

Academic Restructuring Working Group Interim Report Feedback

September 26 - October 21, 2020

Below are comments shared by members of the U of A community in response to the [Academic Restructuring Working Group's Interim Report](#). All feedback shared through the UAT website ([Interim Report Feedback Form](#) and [UAT Feedback Form](#)) is, and will continue to be, shared with the Academic Restructuring Working Group (ARWG) for consideration as they refine and revise the proposed scenarios. A list of all University of Alberta for Tomorrow (UAT) consultations is available on the [UAT website](#).

Responses to frequently asked questions and comments can be found on the [UAT FAQ website](#), and in regular [UAT Updates](#) from President Flanagan, Provost Dew, and SET Executive Lead Rob Munro.

Feedback on Scenario A

In Favour

No comments received through the feedback forms in favour of Scenario A.

Concerns

It's not clear to me why a minimal rearrangement is being considered at all, rather than no rearrangement of the current situation. Is there any benefit whatsoever to scenario A?

Facing unprecedented hardships that will be difficult to work through, our university must change. This is, however, our moment to build our place as leaders in higher education and research. The U of A must seize the opportunity to evolve. With fundamental systemic reform, we can set a bold new direction for the university of tomorrow. It seems to me your assertion towards change would preclude any acceptance of Scenario A. Is this not so?

Feedback on Scenario B

In Favour

As a student in a professional health science college, I think Scenario B would be the best option. I worry that the separation between the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry and the rest of the Health Science faculties presented in Scenarios A and C would further reinforce the perception in the healthcare system that physicians are more important than any other healthcare profession. Although I understand the FoMD is separated from the other health science faculties in Scenarios A and C due to its size, I think Scenario B would have the best impact on interprofessional collaboration between students in all health science faculties.

Scenario B treats the health sciences and other faculties fairly rather than privileging the FoMD over the other health sciences. This option affects faculties fairly and appropriately given the proposed academic restructuring.

I appreciate that this scenario (and indeed all scenarios) keep CSJ, Augustana, and the Faculty of Native Studies as separate entities. All of these are community-based, with their own unique needs and structures, and I appreciate that the ARWG is aware and respectful of this.

Scenario B, while most disruptive, appears to address critical inefficiencies. It's a decent choice, I am not sure why the three community faculties are not being consolidated into a community-focused division as well, given the rationale for the others was that it, "enables new forms of academic integration and collaboration, realizes administrative economies of scale, and reduces the number of academic leadership positions" ...I would think these would be opportunities that all faculties would appreciate.

Based on the interim report and the case presented, Scenario B seems to offer the most benefit (in terms of cost savings and opportunities for interdisciplinary research & teaching), and is the most intuitive to understand -- the Tri-Council alignment generally makes sense, we're familiar with it, and it's easy to imagine administrative structures in SET that would complement such a structure.

I think it is apparent to many stakeholders that change is imminent and needed. I think if B is what the university wants, more details on how division will function, operational definition on each unit, and where the task will be performed and responsible for will be needed as every unit will be seeking direction on how this change management will need to be handled. But I think the engagement details of how programs, courses, students, and teaching responsibility will likely need to be sorted to provide a sense of direction for everyone to follow.

Scenario B best aligns with the principles of the working group's initiative. Would require considerable change management and work efforts to initialize, but offers the greatest long-term viability and cost savings.

This is the one to choose. You rarely have an opportunity for such fundamental structural shifts. Use the opportunity to get the best long term result for the University. Be bold and responsible. Universities need to structure themselves where their core missions of teaching and research are front and centre. Cross-disciplinary offerings in both areas are most accessible in this structure. The more dialogue, contact and information sharing between related, but different areas, leads to the most innovative and resourceful outcomes.

B - makes most sense to consolidate faculties that are present on North Campus. Helps to decrease 'rivalry' between faculties and the most cost effective option is better than tuition increases for students.

Scenario B. Has the best opportunity to make transformational change to prepare the University for future challenges. The biggest drawback is that it has the greatest impact on facility and thus would be the most difficult to implement.

I am in favour of Scenario B. I do like the idea of a super health sciences faculty with all the health sciences together. The intention of Dentistry leaving Dent/Pharm was that we would be more integrated with Nursing/Nutrition. This has absolutely not happened at all. I think

encouraging all of us to be in the same Health Sciences Faculty will allow professors the opportunity to teach in other departments. There is concern that Dentistry / Dental Hygiene is lumped as a department. To be fair Med Lab Sciences and Rad Therapy are also part of FoMD.

Concerns

The Faculty of Science has consistently been pointed out as a faculty that is already quite efficient in scope and operations. However, both of the scenarios that are being seriously considered (i.e., B&C) are incredibly detrimental to the Faculty of Science by conglomerating it into some kind of Frankenstein-esque super-faculty. If it ain't broke, why try to fix it?

If the overall goal of this restructuring is supposedly to streamline the university, the combining of professional/accredited and non-professional programs (e.g., the combination of Science and Engg in Scenario B) seems rather counter-productive. For example, even if they're under the same faculty, professional programs would still require separate administration compared to 'purely academic' programs, due to their unique requirements.

I see why the Tri-Council framework is a logical model to follow. However, given that the Tri-Agencies were established several decades ago and, in the interest of being "nimble" going into the future, I wonder if it's necessarily safe to assume that this is the most efficient method of division. This also ties into my point above re. combining professionally accredited and non-professional faculties/programs under the same faculty.

Scenario B does not take into account the nuances of the various roles played by academic staff within our institution when it comes to leadership/service (which seem to be conflated here; acting as associate chair is a service role). It is disingenuous to assume that every academic staff member that goes into one of these roles gives up their teaching and research. In this way, the savings are inflated. Further to this, we need see the numbers; there needs to be more transparency. Another comment about this scenario is that it assumes that associate deans at the Division level can manage their portfolio for multiple Faculties; I don't think that is realistic. If such a scenario goes ahead, I foresee the ballooning of administration, both because the Division-Level Associate Dean cannot manage everything in their portfolio and need to have help from the Faculty Dean-Level personnel, AND because the Faculty Dean-Level will want to have a say in what happens at the Division Level. I am not convinced that adding a layer produces the savings that have been touted.

I am very skeptical that creating a new administrative layer of Divisions would create the benefits sought. Though initially support staff would be centralized within Divisions, it would likely be quickly discovered that some of these staff are needed at lower levels again. For instance, Computing Science has discovered that IT support (pulled from departments), is inadequate . The additional layer of bureaucracy would add significant inertia to many of our missions (e.g. decisions about new research directions, as well as paperwork in general), and I think we would all regret the change.

Engineering has strong links to its professional programs, which make it hard for Engineering to be merged with other faculties. For instance, Engineering's dean must be an engineer; does this extend to the executive dean of the Division? Engineering should stay a separate Faculty. (I am not an engineer.)

The idea of combining Faculties into divisions by tri-agency council nature is, I believe, a mistake, as it will discourage interdisciplinary research which may get funding from multiple councils.

Are any of the scenarios geared toward reducing administrative bloat? By this, I don't mean admin assistants, but rather the several provosts at the university and the MANY deans in every single faculty. Seeing costs for this would be very helpful in each of the three scenarios.

I have a question about option B for restructuring (i.e., big tri-council faculties). I understand that having larger faculties will save on admin costs but I also saw in the document that each sub-faculty (e.g., business, law, education etc) would retain deans and chairs. So my question is this - how does this option actually put deans and chairs back in the classroom? My understanding was that having fewer deans and chairs in admin positions (and back in the classroom) would be another way of making us more teaching efficient (and help us save money).

My question is how will it be different? Will there still be chairs/vice chairs? The Dentistry Chair earns almost half a million dollars with benefits and the Director of Dental Hygiene just over a fifth of a million dollars. Dentistry accounts for a lot of administrators as AASUA faculty. Will this be diminished?

Feedback on Scenario C

In Favour

Scenario C makes the most sense to me as it balances streamlining administrative redundancies achieving most of the cost savings but it does acknowledge some faculties (like FoMD) are massive and combining it with other faculties would lessen the "essence" of those smaller faculties. The one issue is we need to have a better understanding of the "shared division" as it was not clear how that is different from the other divisions that combines faculties.

I don't like any of them, but I would prefer a scenario akin to Scenario C where the largest, most efficient Faculties are retained and departments are redistributed. Scenario B supposedly has the biggest savings (which I don't see evidence for; the numbers are not provided), but I don't trust that it would stay that way, plus the optics of adding layers of administration are terrible. Lastly, I think it is foolish to leave FGSR out of the discussion - for reasons that are completely opaque. I have worked here for over 17 years and still don't understand what role they play that could not be done at the Department level. (Why and how is it that we need a separate Faculty to adjudicate whether an external examiner on a PhD defense is suitable? What expertise do they have that we don't?) Cut FGSR, and distribute the roles to departments and faculties - or Divisions if that's the way it goes.

Concerns

If the Faculty of Science is held up as a model of efficiency, then why is it combined with another faculty? It would make more sense to take departments from other Faculties and add them to Science (e.g., relevant departments from ALES, and put the applied science departments from ALES into Engineering). Keep Arts as a separate Faculty.

How does the ARWG expect single Associate Deans will be able to be responsible for faculties bigger than Arts and Sciences are now, given that the current Associate Deans (at least in Science) have needed deputized ADs to meet the current workload.

This scenario seems rather random and poorly conceived as it places poorly related Faculties together and, as a result, would wind up with administrators with poorly related expertise to many of the individual units. While I greatly respect professional administrators and their expertise in their areas such as budgeting and compliance, they are not subject matter experts,

which is important for many questions and issues that arise at the Faculty (or Division) level. This scenario seems like the worst of all worlds.

I believe creating another layer of Divisions is a mistake. Amalgamation of Faculties needs to be done, and this comes closest to the logical outcome. However, it has serious flaws. Combining Engineering with ALES doesn't consider the profession-specific role of the Faculty of Engineering, which makes merger (or division-encasing) of Engineering with others a mistake. It also attempts to divide Science into applied science vs. non-applied science--this is a serious mistake, as we should be trying to *encourage* the connection between basic research and applications (including spinoff companies), not put up artificial boundaries between them. Merging Arts and Science, while not impossible, seems a poor choice given the FEC structure. See my preferred structure below.

Suggestions for Alternative Academic Restructuring Scenarios

Please review the [*Alternative Restructuring Proposals from the Community report*](#).

General Questions & Comments

Responses to frequently asked questions and comments can be found on the [UAT FAQ website](#), and in regular [UAT Updates](#) from President Flanagan, Provost Dew, and SET Executive Lead Rob Munro.

It's wrong to call the exercise an Academic Restructuring when it is an administrative restructuring. You want to change the position of the deck chairs but it is still the same old cruise stopping at the same old ports. Your discussion suggests that "real" academic restructuring will have to be done in the future. Fat chance! Bureaucracies resist change, they don't invite it. The process remains top down, Administration first, academic staff and students last. You are wasting a great opportunity for true innovation. The new disciplines, those of the future, are outside and between your coloured faculty/department boxes. You talk about interdisciplinarity and synergies but reject the Interdisciplinary Matrix, Fig. 16. But this is true to form as the U of A has always lacked innovative programs. We are a conservative institution, fearful, and unable to nurture and support bottom up initiatives. Sorry! Other than savings, I'm unimpressed with the three options, and separating Arts and Sciences is just plain dumb. Where do you think academic innovation and synergies come from?

Given that the SET and AR initiatives are proceeding in parallel under the overall UAT 'umbrella', I fail to see how the UofA community can develop fully informed opinions -- and indeed how GFC, the working group members, etc can make informed and viable decisions -- regarding the ARWG's report without knowing how this lines up with SET's plans. In my opinion it makes no sense to attempt to move ahead with ARWG's report until we know the full administrative impacts of all of these scenarios.

How will the ARWG quantify financial losses due to loss in University Ranking and potential losses due to donors? While admirable to keep ranking unaffected, it is unreasonable to expect that a cut of \$40M/year will not negatively impact performance. How do different models account for value and funding lost due to declining status?

I came to UoA 10 years ago and thought there was a lot of "fat". However it seemed to me it stemmed in part from the FEC system with its emphasis on rewarding the individual. Also I felt

that the University seemed mostly a collection of independent academic entrepreneurs doing their own thing in their own little world, expected to support their own research programs with their own staff and whose research programs were set up to be competitive rather than collaborate. This generated an incredible amount of waste. This is despite the so called collegiate culture. It seems a very patriarchal culture , about ego and showing off. Only by putting in systems that encourage cooperation and collaboration will you really change the culture and create a new type of university.

I don't think the plan of removing associate chair positions from departments has been carefully considered. It's crucial that the associate chairs *know* their department well, so they can manage complicated situations. Pushing these responsibilities to a higher level would be a *very serious mistake*, which would dramatically reduce support for undergraduate and graduate students. To put this bluntly, the Faculty of Science (as well as Engineering, Business, & Medicine) are running a very lean ship, for their supported levels of students and faculties. The University should be looking to see how it can duplicate this level of service for cost throughout the University, not to dramatically change the current structure within these units.

All options do not feel optimistic. Maybe it is a result of said lack of interdisciplinary collaboration between faculties, but the groupings of faculties all feel forced. Very little common ground bind the students of the proposed groupings. As an alumnus, I can imagine many students becoming disenchanted at the lack of relatable knowledge and support they may receive from faculty staff if the faculties become all lumped together. Many alumni complain of university as a money-grabbing establishment that offers no concrete real-world benefits after graduation, and this disenchantment can worsen it.

Strongly encourage any option that integrates FoMD with related Health/Medical Science disciplines. Medicine does not exist in a vacuum - moving toward a more collaborative “top-down” approach could have positive downstream effects on the institutional and personal relationships between these groups.

The focus of the ARWG seems to be entirely on the money, but why is there no discussion on the revenue generating capacity of the University? More specifically, an understanding of where the cuts will adversely impact revenue generation.

There has been way too little of a focus on the student experience in this process, every change that we make should be viewed under the lens of 'how does this impact the students'?

Will alumni be consulted about the change in university structure, how do you think they will feel connected to a "newly named" faculty especially if the department that they graduated from no longer exists. How are transformational donations going to happen without such connected and invested donors?

No to additional layers of Administration. Like many others, I really must protest the scenarios that add another layer of administration, in the belief that somehow this will reduce lower levels of administration and cost less money. This has been tried already since I arrived with ventures like IST, which has not exactly been a cost savings nor produced better service. It was during the time that IST was conceived that the University was big into "efficiencies", which instead led to serious growth of Central administrators. More is just more.

I feel there are additionally a handful of vertical cuts that should be considered and probably are not yet being considered. While I believe the U of A provides world-class education in many subjects, the sad and unfortunate reality of modern education is that there are a non-trivial amount of sub-disciplines (naturally marketing themselves as providing essential life skills) which, after 2-8 years, leave many of their students indebted (with a poor return-on-investment outlook), depressed, nihilistic, and chronically and pathologically resentful of their own society. Why, in a situation like this, would we risk reducing quality of education in nearly all subjects to protect our most dubious offerings?

I am very concerned about the consequences of the centralization implied by these scenarios for shared governance, for flexibility and independence of the Faculty-level units and Departments, and for the concept that the best governance is closest to those affected. The ARWG report talks a lot about the cost savings of these approaches, but little about the ACADEMIC benefits/disadvantages of each approach. This apparent lack of thought regarding the implications of the changes reflects the approach of our current provincial government, which often takes the approach of "cuts are good" without considering the benefits side, either economically or in terms of impacts on people. Similarly, the ARWG report does not address WHY a particular model might benefit any aspect of academics, nor which programs might be harmed by a particular approach (and to what extent). In my mind, such an evaluation is critical to a cost/benefit analysis--you've looked at the benefits to the bottom line, but not the associated costs. As a result, it's difficult to give any INFORMED feedback on any of the scenarios.

I am skeptical about the accuracy of the budgetary savings numbers from the modelling exercise carried out by the NOUS group, in part because they haven't really shared their methods. While I do expect some cost savings (read: staff layoffs/firings) from the administrative centralization proposed in the Interim Report, the costs to academics, shared governance, university reputation, and faculty time have not been assessed. These aspects of the scenarios MUST be properly (and openly) addressed in future reports, and before any final decision making is done.

Understand the need to make significant changes and cost savings. Given the challenges Alberta faces and Governments in general will be facing to deal with significant debt loads the sooner the University is able to meet these challenges the better. Also agree it is best to look outside the country for world best practices.

Consider consolidating campuses (ie. move the Faculty of Extension from Enterprise square to main campus. Stop using Enterprise square as a location, one less building to maintain and populate).

I have experienced many changes and restructurings during my career. The one common denominator that is relevant to comment on here is whether at the end of the day centralisation saves money. The reality is that the work must be done and there is only so much capacity for

one individual to accomplish. The result is twofold when centralisation is carried out. More work is downloaded on to individual Professors and Univ Staff to do without providing adequate resources to execute the extra work. Eventually the administration in the central area grows in order to monitor what the Professors are doing. This happens because Universities like the UofA are risk averse rather than productive focused. This is common of public institutions. We have recently experienced this in Engineering with many services moving from Departmental control to the control of the Office of the Dean. Services have become inefficient and slower than before (despite the best efforts of Staff), and work has been downloaded to an individual Faculty member keeps increasing. Many of us go outside the University for services or raise the funds to look after them ourselves. Examples are in machining and characterisation of materials. Meanwhile expectations from FEC increase. The outcome is that Faculty Members focus their careers on being more business oriented rather than focusing on quality scholarship. I realize that the reality is that we need to find ways to save a significant amount of funds. In that area, I have no experience to offer any suggestions other than my experience at [redacted to protect privacy]. They have no Faculty of Graduate Studies. They leave admission decisions up to individual Departments. Perhaps this is a model worth exploring.