

Academic Restructuring at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock
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I visited UALR on July 11 and 12, to meet with members of the Academic Restructuring Steering Committee, as well as the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, Zulma Toro. Before the visit, I read the following documents:

- Chancellor's memo to Provost, RE: Academic Restructuring (February 13, 2013)
- Academic Restructuring Faculty Task Force Charge (February 25, 2013)
- Academic Restructuring Process (March 1, 2013)
- Summary Report on Restructuring Conversations with Internal and External Stakeholders (April 1, 2013)
- Recommendations of the Faculty Task Force for the Restructuring of the Division of Academic Affairs (May 15, 2013)
- Chairs' Task Force Report on Academic Restructuring: Final Recommendations to the Steering Committee (mid May 2013)

During the visit, I also received copies of the following documents:

- Restructuring to Promote More Effective Student Advising
- Barriers to Interdisciplinary Work (including team teaching and research) and Suggestions for Improvements
- Online Education

Commendations

The university's process has been effective, efficient, and inclusive. In a relatively short period of time, those participating in the process have produced thoughtful reports that reflect the ideas of many members of the UALR community. Faculty from across the university have been afforded opportunities to offer their suggestions for academic restructuring, and those suggestions have been seriously considered.

Reading the aforementioned reports and interacting with members of the steering committee has led me to appreciate the diligence, thoughtfulness, and commitment of the steering committee members. To a person, they care deeply about the success of students, faculty, the institution, and the community of Arkansas. The steering committee has benefitted from the strong leadership of John DiPippa, but I am impressed with the leadership roles of all of the steering committee members whom I met: John DiPippa, Elizabeth Vaughn-Neely, George Jensen, Sarah Beth Estes, Joni Lee, Andrew Wright, Logan Hampton, Robert Denman, Ben Fry, Thomas Tutor.

I. Restructuring Plans

During the visit to UALR, I discussed the restructuring proposals at length with members of the steering committee. The options included in the proposals reflect thoughtful deliberation and a commitment to considering a range of recommendations. Further, all three options seem

reasonable and workable. The recommendations clearly delineate the exciting opportunities that currently exist at UALR. They lay a foundation for re-imagining what UALR can become.

Although the current documents partially explain the rationale for the restructuring options, the criteria became clearer during the on-campus conversations. Those who developed the options considered the following kinds of questions:

- To what extent would a specific configuration of departments in a college encourage interdisciplinary research and teaching? (from the original charge)
- To what extent would the academic structure enhance efficiency? (from the original charge)
- What would be the relative size of each college?
- To what extent might departments in a college share curricula?
- Would the departments in a college offer degrees that lead to professional licensure?
- Would the departments in a college offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees?
- How would the option address the perception that some departments are currently misplaced?

During the on-campus conversations, we talked extensively about encouraging interdisciplinary research and teaching. The restructuring could lead to increased collaboration among faculty, but it will take more than simply moving departments from one administrative home to another to realize the full potential of interdisciplinary work. UALR could also consider the following:

To encourage frequent hallway conversations that can lead to collaborations, locate departments close to other departments with similar interests. To take this concept further, consider housing faculty from several academic units in offices on a single floor.

During the visit, the steering committee and I contemplated potential disadvantages of moving some departments to other colleges. For example, faculty who plan to stand for tenure and promotion may be concerned about going through that process with a new dean, someone other than their current dean. However, even if UALR were not to reorganize its colleges, some new deans would be selected in the next year.

During the visit, steering committee members asked what effects the reorganization might have on students. In my experience, students do not experience any changes because the same degrees are offered by the same faculty. Further, most students do not care—and may not even know—what department or college offers a particular degree.

I read with interest the proposal to form schools within the colleges at UALR. Those schools would not add any administrators to the organization. Rather they would encourage department chairs with similar interests to function as a committee to foster interdisciplinary collaboration. Such an arrangement could work well. However, there are other ways to think about schools. For example, at Arizona State University some schools have been formed by merging departments. For example, the School of Social Transformation was formed by combining the former departments of African and African American Studies, Asian Pacific American Studies,

Justice and Social Inquiry, and Women and Gender Studies. Elsewhere at ASU, multiple departments merged to form the School of Life Sciences. All of the former language departments merged to become the School of International Letters and Cultures. Three other former departments became the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies.

II. Graduate School

I was asked to describe the functions of the Graduate College* (<http://graduate.asu.edu/>) at Arizona State University. Those functions include the following:

- Coordinating admissions processes
- Overseeing and assisting academic units with recruiting graduate students
- Coordinating program reviews, including both graduate and undergraduate degrees
- Offering face-to-face and online workshops on preparing for the job market, writing,
- Providing services to post docs
- Investigating violations of academic integrity
- Providing workshops and other support for teaching assistants/associates
- Reviewing dissertation formatting
- Coordinating comprehensive examinations and dissertation defenses
- Collaborating with academic units to provide support for international students
- Certifying faculty for graduate faculty status
- Providing fellowships—for example, dissertation fellowships
- Partnering with the American English and Culture Program to administer the spoken English requirement for international students who wish to teach on campus

*As of this writing, the Graduate College is in the process of being renamed to Graduate Education.

III. Online Education

As noted in the UALR document titled “Online Education,” there are many opportunities for institutions that offer high-quality online courses and degrees. Through online education, an institution like UALR can serve students who are not able to participate in face-to-face courses because they are place-bound and/or time-bound. Often students in online degree programs have full-time jobs and families, and they frequently live relatively far from a university—not within easy commuting distance.

However, it is crucial that online programs be rigorous and operate within structures that communicate to stakeholders (faculty, students, administrators, policymakers, the general public) that they are academically rigorous. To achieve this goal, online education needs to be housed in academic affairs. Further, faculty need to control curriculum and pedagogy. The administrator for online education—preferably a dean with academic credentials—should report directly to the provost. The role of this dean is to market and coordinate online initiatives and to provide technical and other support to faculty who are designing and delivering instruction. Those faculty need to be housed in the regular academic units, not in the online education unit. Further, those

faculty should be teaching courses for both online and campus-based students so that online education is not viewed something academically distinct from campus-based education.

Arizona State University has a unit called ASU Online (<http://asuonline.asu.edu/>), which offers the kinds of support described in the previous paragraphs. The administrator for ASU Online, Philip Regier (<https://webapp4.asu.edu/directory/person/10868>) holds the title of Executive Vice Provost and Dean, and he is a tenured faculty member in the W.P. Carey School of Business. He and his staff work with academic units across many of ASU's colleges to support them as they offer a wide range of online degrees(<http://asuonline.asu.edu/degree-programs>). Sometimes he will approach an academic unit to ask whether that unit would like to offer a degree online, but sometimes academic units approach him to request permission to offer one of its degrees online.

It is also crucial that online students work with academic advisors in the departments offering the degrees. (See the advising section of this report.)

IV. International Students

It takes a strategic effort to recruit international students because they have opportunities to attend a huge array of universities in the United States.

Arizona State University uses a range of tools to recruit international students and to make them feel supported once they arrive:

The *International Student Arrival Guide*

(<http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/asu/intlstudents1314/>) offers information about services available at ASU.

The international students orientation (<https://global.asu.edu/internationalorientation>) includes a day of sessions in which students receive information about ASU and engage in conversation about services, policies, and procedures. The orientation also puts a human face on each of the available services. A week before the orientation, ASU provides free transportation from the airport to each of the four ASU campuses in the Phoenix area. ASU employees greet international students at the airport and direct them to the free shuttle service.

For International students who plan to be teaching assistants, the Graduate College has produced podcasts with information about teaching in American classrooms:
<http://graduate.asu.edu/grow/sfs/podcasts/508>

The Center for Global Education Services (<https://global.asu.edu/>) offers programs and services for future, newly admitted, and current international students at ASU.

V. Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching

As noted earlier in this report, moving academic units from one college to another can make it easier for faculty to engage in interdisciplinary research and teaching, but additional measures can help to further encourage such collaborations:

- Locating faculty in close physical proximity to potential collaborators will increase the opportunities for casual hallway conversations that help to build relationships that foster interdisciplinary research and team teaching. At the very least, it would be helpful to locate departments with similar interests next to one another.
- Faculty in a department usually occupy a group of offices located at a single site—e.g., one floor in a building. Faculty from other disciplines rarely occupy offices at that site. However, to encourage interdisciplinary work, it can be helpful to mix faculty from several disciplines on the same floor of a building.
- To encourage faculty from several disciplines to collaborate on research projects, it is helpful to develop policies, procedures, and services that support such cooperation.
- To encourage faculty and their academic units to participate in interdisciplinary team teaching, any university needs policies that clarify the financial arrangements. For example, if two faculty members from two separate colleges would like to team-teach a course, how will that course be funded? How will the student credit hours be distributed? How will the team-taught course count in each faculty member's load?

The New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (<http://newcollege.asu.edu/>) offers both interdisciplinary degrees (e.g., Interdisciplinary Arts and Performance) as disciplinary degrees (e.g., Applied Mathematics).

Further, Arizona State University offers interdisciplinary degrees in the School of Letters and Sciences. These degrees are viewed as retention tools because they offer pathways to graduation for students who have not found a home in a narrowly focused disciplinary major. Each degree has a distinctive appeal:

Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (<https://sls.asu.edu/undergrad/proginfo/lbsbis>) asks students to complete two 18-hour concentrations, which are essentially minors. BIS students also take four core courses that help them make interdisciplinary connections between their two concentrations. This degree is especially appealing to a student who may have tried one major and then a second, but decided that neither one is satisfying. Rather than try a third narrowly focused major that may require several years of course work, a student may be able to complete the BIS degree in one year.

Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies in Organizational Studies (<https://sls.asu.edu/undergrad/proginfo/lvorgbis>) asks students to take a range of courses offered by multiple colleges and schools at ASU.

Bachelor of Liberal Studies (<https://sls.asu.edu/undergrad/proginfo/lablsbls>) asks students to complete 12 hours in the humanities and 12 hours in the social sciences, along with two core courses. This degree is especially appealing to students who left school years ago but would like

to complete a degree. Often these students have completed some hours in the humanities and in the social sciences, so the BLS degree may allow them to finish the degree in one year or even one semester. Because this degree is appealing to working adults who often have families, ASU offers it online.

Bachelor of General Studies (<https://sls.asu.edu/undergrad/proginfo/lsgnbsgs>) asks students to complete 39 hours in four general studies clusters. In consultation with an advisor, students choose the four clusters from a list of 19 clusters (<https://sls.asu.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/BGS%20Clusters%202013.pdf>).

VI. Advising

As noted in the document titled “Restructuring to Promote Effective Student Advising,” students benefit when they work with professional academic advisors in their colleges. While faculty can play import roles in students’ lives outside the classroom by providing mentoring focused on professional development, full-time advisors are well equipped to offer well-informed academic advising.

At Arizona State University, we assign academic advisors to students as soon as students pay enrollment deposits in the admissions process. During the summer, advisors call and email new students to help them register for fall courses. Advisors also work with students during the summer orientation sessions (<https://eoss.asu.edu/orientation>) that occur on the four ASU campuses.

The goal is to have students work with academic advisors in their majors as soon as they have declared majors. Newly admitted students who do not immediately choose majors are assigned to the exploratory program (<https://sls.asu.edu/exploratory>). With the help of an advisor, each student chooses one of four exploratory tracks (<https://sls.asu.edu/index.php?q=node/489>):

- Engineering, Math, Technology & Physical Sciences
- Fine Arts/Humanities/Design
- Health & Life Sciences
- Social/Behavioral Sciences

In the exploratory program, advisors work with students to find academic majors as soon as possible—no later than the 45th hour. Further, students in the program complete a one-credit course, UNI 150: Major and Career Exploration.

Full-time professional academic advisors report to a department, school, or college administrator, who offers ongoing training, mentoring, and supervision. Further, one of the vice provosts (currently Frederick Corey), coordinates advising across all schools and colleges to ensure consistent quality.

In many majors, students are required to consult with an advisor at least once each semester, often as they are registering for the next semester's courses. However, many students see their advisors more than once each semester.

In addition to full-time academic advisors, ASU has developed eAdvisor (<https://eadvisor.asu.edu/>), which provides online tools for students. One important feature of eAdvisor is the degree search site (<https://webapp4.asu.edu/programs/t5/?jsessionid=AB20F6CA0BDA527A9EE2E426AC50A351.programs3>), which helps students match their interests with a range of degree programs in 14 general areas.

VII. Retention

As everyone reading this report realizes, retention is key to the success of any university.

At Arizona State University we consider retention to be everyone's responsibility—administrators, faculty, advisors, office staff. For example, we train advisors and office staff how to support students at every opportunity. We expect everyone to treat students with respect and with a commitment to students' well-being and success.

Although I have mentioned some of ASU's retention tools, I will describe a full range of tools here.

The *Retention Dashboard*, developed in-house, provides current information about each student at ASU:

- Financial Aid Issues
- Calculated Index (student's high school GPA and SAT/ACT score)
- Academic Status Reports (midterm performance in courses)
- Portal (My ASU) usage (Is the student engaged via online tools?)
- Cumulative GPA
- Probation Status
- Transcripts Sent (Has the student requested that transcripts be sent to another institution?)
- Enrollment Holds
- Enrolled in Upcoming Semester
- Past Due on Tuition Installment Plan
- Financial Holds
- History of At-Risk Indicators
- Advisors' Comments
- Survey Results (We survey freshmen early in the fall to determine whether they have any issues. When issues are identified support staff work with students.)

These data, which are updated daily, are available for each student at ASU. Further, by clicking on several boxes, a college, school, or department administrator or advisor can aggregate the data by college, major, campus, cohort, or any combination of these factors.

For a full list of dashboards, visit <http://www.asu.edu/dashboard/>

The ***University Enrollment Planning Team***, led by the Kent Hopkins, vice provost for enrollment management, consists of several vice provosts, an associate dean from each college, and the director of advising from each college. This group meets every three weeks throughout the year to discuss retention initiatives at the university, college, and department levels. At most meetings the group engages in problem solving, working to address retention and recruiting issues as they arise. This group receives weekly admissions and retention reports for all the colleges at ASU.

The ***Retention Working Group***, chaired by Art Blakemore, senior vice provost, consists of administrators from the provost's office, housing, financial aid, the registrar's office, university evaluation, the university technology office, and several colleges. The group, which meets once a month, assesses current retention efforts and designs new initiatives.

The ***University Academic Success Program***, which reports to Duane Roen, assistant vice provost, offers a range of student success programs for students. The Student Success Centers (<https://studentsuccess.asu.edu/>) offer subject-area tutoring, writing tutoring, supplemental instruction, success teams, a summer program for the transition from high school to college, and a program for students on probation. Last year, the Student Success Centers logged more than 140,000 visits. The summer transition program served nearly 500 students, with ASU paying for their housing, meals, instructors, tutors, and success team leaders.

First-Year Success VIP² Coaching (<https://students.asu.edu/fys>) is available to all entering freshman students at Arizona State University. Coaches call and email all freshmen to schedule meetings to develop study habits, solve a wide range of problems, and adjust to the college life, among other things.

Pathways for Achieving Student Success (PASS) (<https://studentsuccess.asu.edu/pass>) is designed to support freshmen who have been placed on probation (GPA below 2.0). Students participate in PASS for a half day at the beginning of the next semester.

UNI 220 Academic Refresher is required for all students placed on academic probation. As soon as a student's cumulative grade point average falls below 2.0, the student receives a message that the requirement is listed on the degree audit. Advisors also work with students to enroll them in UNI 220.

The Student Success Centers (<https://studentsuccess.asu.edu/>) offer a range of support services for students:

- Subject-area tutoring (face-to-face and online)
- Writing tutoring
- Supplemental Instruction
- Support for first-year mathematics

American Indian Student Support Services (AISSS) (<https://aiyss.asu.edu/>) offers American Indian students support for academic and personal success at ASU.

Entering freshmen considered to be at risk are asked to complete the following:

- A two-week Early Start program in August to help students acclimate to college life and courses. Early Start is offered at no cost to participating students.)
- UNI 120 Academic Success (1 credit course)
- Weekly meetings with success team leaders

Career Services (<https://eoss.asu.edu/cs>) is another retention tool because helps students focus on what is to come after graduation. The office offers career advising and assessment, as well as career events (e.g., mock interview dinners) and career fairs.

General Studies requirements (https://catalog.asu.edu/ug_gsr) are also seen as part of retention. To that end, general studies requirements are university-wide, which makes it relatively easy for students to change from one major to another. The three state universities in Arizona also have agreements with the community colleges so that students can easily transfer general studies courses as a package from any of the community colleges to any of the universities (<https://catalog.asu.edu/agec>). Beside fulfilling general education requirements, completing the Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) with a GPA of 2.0 or higher also guarantees admission to any of the state universities.