

Miami University Strategic Planning Academic Excellence Subcommittee Report

March 25, 2019

Preamble

Our charge was multiform and encompassed all elements of academic programming. We focused on the following aspects of the charge:

- general education (Miami Plan)
- interdisciplinary research and teaching
- new graduate programs
- pedagogical quality
- curriculum development and approval process
- optimal configuration and content of academic units (departments and divisions)
- an ability to become more nimble in all of the above

Given the time available and the makeup of our group, we focused more extensively on changes to process than on identifying specific programs to eliminate or develop. In all cases, we applied the following questions to each of our recommendations:

- Does the recommendation improve student success, including recruitment, retention, graduation and career trajectories?
- Does the recommendation advance the core mission of the university?
- Is the recommendation affordable, or does it have the potential to generate additional revenue?

The last question proved the most difficult to apply, since all these recommendations involved some trade-offs and many involve additional cost. Ultimately, Miami University must decide the best configuration for a modern university today, what is worth paying for and how to pay for it. In that spirit, our recommendations include both savings and new expenses.

Process

The subcommittee met about 20 times between November 2018 and March 2019. The group consulted the earlier reports, resources and individuals listed at the end of this report. These recommendations reflect the consensus of the subcommittee. Remarks in *italics* reflect suggestions that did not gain consensus support, either because the group did not agree or because we lacked time to consider them fully.

Agendas of other subcommittees, where we are aware of them, are indicated below (eg. NU- National University, DI - Diversity, Inclusion & Equity, etc.).

Vision statement

Miami's academic programs will be nimble, forward-thinking, student-focused, high-quality and grounded in our traditions of teaching excellence and the liberal arts. Our graduates are ready for their first job and their fifth, as well as ready to lead a meaningful life in a diverse world. We are one Miami working together, fostering a culture of investment in the institution.

Organizational Structure

A. Reorganization

Our charge included identifying the “optimal divisional and departmental structure.” While this group does not recommend reorganizing in any particular way, we note that new organizing structures, such as divisions, institutes, centers and departments, have the potential to focus our resources in particular areas and to increase our visibility in the region, nation and world. Smaller and extra-departmental structures can be more nimble, responsive to changing environments, and can help our programs stand out. This could raise our national and international profile and generate excitement among students, faculty and donors.

New programs are already being developed and supported in human health sciences and data and information sciences. These may ultimately lead to the creation of new divisions or departments. Should any reorganization be on the table, we offer the following recommendations regarding process and criteria. It is imperative that the needs and viability of the whole university be considered. Miami’s core values of liberal education require strength in some traditional disciplines. Simply extracting new, currently-in-high-demand subjects from existing units and giving them new resources will damage morale and support for the project and will lead to weak, vestigial divisions or departments. To avoid this downside, the committee recommends that the following criteria be applied to any reorganization:

- **Process.** Any reorganization must follow appropriate process and review per Policy Library, involving all stakeholders in the discussion. This policy may need to be revised to be more nimble, facilitating more rapid change in this dynamic environment.
- **Collaboration.** The new configuration should facilitate collaboration (research and teaching) among many disciplines, and open up new possibilities for students, faculty, outside partners and donors.
- **Right size.** Any new or newly structured divisions should be right-sized in the sense of having sufficient size and complexity to constitute a full division, while being clearly focused in the sense of small enough to have a coherent shared vision. This includes a viable financial base.
- **Cultivate leadership.** The success of any structure, but particularly a new structure, depends on visionary, constructive leadership at the divisional and department levels. To that end, appropriate recruiting, mentoring and accountability systems for chairs and deans should be strengthened.
- **Student success.** The new structure should facilitate student pathways to graduation.
- **Finances.** New structures should improve the financial position of the university. This could be through efficiencies, increased access to external funding (includes grants and contracts, development and endowments through naming opportunities and more), attracting new students, etc.
- **Holistic.** There should be a realistic plan for the remaining units (divisions or departments), or individuals of a unit that has been disbanded, to thrive and to contribute to the institution’s success.
- **Divisional curriculum.** Consequences that may result from shifts in divisional curricular requirements should be identified and proactively addressed.
- **Innovation and entrepreneurship** are elements that extend across all divisions. These values should permeate and be central to all programs, and not be siloed into a single unit.

- **Faculty composition** should align with individual program needs. Currently, the make-up of faculty is limited by Senate rule. *More divisional flexibility and control regarding appropriate composition is desirable.*
- **Example of reorganization.** Here is an example of a possible reorganization that recognizes the growing importance of the new areas named above, addresses the health of the whole university, maintains efficiency and creates more nimble units. Other arrangements are of course possible, particularly if a net new division is envisioned. This highly provisional version would partition and reorganize all divisions of the university with the great degree of reorganization impacting the current Colleges of Arts and Science and Education, Health and Society.

The departments of GEO, SOC, PSY and KNH would be divided as indicated. Some other departments might need to be split or relocated from this provisional version. The Western Program has not yet been accounted for. Innovation and Entrepreneurship would be structured to bridge all divisions and directly report to the provost.

College of Humanities and Creative Arts - ARC, MUS, THE, IMS, REL, FRE, SPO, CLS, GRAMELAC, HST, ENG, MJF, PHL

College of Education, Policy, and Social Sciences - EDT, EDL, EDP, POL, ATH, SOC, part of PSY, GEO, SLAM (formerly part of KNH), GIC

College of Engineering and Data Science - MME, CPB, ECE, CSE, STA, MTH, ISA, GIS (formerly part of GEO)

College of Health and Natural Sciences - MBI, GLG, FSW, perhaps NSG, IES, GTY (formerly part of SOC), part of PSY, SPA, BIO, CHM, PHY, part of KNH

Farmer School of Business - ECO, FIN, ACC, MKT, MAN - unchanged except ISA which could perhaps go to CEDS

CLAAS - unchanged in this model, except for perhaps NSG

B. Interdisciplinary and cross-unit collaborations

Regardless of the organizational structure of the future, there needs to be an additional focus on interdisciplinary, cross-unit collaborations in both teaching and research (NU, Convergence Committee Report). The university and the student of the future will be more integrative and cross-unit. Many of our students are already creating their own interdisciplinary programs. Cross-unit collaborations such as the BA and BS degrees in Public Health have the potential to leverage cross-unit strengths. Below are examples of strategies to further cross-unit collaborations.

- **Facilitate cross-unit curriculum design.** A possible more flexible degree structure would be a major that is constituted of at least 50% core in a skill or competency, with the remainder of the major offering a related area or application of the skill. Additional applications (tracks/concentrations) could then be added without having to create a new degree, allowing for more nimble development to respond to changing demand. An example is the new BA in Data Analytics, a degree with advanced concentrations that can span all divisions as needs and interests evolve.
- **Encourage joint appointments.** Difficulties in creating and sustaining faculty joint appointments are a major obstacle to interdisciplinary research and teaching. These should be facilitated through MOUs. Deans and the provost may be positioned to identify promising opportunities for joint appointments and should devote some portion of new hiring to those positions. Joint appointments can also be temporary under existing policy; this possibility should be more fully

exploited. For example, health economists (ECO) and biostatisticians (STA) would be natural candidates for joint appointments in a new Health and Natural Sciences division.

- **Create a structure for program prototyping/curriculum lab.** An umbrella instructional (and research) structure “Discovery Lab” should be created to enable more rapid response to student demand and as a space for testing new ideas. We recommend the structure report to the provost to ensure cross-unit (or cross-divisional) activity. Faculty could be assigned temporarily (e.g., 3-5 years) with a focus on a particular program or curriculum initiative. The Humanities Center provides a possible model for creation of the umbrella structure. The structure would provide an opportunity to refine proof-of-concept with low risk/low expense at the beginning, then implementation, evaluation, and next steps that might include disbanding or expansion into a co-major or minor, or moving into a department as a full major.
- **Earmark some portion of faculty leaves for cross-unit activity.** Some faculty research leaves should be redirected to faculty who commit to working on an innovative, interdisciplinary or cross-unit academic program or co-curricular academic structure based in a residence hall (a RLLC - research living and learning community).

C. Honors College

The creation of an Honors College is recommended in the NU report. While we did not invest a lot of time on this topic, it may be consistent with our other recommendations if it is found to help in the recruiting and supporting of academically excellent students. If an Honors College is contemplated, it should have a clearly defined role and mission that advances the university’s core goals to justify the high cost. It is possible that an expanded and targeted UASP, and other opportunities for high-achieving students, could fill the same need.

D. eLearning

Electronic media should enhance the quality of existing programs and enlarge Miami’s reach and audience in strategically selected online programs. Online-only is a promising space for the development of professional certificates that can stack into a master’s degree in new areas. At the undergraduate level, programs for online or hybrid development should be carefully selected to complement, not compete with, the residential face-to-face experience. Online or hybrid programs should primarily serve those who cannot physically come to campus, whether undergraduate or graduate, enabling the university to reach new markets. This is particularly true during fall and spring semesters.

The committee strongly recommends that Miami develop a university-wide master plan for coherence and quality assurance, and to avoid duplication. In designing this plan, a leadership role should be taken by CLAAS for undergraduate offerings and the Graduate School for graduate offerings. This master planning process should consider whether there should be a new division, Miami E-Campus, as is done at many schools. Miami E-campus would diminish the duplication of offerings across divisions and could help address challenges in meeting marketplace needs.

Academic Programs

Our charge included reviewing curriculum development and approval processes. The challenge of creating a more nimble review process was a focus of the committee. We recommend that to maintain and enhance excellence, resources must be reallocated. Simply stated, we need to prune programs in order to grow strategically. While a rich and varied curriculum benefits students and helps to draw a

diverse student body (D&I), our university has more majors than most for its size (NU). *Some reduction in the number of majors is appropriate.* Review of all current and new academic programs must be more critical and consider the possibility of sun-setting programs. Stakeholders consulted must include faculty, Enrollment Management and Student Success, and community partners.

A. Strategic review of the curriculum

The curriculum review can be done separately for graduate and undergraduate programs, though the criteria are largely the same (NU). The criteria should include:

- **Alignment** with the core mission of university, including cultivating a culture of inclusive excellence
- **Demonstrated high quality**, as measured by faculty involvement, levels and types of high-impact practices, participation of external stakeholders, etc.
- **Documented student demand** that includes actual and projected enrollments. We note that destination majors, programs and opportunities that attract high-achieving students to Miami are particularly important in the current competitive higher education landscape.
- **Clearly articulated and realized student outcomes.** Are students successful in pursuing their next step, be it additional training, the first job or career opportunity?
- **Outline actual budget impact.** Simply stated, curriculum has costs. These costs should be articulated.
- **Detailed plans** that include a timeline, enrollment targets, plan for meeting goals and adjustments if goals are not met, and a deactivation/sun-setting plan.

Curriculum Review Process. *The current Academic Program Review process, while it attempts to achieve some of the aforementioned, is not consistently effective and should be minimized to conserve resources.* We recommend that the curriculum review occur in two phases.

Phase One: A one-time comprehensive review of all academic programs according to the criteria above. This review should be conducted ASAP. Review of related programs could be combined into a holistic review. Questions to consider include whether these programs (majors, minors, courses) should be combined, consolidated or eliminated. Some majors and graduate degrees will be eliminated as a result of this review, while other areas may be strengthened. With lower budgets for academic units (in 5 years, >7% less than current budgets), pruning and reallocation is necessary for the overall health of the university.

Phase Two: Revision of the program/curriculum review process. The goal is to improve the current, slow process for development of new programs by adding a strategic centralized review of proposed new programs that includes faculty, divisional leadership, EMSS, Office of Institutional Research, Finance and Business Services and University Communications.

B. Identifying opportunities for new programs. We recommend the following:

- **Create a more flexible structure** for undergraduate degrees with internal variations possible: a core skill competency is half the major, while the other half can have multiple options that are more quickly created. See section above on interdisciplinary collaborations.

- **Develop new, revenue-generating graduate programs** that are organized as certificates, stackable into professional masters' degrees. These could include micro-credentials. (See State goals)
- **Grow the combined bachelors and masters programs:** these should be developed across disciplines so a student with any bachelor's degree can add a one-year masters in another area, perhaps with certain specified prerequisites that would be completed during the undergraduate degree. These degrees need to be overseen by the graduate school or another university-wide entity to control overlap, facilitate sharing of resources, and cross-market complementary programs. A current example is the BS in Family Science/MA in Education Psychology. Other possible pairings include Engineering BS+ MS in Environmental Science, and any College of Creative Arts bachelors+ MBA.
- **Create a structure for program prototyping/curriculum lab.** This Discovery Lab structure, located in the provost's office or otherwise above the divisional level, would encourage collaboration and experimentation across divisions. It could include showcase interdisciplinary courses for GMP and team-teaching opportunities. See interdisciplinary section for additional details.
- **Eliminate policies** that hamper experimentation unnecessarily. For example, limits on the repeatability of topics courses and limits on the use of temporary courses tend to make curriculum less nimble and slow to change.

C. Global Miami Plan

The GMP is Miami's signature liberal education plan, but it has become cumbersome and outdated with too many options and not enough cross-curricular connections. Other universities have passed us in this area (NU). We recommend reinvigorating GMP through:

- **Conduct a comprehensive review of the current model.** Review whether the current delivery model for the GMP is efficient and comprehensible to students. Do students comprehend the value of the GMP curriculum? Are there too many different classes in each category? Should there be a showcase interdisciplinary program of some kind? Or a 1st year seminar? The GMP should be reviewed regularly (every 5-7 years) to keep it up to date. Some of this work is already being done by LEC. These efforts should be strengthened regularly.
- **Remove the thematic sequence (TS) requirement** and replace it with a requirement of a certificate, minor, major or co-major. This would enhance opportunities for students to broaden knowledge/skills and get a credential that furthers their careers. A great many students now meet the TS requirement with a second degree or major or minor. Additionally, there are numerous TS's with very low enrollment, which creates inefficiencies.
- **Simplify the GMP** and make core competencies more visible. One example could be to reduce the AAC&U "additional" competencies from 15 to six or eight. This reduction would sharpen focus on targeted areas and simplify messaging to students, faculty and parents.

D. Scheduling and course selection

Miami's rich and varied curriculum means that students are sometimes overwhelmed and have difficulty making choices among available courses. At the same time, in many areas demand is unpredictable and it is difficult for departments to schedule efficiently or redo schedules when demand shifts quickly. There are a number of ways to improve this, both for efficiency (fuller classes, better use of time and

space) and for student success. While we did not reach a recommendation for refining scheduling and course selection, we did discuss these options: (1) *block scheduling, at least for the first year or two*; (2) *demand scheduling, where students would state their preferences for classes, with back-up choices but without instructors or meeting times, and then an algorithm would produce a schedule.*

Miami's Signature Foci

The subcommittee identified three signature areas of focus. We recommend sharpening our focus on the teacher-scholar model, furthering student engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities, and more clearly articulating these as competitive advantages.

A. Fostering teaching excellence

Miami is known for its teaching excellence. To continue and strengthen this focus, we recommend that the university:

- Recognize and promote our model teachers with a focus on diverse models of teacher-scholar excellence.
- Support and broadcast evidence-based measures of teaching quality, including support for pedagogical research.
- Strengthen CTE's resources to support teaching excellence. These resources could be used to provide discipline-specific support to groups of faculty, expand the faculty associate model to provide for pedagogical innovation across courses, and systematize university-wide training for peer-review of teaching.

B. Rich co-curricular and curricular opportunities

Miami's rich curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students should be made more visible. These opportunities help our students stand out in their jobs and communities. They add value to the degree and give our students a competitive advantage. We recommend the creation of an office or clearinghouse to bring more visibility and awareness to these options for undergraduate students. This clearinghouse should work in collaboration with CCES, OARS, The HUB, Global Initiatives, and other entities on campus. This office may coordinate an expansion of living-learning communities connected to engagement, leadership and research. Its scope would include:

- Research. Helping connect students to all types of research from applied to basic investigations.
- Leadership. Providing students with information on opportunities to engage in leadership activities from elected positions to volunteer activities.
- Engagement with the wider world – local, national or international.

The challenges to community engagement must be addressed. Given our rural location, there are a range of barriers to students getting off campus to engage with community partners. Barriers include: transportation for students to community opportunities; class scheduling that does not accommodate blocks of free time for travel and volunteer work; and access to resources for job shadows and interviews, including clothing, transportation, information and preparation. A clearinghouse could help address these barriers in a collective fashion that benefits all students and programs.

C. Aspiration

We recommend bring together the strands that weave through a student's time at Miami. The "Make Your Mark" campaign captures the areas for which we hope a Miami student will be known. Skills in:

- Entrepreneurial thinking
- Intercultural competency
- Communication (writing, speaking)
- Leadership and teamwork

Communication

In order to gain the trust and commitment of the faculty and staff, it is essential to convey the rationales and support for these objectives clearly and consistently. (See also NU's recommendation of a PR campaign.)

Membership and References

Committee members

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People consulted

Denise Taliaferro Baszile, from the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee
Stacey Lowery Bretz, from the Financial Sustainability subcommittee
Shelly Jarrett Bromberg, Director, Office of Liberal Education
Allison Farmer, former Director, Center for Analytics and Data Science (CADS)
Carolyn Haynes, Associate Provost
Tim Melley, Director, Humanities Center
Susan Spellman, Acting Director, Office of Liberal Education

Works consulted

EAB reports on trends in student interests and majors
Fiscal Priorities Committee Report to University Senate, 2018
BI reports on enrollments in all majors, minors, and graduate programs across the university for the last 5 years
Convergence Committee Report, 2017
Interdisciplinary Enhancement Committee Report, 2011