

Strategic Planning Council Recommendations On Academic Restructuring

Vision

Restructuring is based on the rationale that the process will contribute to achieving the mission of university excellence in education---undergraduate, graduate and research, and distributed learning--- through a culture shift and more effective resource management.

This vision leads to the notion of “one university” – unique, distinctive, and able to build on historical and emerging strengths. Students should experience as seamless an experience as possible in whatever program they choose. Collegiality, innovation, and interdisciplinary endeavors will be strengthened at Northern Arizona University.

Strategic Challenges

The current academic structure of autonomous silos with widely varying resources and expectations results in NAU being unable to manage efficiently and effectively, and is a barrier to achieving university goals and priorities. Restructuring creates, even demands, the need to articulate expectations for the new units that will help the university manage more successfully. The realigning process becomes a means to help us create a roadmap for our future success.

It is expected that restructuring, in the long term, will improve overall resource management at the university. While the absolute dollars expected to be saved next year are relatively small, longer range savings, cost avoidance, and more efficient and effective management are expected. Both the new and old schools and colleges will need to evaluate their organizations, reprioritize their energies and resources, and consider economies of scale to benefit the university, their faculty and students.

Additionally, the collective will to look at these issues, the attempt to become more efficient and effective, and the evidence of a university willing to change are important to convince external stakeholders of our ability to manage effectively for the future.

Strategic Planning Council Recommendations

Although the Council did not elect to endorse one proposed restructuring plan over the other, it does wish to make some general recommendations to the President and Provost on the academic restructuring effort and its ties to strategic planning.

- Restructuring should be aligned with objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan allowing the university to set, measure, and evaluate performance.
- In devising their ultimate plan, the President and Provost should review feedback gathered to find converging trends which will help tailor an effective plan.

- The plan should correspond with the guiding principles set forth by the Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Restructuring.
- Implementation should address standards or expectations in the areas of quality of academic programs, leadership, student learning and satisfaction, faculty and staff well-being and morale, and key support processes such as development, IT, central planning and budgeting.
- Feedback on the success/problems with the restructuring will be gathered, and further changes may evolve. University leadership at all levels and across all units should be committed to listening, participatory decision-making, and continuous institutional learning.
- Revision of the Strategic Plan priorities and recommendations on the reallocation of budget savings will help the university to successfully achieve its goals of improving resource management, image creation, and transformation in culture.
- A process to facilitate dialogues with faculty, staff and students in units facing change should be developed with the intent to assist them and the university to better understand and attend to issues that will affect their daily life working and learning environments.

Timing

It should be recognized that no restructuring proposal will satisfy every interest. People will disagree about the particulars of the plan and the process. A large majority of the Strategic Planning Council believes the President and Provost should follow their published timeline and announce a plan by April 12th¹. After a plan is announced, the campus will want to comment on particulars of the plan, and bodies such as the Strategic Planning Council can begin to look specifically at the connections and implications of the structure, with the intent to provide Strategic Plan guidance to the implementation.

¹ A minority view suggests that further discussion is needed before announcing a plan.