reorganization that would move from our current 7 undergraduate (degree granting) college system to a 4 (or 3) college organization.

The Current University Organization

The strongest case for attempting to reach a number of the goals and concerns driving the President’s charge to this committee without reorganizing the current university structure would include the following elements:

The Argument that Organization is Not the Problem: UVM has enjoyed a significant resurgence in recent years. Our success in attracting increasingly large numbers of high quality undergraduate students has taken place within our current academic organization;

our successes have obviously been compatible with our current organization, and perhaps actually aided by it.

The High Cost of Change: There is no doubt that any academic reorganization is likely to produce significant anxiety in many quarters, a sense of grievance in some, long-term adjustment issues in others, and perverse or unforeseen outcomes in some cases. We can expect these problems to be increasingly exacerbated in the current environment of budgetary crisis and administrative turnover. Even when change is thought to have likely benefits, these expected benefits must be very likely and quite dramatic in order to justify the potential disruption to the community that such reorganization is almost certain to produce.

Preserving our Communities: Our current academic organization has generated strong feelings of community and collegiality within our schools and colleges. To reorganize these academic communities would be to threaten the very real goods that flow from these feelings of identity, solidarity, and commitment.

Despite these arguments, however, there are a number of reasons to think that reorganization might be a good idea. Here are what we take to be the most important tensions within the current collegiate structure:

Equity Issues: The current organizational structure has one large college and a number of (in some cases much) smaller schools and colleges. Some think it makes little sense for small units to have equal organizational status to much larger ones. Such asymmetry provides some departmental-size units with much greater university representation than other departments that happen to be located in a large college. Reorganization could be thought of as a means for addressing such inequities in university representation.

Administrative Redundancies: The historical accidents that have given rise to our current organizational structure did not necessarily attend to administrative effectiveness and efficiency. It may be that having so many schools and colleges requires more administrators and staff than would be required in a more efficiently organized institution. It is difficult to know exactly what efficiencies could be achieved with fewer administrative units, but it is plausible to think that real financial savings could be achieved by having fewer small colleges and schools.¹

¹ Our current administrative structure appears, on its face, to be quite expensive. In FY 2008, the cost of dean's office staff salaries in CAS was just under \$720,000. Comparing the same budget lines, the dean's office staff salaries in the other undergraduate colleges and schools combined (excluding the Honors College) was just under \$2,400,000. This suggests that the staffing of the 6 undergraduate units (which serve approximately 45% of the undergraduate students) costs the university about three times as much as it does to staff CAS (which serves more than half of the students). It appears that the ratios are roughly the same when we compare the number of staff positions; there are approximately three times as many dean's office staff, total, in these 6 units as in CAS. These types of comparisons are tricky, and shouldn't blind us to the true needs (regardless of administrative organization) of programs with professional accreditations, high technical costs, and so forth. Nonetheless, it is not hard to imagine that our current organization is a relatively expensive way to approach our academic business. It is also interesting to note that the University of Massachusetts has just announced reorganization plans, in which four colleges will be collapsed into two. Although it would not be sensible to compare, in actual dollars, their projected savings with the

Strategic Planning Implementation: Our current organization significantly decentralizes power to the individual schools and colleges. This decentralization has not prevented the development of a clear and focused university strategic plan; it does, however, make the implementation of this plan very difficult (our policy initiatives and decisions rarely match our strategic intentions). This does not mean that strategic policy is impossible under current university arrangements, but it does suggest that the organization may make such coordination and cooperation less likely and more difficult. Another way of looking at this problem is to note that this decentralization may make the Provost's job of providing coherence and strategic guidance to university policy more difficult than it might be under other organizational structures.

Curricular Issues: With seven undergraduate schools and colleges developing their own independent curricula, it becomes difficult in many cases for students to move freely between units. Although the Faculty Senate is ultimately responsible for the overall undergraduate curriculum, it has historically been respectful of the independent wishes of the units and reluctant to impose much general order or uniformity on the curriculum as a whole. It seems likely to some members of the committee (and not to others) that the development of a common core curriculum and the general breaking down of curricular barriers for students is more likely with less academic decentralization. Included in such benefits might be an increased ease in encouraging student research with faculty from anywhere in the university.

The current academic organization produces significant disincentives and barriers for teaching and curricular coordination across unit boundaries. We believe many (if not most) of these problems grow out of the current policy of using unit-level student/teacher ratios for allocating resources, and much of this problem could be eliminated or significantly mitigated by adjusting this policy. Even so, school and college boundaries produce additional layers of administrative coordination to be negotiated when faculty from different units wish to teach outside their home unit. Also, the lack of overall integration of the undergraduate curriculum makes the task of developing an effective centralized advising center all the more difficult.

Scholarly Issues: Just as our current organization can produce curricular silos, so some think that it can (and does) produce unhelpful scholarly silos that inhibit faculty collaboration and/or inter-disciplinary cooperation. There was much less consensus on the committee about this issue than there was about matters concerning the curriculum: some expressed the view that the current collegiate organization is irrelevant to scholarly cooperation across units; others argued that at the very least quite different "scholarly cultures" develop in the different units and this can inhibit scholarly communication and cooperation across units. To the degree that this is so, greater organizational unity may encourage increased scholarly familiarity and cooperation across the faculty; one consequence of such increased familiarity and cooperation could be an increase in interdisciplinary scholarly collaboration.

possible savings from reorganization at UVM (given the different scale of the two institutions), it is nonetheless of interest to note that they believe their financial savings will be substantial.

In light of these considerations, some believe there is a plausible case on financial, academic, and/or administrative grounds, for considering some form of academic reorganization. It is obvious, in light of UVM's recent successes, that none of the aforementioned problems is crippling. Nonetheless the current academic organization may be more of a hindrance than help as we attempt to reduce administrative costs, coordinate our overall curricular and co-curricular programming, and implement the strategic plan.

Two Possible Models for Reorganization

UVM College

President Fogel holds the view that our goals are not likely to be achieved within the current academic structure of the university. He has proposed, as a possible alternative, to collapse the current schools and colleges into a single UVM college, overseen by an executive dean. The idea here is to provide a context in which curricular, scholarly, and administrative efficiencies become much easier to achieve, in which collegiality and interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship across units is increasingly encouraged and nourished, where general education programs for all students are more easily designed and promoted, and where students find it much easier and less confusing to access more extensive curricular opportunities. Strategic planning might also have a better chance of success in this proposed context than under present conditions (although not all Working Group members believe this would be true).

The strongest cases to be made for this model include the following arguments:

1. Bringing all the schools and departments together into one collegiate organization addresses, and perhaps even dissolves, the kind of equity issues mentioned above. Presumably all departments and schools will be equally represented in their relationship to the executive dean.
2. The President has suggested that this organization will strengthen the Provost by significantly reducing the number of reports being directly made to that office. The idea here is to make the bureaucratic chain of command more coherent and manageable.
3. There may be administrative and financial efficiencies to allow for cost savings under this model.
4. Having all the schools and departments in a single college overseen by one executive dean may enhance academic and policy coordination, from the development of our core curriculum to the implementation of truly strategic policy. If this is true, it may be easier to break down the kind of barriers that currently inhibit students as they attempt to move between academic units.
5. By uniting into a single collegiate body, we may be able to encourage a greater sense of a shared cooperative enterprise among the entire faculty, who currently often identify more closely with their home school or college than they do with the mission of the university as a whole.

As strong as some of these arguments may be, many in the Working Group are skeptical about the wisdom of moving UVM in this direction. By far the greatest concern is that if all the current undergraduate academic units are consolidated within UVM College, it looks as though we end up with all our current organizational units (except, perhaps, CAS?), plus an executive dean's office imposed on top. If this is true, a single college could have the perverse effect of increasing rather than decreasing the layers of administration at the university. At the very least, it appears that if UVM College were to actually promote significant academic flexibility and cohesion, and financial and administrative efficiencies, it would require a great deal of internal reorganization and consolidation of schools and departments within this new college. To the degree that this is true, the model doesn't yet provide enough information to allow a clear assessment of whether it can address the problems it claims to address; rather, it may merely displace these issues to the next (collegiate) level of analysis and policy development (currently undeveloped in the President's plan).

Other concerns have been raised about the UVM College model.

1. Some thought that we could lose a level of diversity in administrative and academic experimentation if we consolidated (others thought, however, that such experimentation might be encouraged just as effectively within departments and schools of the single college).
2. It was observed that programs and schools might need to be reorganized as departments in order for there to be a clear symmetry between the leadership of schools and departments.

Although there may be real gains to be achieved by reorganization, this particular model would require a more detailed analysis of the reorganization within UVM College to help us understand more satisfactorily its full range of possibilities and implications.

Consolidation of Current Schools and Colleges into Fewer Units:

A second possibility for reorganizing the university would be to reduce the number of undergraduate colleges, without collapsing them into a single collegiate structure. In place of our current 7 undergraduate schools and colleges, for example, we could consider consolidating into 4 colleges. Here is one way of imagining this:

College of Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering
 College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
 College of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences
 College of the Professions (including CESS, CNHS, BSAD, Rubenstein)

Another possible organization might be:

Move physical sciences and Business Administration back into CEMS
 Move Biology and the Rubenstein School into CALS
 Move CNHS into the College of Medicine
 What remains in CAS will become a College of Arts and Letters (perhaps integrating the

current CESS, and perhaps leaving CESS as a fifth, stand alone college)

Or, we could collapse all the current departments, schools and programs into three large colleges that reflect our university mission:

College of Health Studies
 College of Environmental Studies
 College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

There are, of course, any number of possible organizational schemes we can imagine here.² Each of these imagined schemes could have a particular rationale, such as building our collegiate structure to reflect our university mission (the third possibility above), or trying to bring disciplinarily similar departments, programs and schools together in closer proximity (this is the logic informing schemes such as the first two above). The possible advantages of all such organizational structures could include the following:

1. Real administrative efficiencies could be achieved, creating the need for significantly fewer deans' office administrators and staff. Such reductions would, of course, create cost savings as well.
2. Reorganization into fewer, more equitably sized units could dramatically increase equity in departmental representation at the university level.
3. It is also reasonable to hope that (at least in the long run) scholarly advantages could be realized by bringing related disciplines into closer organizational proximity and more routine daily relationship. This might encourage an increase in interdisciplinary scholarship.
4. University curricular coordination and development (as well as centralized advising) might be easier and more effective in an environment with fewer collegiate bodies.

Whatever positive goods could be imagined in one or more of these schemes, there are dangers in moving in this direction as well.

First, any such reorganization will create deep anxiety and resistance in some quarters. Some departments, or members of departments, won't fit clearly or obviously into a new organizational scheme. For example, in the third model above, is a social scientist studying the environment best housed in the relevant social science department in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences or in the College of Environmental Studies? Should departments with interdisciplinary faculty be maintained within one of the new colleges or should the faculty be moved into relevant departments in, say, a College of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences? Other groups will find themselves moved away from familiar colleagues, with whom they currently have deep and productive relationships, and relocated in proximity to less familiar departments and colleagues. In some cases, schools currently enjoying independence may feel threatened by or distrustful of

² It should be noted that any such reorganization would be compatible with President Fogel's concept of a single UVM College if we think of these reorganized units as divisions within a broader collegiate structure.

disciplinary consolidation. As with the President's proposed reorganization, any other possible reorganization will likely incur real costs in human discomfort, readjustment, and conflict.

Second, there are real financial expenses to be expected in any collegiate reorganization (including the possible physical moving of departments, etc.), and these will need to be carefully considered and weighed against expected short-term and long-term savings. At the very least, even in the light of strong academic reasons for consolidation and reorganization, we would need to make certain that this move was, in the very worst case, resource neutral.

The Next Steps

The purpose of this Working Group has been to supply President Fogel with some reflections on the feasibility and wisdom of academic reorganization. We have not been charged with the task of developing a detailed plan for reorganization, or even with providing a detailed advocacy for or against reorganization. Obviously we have not reported here at this level of detail, nor would this group have been able to come to consensus about these matters in the brief period we have had for our deliberations. What we have attempted to provide, instead, are some thoughts about what appear to be the primary advantages and concerns relating to a number of possible options for UVM's academic (re)organization.

We strongly recommend that President Fogel share this report with the Faculty Senate Executive Council and committees and allow these faculty representatives to discuss these matters, in dialogue with students, staff and administration. As we see it, the real purpose of our committee has been to open a dialogue rather than to bring it to fruition in specific and detailed policy proposals. The latter task is the work of the regular institutions of university governance. In the event that the President decides to pursue these matters, we hope the Faculty Senate will systematically engage the faculty at large, along with relevant staff and student groups, in this conversation about UVM's organizational future.

Appendix

Readers interested in reviewing some of the most important reports, surveys, and memoranda produced by or for the University of Vermont concerning the undergraduate program should consult the materials posted on the President's web page under the heading "Transformational Change" and then "Surveys and Reports." Provided below is a brief annotation concerning each of these posted materials.

1. George Kuh: AAC&U: "High Impact Educational Practices": This is a state of the art discussion of the impact of such practices as First Year Seminar/Experiences, Learning Communities, Writing Intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments, Service Learning, Common Intellectual Experiences, Capstone Experiences, etc.
2. AAC&U: College Learning for the New Global Century (2007): This is a report by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, discussing what the Council believes a liberal education should encompass for contemporary students. See page 13 for a summary of skills and knowledge sets they identify.
3. COBE Report: This exhaustive report from 1979 made the (failed) case for a general education for all UVM undergraduates. Among the (in some case provocative) findings: UVM would need a more integrated, shared curriculum in order to become a true university (rather than a multiversity, or some such thing); our curriculum is more accidental than rationally conceived; our elective courses serve faculty more than students, and curricular reform demands that we focus more on what students need; we do a disservice to some of our students by moving them too quickly to vocational studies; we need a more consistent standard of academic rigor in both course content and student evaluation; it is not UVM's uniqueness that counts, but rather our quality.
4. NACADA: Organizational Structures for Advising (2004): This brief document explains three general advising models, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and the need for clear evaluation and the fitting of a particular advising system to the needs of a given institution. It also includes a helpful bibliography.
5. Carnegie Communications: Admitted Student Survey (Fall 2004): This is a survey sent to over 8600 students admitted to UVM in the fall of 2004. Two striking findings: we lose students to schools that are perceived by applicants as more academically rigorous and prestigious; we lose students to a wide array of competing (mainly private) institutions, rather than to small core of competitors.
6. The College Board: UVM Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus (2005): This is a long, detailed report from the College Board on responses to a survey by students admitted to UVM. We do pretty well, in students' perception, on "fun," "comfortable," "friendly," "social," and "partying"; we don't do so great on "prestigious," intellectual," "selective," or "challenging." You can find all the raw survey data here.
7. National Survey of Student Engagement Reports – 2005/ National Survey of Student Engagement Reports – 2008: These surveys provide extensive national data on student engagement, as well as specific UVM student data (which can then be viewed in this broader national context). Lots and lots and lots of data.

8. UVM 2008 CIRP: This is the raw data from UVM students in the 2008 American Freshman Survey. Striking findings include: the dramatic non-religiosity of our students in comparison to their peers at other select public schools (see p. 5); the liberal politics of our students (see p. 10); the “green” commitment of our students (see p. 18).
9. UVM 2008 CIRP: PowerPoint presentation prepared by CIRP/HERI that is a summary presentation of UVM data.
10. Joan Smith: Retention at the University of Vermont (August 2001): When this report was drafted, our (first to second year) retention rate was in the low 80% range; Dean Smith aspired to raise our rate to 85%. We have achieved this, and now are looking to move closer to our aspirant institutions’ rates in the low to mid 90% range. Interesting insights include: high ability out-of-state students are significantly more likely to leave (transfer) than high ability in-state students; retention results from high-quality academic programs, not from a retention program per se (Smith draws on Tinto for this simple but important insight).
11. Fred Curran: UVM Retention by Distance (June 2004): One of the findings is that retention declines the further away from home students are. This is of concern as we become increasingly dependent on a national student body.
12. Noel-Levitz: Student Retention Practices at Four-Year Institutions (2007 National Research Report): This report suggests that our current retention and six year graduation rates are just what we find in other highly selective public universities. If we are going to move to compete on these metrics with highly selective private universities, we will have to enhance our advising and student support services. (This report is very critical of the “uneven and disorganized” advising here at UVM.) They recommend the development of a “student success center.”
13. Don Hossler: College Board Pilot Study on Student Retention (Spring 2006): This brief report gives data on student perception of campus climate.
14. Noel-Levitz Retention Opportunities Analysis Presentation (January 2008): This is the power point from the final Noel-Levitz report.
15. ACT Policy Report: The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention (2008?): Discussion of the academic and non-academic factors influencing retention.
16. ACT: What Works in Student Retention? Four-Year Public Colleges (2004): Findings include that academic advising, quality first year programs, and effective learning support systems are the three most important retention practices. High performing institutions focus advising on needy populations, integrate advising with first year program (much like, say, the TAP program in CAS), have some centralized office for academic and career advising, have some sort of first year seminar emphasizing transition to college, and promote learning communities.
17. Copernicus: Brand Positioning Research Findings & Implications (April 2008): The key findings of this report are: we can improve our yield; improving our yield will improve the quality of our first year classes; we face a very “fragmented competitive set” (students who turn us down go to many different schools); students we lose choose schools that they perceive as ranked higher in academic prestige and quality; we tend to lose students with stronger academic records.

18. Maguire Associates: Image and Retention Report (Sept 1995): Report concludes that it is “superior academics” that lures away students from UVM to private institutions; academic quality is what we need to focus on to improve our recruiting. If we are going to compete more successfully with these private (and a very few elite public) colleges and institutions, we need to develop more rigorous and consistent university baselines for the academic quality and challenge of our curriculum.