

WT 125 White Paper

A College of Arts and Sciences or a University College

Abstract:

The goal of this paper is to describe and evaluate a possible restructuring of the University by either instituting a College of Arts and Sciences or by creating a new entity called a University College, which would focus on freshman and undeclared students and would bring together offices and services to serve these students. While there are merits to creating a traditional Arts and Science college at WTAMU, there are also drawbacks, including additional costs and imbalanced college sizes and budgets. The creation of a University College, on the other hand, can potentially accomplish many of these same objectives with fewer concerns and at a lower cost. It should be explored as a way for the University to create more focus and cohesion in both the core curriculum and in providing student support services for freshman and undeclared majors.

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Introduction:

As WTAMU looks toward 2035, it makes sense to examine the structure of the University and the colleges in order to assess if we have the best organizational model. The University is currently divided into seven colleges and schools: the College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Education and Social Sciences, the School of Engineering, Computer Science, and Mathematics, the College of Fine Arts and Humanities, the Graduate School, and the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. While this structure is slightly unorthodox, it has evolved to fit the needs of the University as it has grown over the past three decades or so. A disadvantage of the current model is that it does not provide a centralized focus on the core curriculum, a set of lower level courses that all students are required to complete in order to graduate. One possible way to address this concern is to examine the possibility of restructuring the University by creating a College of Arts and Sciences. Many other institutions of higher education are organized around a college of arts and sciences. A central goal of this white paper is to explore what a College of Arts and Sciences would look like at WTAMU and to determine if it would be a better option than the current configuration.

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The model of a liberal arts and sciences education at colleges and universities is historical in nature. The Michigan College Alliance stated that “Liberal arts and sciences education has its roots in the founding of the nation’s first colleges in the 17th century...and yet this model of active engagement and comprehensive study remains the most effective means to prepare students for the complicated world in which we live today” (The Benefits). It is hard to determine from this quote, however, whether the perceived benefit is from the liberal arts education or the specific component of an A&S college on campuses. There is no exact model of what disciplines should comprise a College of Arts and Sciences, but they generally focus on instruction of the liberal arts and pure sciences, although many schools add social sciences to the mix, such as the University of Texas Tyler’s College of Arts and Sciences. This college is comprised of Art, Biology, Chemistry, Criminal Justice, Economics, English, History, Mass Communication, Mathematics, Music, Political Science, Social Sciences, Spanish, and Speech Communication. Baylor University’s College of Arts and Sciences is similar and is the oldest and largest academic unit in the university. It includes departments in the humanities and social sciences as well as the sciences and serves over 6,000 students, nearly 40 percent of Baylor’s total enrollment (Quick Facts)

The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder describes itself as the “intellectual core of the university, conducting research, scholarship, creative work and education in more than 60 fields” (College). This college is made up of social sciences, natural sciences, and arts and humanities. The University of Kentucky’s College of Arts and Sciences is “the oldest and largest college” and is comprised of humanities, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences (About). The list goes on and on and includes well established universities such as the University of Oregon, Texas Tech University, the University of Missouri at Kansas City, Vanderbilt, Kansas State, and the University of Oklahoma. Within the A&M system, Texas A&M University San Antonio, Texas A&M Kingsville, Texas A&M Central Texas, Texas A&M International and Prairie View A&M all have colleges of arts and sciences. Other A&M schools have slightly different versions of colleges of arts and sciences: Texas A&M Texarkana has a College of Arts, Sciences and Education and Texas A&M Commerce has a College of Humanities, Social Sciences & Arts.

Interdisciplinary areas such as Gender Studies or Africana Studies are often included in arts and sciences models. Additionally, schools frequently refer to the arts and sciences as the academic or historic core of the university and point to the focus and support they give to the core curriculum of the university, those foundational classes that all students are required to complete as part of their studies. Because of this strong core curriculum focus, many programs house all of the areas that support the core in their college of arts and sciences. As mentioned earlier, colleges of arts and sciences are

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generally one of the biggest units on campus. One trend that is impacting colleges of arts and sciences is the greater number of students who come into college with a large number of core courses already completed, most typically through dual credit. For instance, "Ohio State's College of Arts and Sciences saw an 11 percent drop in credit hour enrollment over the past five years (Woodhouse, 2015)." They reported that 1 in 5 students enter with a full year of coursework completed, so they are losing enrollment in the core, along with the revenue it generates. This development brings into question whether WTAMU should move toward this model at a time when dual credit is increasing and more students are transferring from community colleges with their core curriculum completed.

A College of Arts and Sciences at WTAMU:

The Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities currently houses the largest number of faculty at the University with around 100 full time faculty members. It is assumed that it would form the nucleus of a new College of Arts and Sciences. If all or most of the departments that teach classes in the core curriculum were moved into the new A&S College it would increase the number of faculty members to around 175. For the purposes of this discussion, we looked at general numbers and they could vary slightly from these predictions. The economics program would be excluded from this model as the College of Business has specific accreditation standards and does not want to move a significant area that serves their other programs. Economics serves 1,450 students in the MBA and MSFE programs alone. Additionally, at regional schools, economics is often housed in business colleges instead of colleges of arts and sciences.

What would this restructuring entail? If the social sciences faculty were pulled out of the College of Education and Social Science, that would leave them with around 25 education faculty members, which is a small number for a college. This would also essentially eliminate the student credit hours generated by core courses in the College since education courses do not serve freshman and sophomores. The School of Engineering, Computer Science, and Math has around 36 faculty, but if you moved the math faculty to Arts and Sciences it would greatly reduce the size of the faculty in the School as well as the student credit hours produced by the numerous core math courses. If the current Department of Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and the Department of Chemistry and Physics were removed from the College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences there would be 30 fewer faculty members in the College, leaving it with the Department of Agricultural Sciences and about 30 faculty members.

The resulting picture would be a mega college (A&S) with around 175 faculty members and several much smaller colleges and schools with around 30-35 faculty members

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each. The College of Business would remain at around 65 faculty members. This reorganization would also spread the new College of Arts and Sciences across four buildings and necessitate the addition of at least two new associate deans and probably other administrative positions to manage a unit of this size and complexity. It could also impact administrative positions in the rest of the smaller colleges. This imbalance in size and budget, although not an insurmountable problem, is less than ideal and could create significant issues.

Perhaps a better way to accomplish the goal of having more emphasis on the core curriculum would be to create a University College that focuses on the core and essential support areas for the core.

A University College Model:

In *Organizing for Success: The University College Model* (Evenbeck and Ward, 2010) the authors describe the University College Model as a “collaboration among and within units serving entering students.” Designed as a structure where student services operates as a single unit, the model often houses Career Services, Academic Advising, Learning Support, First Year Seminars, Orientation, and Service-Learning. However, each institution is encouraged to design their University College as a uniquely defined unit within the context of their campus. There was no single “correct” model identified for developing a University College unit within an institution of higher learning.

In 2011, The Advisory Board Company in Washington, D.C. published a custom research brief entitled “Forming a University College.” Three basic issues were addressed: organization, support, and assessment and outcomes. The review of institutions included seven large public four-year institutions (enrollment varying between 10,000 and 30,000 students) with medium to very high research activity.

Several key observations were made, including:

- University Colleges provide a cohesive, one-roof model of new student services (however, exact structures vary among University Colleges).
- Most University Colleges house academic advising, learning support, living learning communities, new student seminars, career services, and new student programs (some also include service learning, international education, honors programs, K-12 initiatives, and degree programs).
- One of three general enrollment policies: enrolling all new students, enrolling undeclared new students, or enrolling both undeclared and liberal studies students.
- A close, communicative professional relationship between the institution’s provost and the head of University College is essential.

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- The dean of University College reports directly to the provost.
- Key strategies to build faculty and staff support:
 - Include faculty in decision-making
 - Offer development opportunities
 - Highlight supportive University College staff
 - Rationalize with positive outcomes
- Analysis and collection of data on:
 - First-year retention rates
 - Overall retention rates
 - Academic standing
 - Pass/fail for UC supplemented courses
 - Academic advising surveys
 - Graduation rates
- Sequential assessments of:
 - Students' needs
 - Program processes
 - Critical outcomes
- Most institutions with University Colleges experienced significant improvements in retention, graduation rates, and other indicators of student success following the formation of a University College (it was recognized that most data can be affected by a variety of factors such as student demographics, but most affirmed that improvement could be attributed, as least in part, to University College programs. It was also noted that improvements may not become apparent until several years after the formation of a University College).

Finally, The Advisory Board Company (2011) cited the importance of emphasizing benefits of University College to skeptics with the following:

- Reduced cost by eliminating duplication of student services among individual colleges;
- Improved student experience as shown by student surveys, evaluations, and focus groups;
- Improved pass/fail rates in supplemental classes;
- Improved retention and graduation rates.

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Potential Issues to be Addressed at WTAMU:

Programs to House within a University College Unit

At WTAMU, Experiential Learning (also known as our QEP), Advising Services, the Teaching Excellence Center, and the First Year Experience & Learning Communities are housed in Academic Affairs under the Associate Provost. These areas are also commonly housed within a University College. We could explore moving some offices currently housed in the Division of Student Enrollment, Engagement, and Success to the University College in order to concentrate more student services under one umbrella. This might include the Student Success Center (with Buff Mentors and Buff \$mart), Educational Services, and New Student and Transfer Student Orientations. The Teaching Excellence Center could be expanded to include professional development for the institution as a whole, providing training for faculty, staff, and outside entities.

K-12 initiatives including Upward Bound, College Talent Search, and the College Assistance Migrant Program might also benefit from inclusion in a University College by recognizing their significance to the institution's continuing efforts to reach potential students and promote their success. The addition of two degree-granting programs currently housed in the College of Fine Arts and Humanities could also benefit from relocation to University College: General Studies and BAAS programs. As an interdisciplinary college, students could develop individualized programs of study within a unit designed with educational diversity and student success in mind. By allowing a broad education and acquisition of diverse skill sets, students would be able to pursue professional careers in diverse occupational fields which may not fit comfortably within any particular discipline.

Enrollment in and Transfer from University College

Not all students know at the time of enrollment in college what major they should select. Others have known since middle school. Some models have all new students enroll in University College (as opposed to the Colleges of Fine Arts, Engineering, Agriculture, etc.) for at least their freshman year, while others allow transfer to different colleges after students have accumulated 58-60 credit hours. Others only enroll undeclared, undecided, and BAAS students. Whichever model is chosen, University College would offer a supportive, educational "home" to freshman and undeclared majors and a structure through which they could develop their interests in a particular discipline. Once a student has settled on a specific career path, they could transfer across to the appropriate college. Student populations who would benefit from enrollment in a University College include first generation students and non-traditional

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students (veterans, older returning students, under-represented populations, students from lower socio-economic populations, etc.).

Organizational Structure/ Staffing

At many institutions, the University College is under the direct guidance of the provost, assistant provost, or dean. At WTAMU, many of the typical University College programs/initiatives already report to the Associate Provost. For simplicity and continuity, this could continue.

At Indiana University-Perdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), faculty in the UC are drawn from tenured faculty and non-tenured faculty ranks as well as from adjunct faculty who have been appointed to the University College in recognition of their contributions to the institution. There are also joint appointments of lecturers from academic departments who teach key first-year courses in their respective fields. These participants promote the mission, contribute to the understanding of University College and act as liaisons between the University College and other colleges across campus. They are expected to collaborate with University College advisors in enhancing the quality of academic advising and mentoring between University College and other units of the institution. They must also provide leadership based on the mission and principles of the University College by mentoring students and by representing the UC on campus committees that may impact it.

Faculty/Instructor responsibilities within most University College units include teaching University College courses, acting as a resource for UC courses, developing and teaching new courses within the UC, providing leadership for the continued development and improvement of first-year seminars and other courses, and pursuing professional development opportunities as they relate to the improvement of undergraduate learning. University College faculty/instructors should be recognized for their contributions to University College through appropriate campus- and university-level teaching, service and research awards, letters of support and appreciation, and acknowledgement of teaching excellence through institutional advancement with rank and tenure when eligible.

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Mission Statement

The mission of the University College is unique to each individual institution; however, commonalities exist. Most center on student success and the promotion of career exploration and interdisciplinary educational opportunities. Collaboration between schools/colleges is encouraged and faculty/instructors/staff are purposefully selected to support their students' goals and the goals of the University College. Review of several different institutions with established University College units illustrates the commonality in mission statements.

- University of Memphis: *"Our mission is to provide interdisciplinary educational opportunities primarily to nontraditional, adult students. The college provides an entry point for students, an innovator of new programs, a catalyst for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary efforts throughout the campus, and a facilitator for the community to interact with the University."* (<http://www.memphis.edu/univcoll/about/index.php>)
- Kennesaw State University: *"The mission of University College is to foster student learning and success at every academic level and to nurture students' educational and personal growth through innovative and collaborative curricular and co-curricular programs, services, and resources. To achieve our mission, University College's highly qualified faculty and staff create opportunities for students to be locally and globally engaged, to examine and understand diverse perspectives, to think critically, and to become ethical and effective leaders in their communities."* (http://uc.kennesaw.edu/resources/resources_docs/uc_marketing_plan_2015_2017.pdf)
- Auburn University: *"The Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary University Studies, offered through the University College, allows students to attain a broad education and acquire diverse skill sets unique to interdisciplinary studies. Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary University Studies offers students an opportunity to create a unique program of study to meet their personal, academic and professional goals. The degree enables students to seek professional careers in diverse occupational fields and prepares them for the challenges of today's global economy."* (<http://uc.auburn.edu/interdisciplinary-studies/>)
- Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis: *"University College provides a common gateway to the academic programs and services available to entering students. University College coordinates existing university resources and develops new initiatives to promote academic excellence and enhance student persistence. It provides a setting where faculty, staff, and students share in the responsibility for making IUPUI a supportive and challenging environment for learning."* (<https://uc.iupui.edu/about/index.html>)

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Because there is already an existing structure within WTAMU that could be adapted for the governing body of the University College, additional funding needs could be kept to a minimum. The primary structural change would be the institutional appointment of faculty, instructors, and staff toward the development and promotion of the mission of the University College. While they would still teach in their respective areas of expertise, they would be recommended by their respective deans/department chairs, and courses taught through the University College would apply to their required load. It is possible that the University College could be an institutional home to all adjunct faculty where they would be kept informed on institutional happenings and changes, have the opportunity to develop courses, be encouraged to complete research, and receive professional development credits.

By giving appropriate credit (consideration in the rank and tenure process, merit consideration, awards, etc.) to contributions of course development, increase in success/retention rates, as well as committee work completed by members/associates of the University College, initiatives would be seen as significant contributions to the whole of the institutional community. Experiential Learning would be directly connected to success programs and have direct and collaborative access to Learning/Living & Learning Communities. K-12 initiatives would have a direct connection to academic programs and to colleagues in the academic arena which could increase student retention and graduation rates of students who connect through these programs. The First Year Seminar would have instructors dedicated to the development and ongoing evolution of an initiative that research lists as a high impact practice that promotes student success.

University College could bring all professional development under one roof. With an area dedicated to the success of students as well as faculty and staff, the collaboration inherent in the structure would promote excellence in all areas of development. Housing Interdisciplinary Studies, General Studies, and BAAS programs together would offer students the ability to craft professional degrees relevant to their individual needs under the direction of academic specialists from all areas of the institution. Experiential Learning and Educational Services could play an important role in this area by certifying past experience toward degree attainment and providing certification testing. Educational needs of a student in their chosen career area could be identified and a degree path developed. Students could have access to a wider variety of disciplines as a result of the structure of the University College.

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Establishment of a University College could be an advantageous expansion for WTAMU. It would place important student success initiatives under one administrative head in Academic Affairs. The establishment of these programs under their own leader would elevate these important initiatives and attract faculty, instructors, and staff who would be fully supportive of the University College's mission. The courses developed and offered by this entity could be created through collaboration and thereby ensure a deeper commitment to excellence, consistency, and student success as a result.

Recommendations/Suggested Next Steps:

It is recommended that the Theme Groups and WT125 members consider a plan to create a University College at WTAMU in order to improve student success, particularly at the freshman level. The exact configuration and mission of this University College would need to be worked out internally, but could be led by guiding principles articulated through the WT125 process.

Conclusion:

There are merits to reorganizing the current University structure in order to increase student success at WTAMU. The two discussed in this white paper are the creation of a College of Arts and Sciences and the creation of a University College. On balance, the authors find that the latter is the more promising avenue, should reorganization be recommended as part of the WT125 process.

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