



May 11, 2012

Dear Members of the University of Vermont Community,

One strand of the Strategic Initiatives Project has included an examination of the current structure of our academic units. Before we move to the very preliminary results of that work, it's worth acknowledging that change is difficult and discussions about change can be challenging – and to some extent, rightly so. Any emotional response you may experience is a reflection of just how deeply you care about your students, your scholarship and your colleagues. It's that same passion that has allowed for the great strides the University has made over the last decade. And while we could choose to accept an unexamined status quo, I believe we owe it to ourselves, to our students and to the future to thoughtfully consider whether we are best positioned to contribute to the larger societal good – to play the crucial role I know we can in addressing the pressing challenges of our time. This is an important discussion and the best results will only emerge if we collectively engage in the conversation as University citizens who are open, forward-looking and fully invested in the future success of the University of Vermont.

I would also like to assure you that this report reflects only the very early thinking of a few. It contains no hidden agendas, pre-determined outcomes or foregone conclusions. Rather, what follows is an update that might serve to stimulate some creative thinking along these lines and an invitation to participate in a broader campus discussion when we return in the Fall. We will not advance this discussion during the summer.

With best wishes for a rejuvenating break,

*Jane Knodell
Provost*

**Organizational Structure Team
Report to the Campus Community
May 8, 2012**

Introduction and Background

The purpose of this report is to summarize the work of the Organizational Structure (OS) Team, a sub-team of the Cost Structure and Productivity Improvement (CSPI) Team of the Strategic Initiatives Project (SIP); to provide a report on the status of the Team's four areas of focus; and to begin the process of moving the organizational structure discourse from the SIP Team to the campus community.

The original membership of the Organizational Structure Team included Dean Tom Vogelmann (Chair), Senior Advisor John Evans, Vice President Tom Gustafson and Dean Mara Saule.

In January, 2012 the Team was enlarged and reconfigured such that one-half of its membership consisted of faculty members. The full Team: John Bramley, President, Organizational Structure Team Co-Chair; Jane Knodell, Provost, Organizational Structure Team Co-Chair; Penny Bishop, Professor of Education, College of Education and Social Services; Doug Fletcher, Professor of Engineering, College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences; Charles Goodnight, Professor of Biology, College of Arts and Sciences; Stephanie Kaza, Professor and Director, Environmental Program, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources; Doug Lantagne, Dean, UVM Extension; Abu Rizvi, Dean, Honors College; Julie Roberts, Professor of Linguistics, College of Arts and Sciences and Faculty Senate President; Don Ross, Research Associate Professor and Lecturer of Plant and Soil Science, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Tom Vogelmann, Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; and Mary Watzin, Dean, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources.

The Team's initial goals were outlined in the guidance document issued from Provost Jane Knodell to the Cost Structure and Productivity Improvement Team in May, 2011, "As part of its work, this Team should consider whether the current structure of academic administration (array of colleges and schools) is optimal for UVM, given our scale and emerging focus on transdisciplinary excellence in research, graduate education and undergraduate education." The Team's scope of work, however, was not limited to academic unit considerations and included the potential to identify opportunities to reduce costs by reorganizing selected units, functions and activities in all sectors of the University.

Organizational Structure Areas of Focus

The Team considered the range of organizational structure considerations to be addressed and grouped them into four categories, several of which intersect with work being done elsewhere in the CSPI Team. Each of these areas needs attention and each will require a unique approach that includes the participation of individuals with the content knowledge and expertise necessary to ensure a meaningful and productive review. At the same time, "arm's length" considerations must be taken into account to maintain the credibility of the process. Given its composition, expertise and time limitations, the Spring, 2012 OS Team focused its efforts almost exclusively on one focus area: Academic Unit Organization. Moving forward, processes will be developed to address the remaining focus areas, with the results of this work returning to the OS Team, and in turn the full SIP Team, for review and discussion.

What follows is a synopsis of work in three of the focus areas and a more in-depth discussion of the work in the fourth area, Academic Unit Organization.

Academic Business Centers

Scope of Work: To determine whether the expansion of the Administrative Business Service Center to incorporate academic units would improve quality and achieve cost savings.

Current Status: The OS Team developed an initial series of research questions to guide the work of the finance team in its modeling of the Academic Business Center concept.

The finance team has been asked to cost out a single Academic Business Center, as well as unit-specific Academic Business Centers that correspond with the general structural models that emerged from the spring, 2012 work of the OS Team.

Next Steps and Timeframe: The finance team will cost out various models this summer. This discussion will move forward in concert with that of Academic Unit Organization.

Student Support Services

Scope of Work: To determine whether reorganizing the delivery of student support services would result in improved service to students and achieve cost savings.

Current Status: Discussion of possible re-organization in this area led to the conclusion that the structure of student services is so intertwined with Academic Unit Organization that this work should not proceed until we have further clarity and direction on that front.

Next Steps and Timeframe: This work will advance in concert with the Academic Unit Organization work, and will include a sub team that explores and develops alternative models for consideration, along with the requisite financial analysis. This sub team will be identified and will begin work in Fall, 2012.

Central Administrative Departments

Scope of Work: To determine whether the current structure, cost, and effectiveness of central administrative departments is on par with comparable institutions and whether reorganization presents opportunities for improved services or cost savings.

Current Status: Discussions about how to proceed with this work continue in the CSPI Team. There is consensus that some structured review of administrative units is necessary, and that perhaps a process analogous to the Strategic Value/Financial Attractiveness analysis could be developed, which would include the establishment of administrative performance metrics and benchmarks.

Next Steps and Timeframe: Discussions of how to best approach this work will continue in the CSPI Team. A sub team charged with developing an analytical tool/process will be identified and will begin work in Fall, 2012.

Academic Unit Organization

During Fall, 2011, the work of the Organizational Structure Team centered on gathering data on the administrative costs for the current array of colleges and schools in four specific areas: leadership/management, business operations, IT, and research administration.

As noted earlier, since January, 2012, the work of the Organizational Structure Team has largely focused on the question of the University's academic unit structure. The Team's efforts this spring were driven by two primary goals:

- To generate and evaluate different ways that the University of Vermont might choose to organize to deliver a higher quality educational experience.
- To achieve cost savings through a more efficient structure.

The Team developed criteria by which different structural options could be assessed; identified principles that could be useful in developing alternative organizational structures; and developed and evaluated alternative organizational structures.

Approach and Method – Grouping Academic Units

Discussions related to organizational structure can be challenging. The Team established norms to guide its work and the interactions among Team members. Discussions were conducted with mutual respect and the work proceeded systematically, with openness, and the Team was able to discuss various options objectively and at arm's length.

After a series of conversations, the Team acknowledged that there is no one “right” structure for an institution but at a given point in time, there usually is a “best” structure. The Team generated six criteria for the development and assessment of various structural options for consideration. While it is true that the impetus for the organizational structure discussion was the potential identification of cost savings that could be reinvested in the University's academic and research enterprise (thus “reduces costs” was one criterion identified), the objective of cost reduction increasingly gave way to improving academic quality and fostering opportunities for faculty collaboration, which became far more important and central tenets (and are more generally reflected in the remaining criteria). It is the Team's view that while reducing costs has obvious advantages, the possibilities for re-organization shouldn't be contingent on cost reductions – good thinking shouldn't be dismissed just because it doesn't save money.

The criteria:

1. Reduces costs.
2. Creates appropriately sized and scalable units.
3. Minimizes unnecessary duplication, simplifies work flows, and creates flexibility.
4. Structures academic programs within and between units so students can more easily match their skills and abilities with our offerings.
5. Builds a more cohesive, congruent and collaborative internal community in our academic units.
6. Aligns with UVM's vision, mission and distinctive identity.

The team then identified five different ways in which the University's academic units could be grouped.

Professional Degree Programs vs. Other – The basis for this sort was the notion that the goals, needs and outcomes of professional degree programs differ significantly from those of non-accredited programs.

Traditional Audience Programs (18-22 yr. olds) vs. Non-Traditional Audience Programs – In light of the declining traditional college-aged population it might be appropriate to consider an organizational structure that is better suited to address the needs of the emergent non-traditional population.

Research-Based Graduate Programs vs. Non-Research-Based Graduate Programs – Underlying this sort is the idea that the goals, needs and outcomes of research-based graduate programs differ from those of non-research-based graduate programs.

By Area of Strategic Emphasis (e.g. environment, health, liberal arts, public service) – The University's vision statement notes an aspiration to be among the nation's premier

small research universities preeminent in our comprehensive commitment to liberal education, environment, health and public service. An academic unit structure that is more clearly aligned with this vision might support its achievement.

By Related Academic Discipline: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities – This is a reasonably common and traditional approach to organizing academic units.

The Team then hypothetically reorganized the academic units of the University in accord with each of these five principles. This exercise involved a series of individual and small-group “homework” assignments in which Team members grouped the academic units and assessed the pros, cons, issues and risks associated with each option. The Team then deliberated as a whole to arrive at a general consensus about each option.

None of these approaches yielded an organizational model without flaw. Further discussions led the Team to consider a hybrid approach that would allow for the blending of Areas of Strategic Emphasis with Related Academic Discipline. Such a model might highlight the strategic themes in our vision statement, create a fewer number of appropriately sized units, support disciplinary excellence, and create cohesive intellectual communities with the potential for exciting collaboration. This approach is by no means perfect, but it does seem to hold reasonable promise and may be worthy of further investigation. And while the Team did not land on any particular model it did arrive at consensus around two main ideas: 1.) that there is potential value in having a fewer number of roughly equally-sized academic units, and 2.) that there is potential value in clustering similar departments and disciplines together.

Next Steps:

As noted earlier, this discussion will not be advanced during the summer. Instead, we will think about how we can best move the conversation from the SIP Team to the broader campus community when we come together in the Fall. Data related to the costs, size, complexities and make-up of the various departments, colleges and schools will also be generated and organized in preparation for future conversations.