

Planning for the Future—The First Step  
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In our faculty meeting Monday, 16 November, 2009, we began a discussion of where we are and where we want to be headed as a college. I began the meeting by noting that, although we had experienced significant cuts in our budget, we were cut less than any other units on campus—and preliminary indicators are that we will have new funding directed to us in disproportionately larger amounts than other units. Our responses to budget cuts were opportunistic, rather than strategic (e.g., we gave back lines where people retired or resigned rather than laying off people in targeted areas), but allocation of future funds will be strategic. That is, rather than simply using funds to replace people or positions that were vacated, we will use new allocations to build capacity in areas that we target as critical. The discussion we began in our faculty meeting is intended to lead to principles by which we will make new allocations.

Our discussion began with the question “What are our strengths?” A number of answers were offered to that question, including:

- Undergraduate offerings that continue to attract more and better students, and are increasingly relevant to meeting contemporary challenges (e.g., globalization, health, environment).
- Strong graduate programs, particularly in the social sciences.
- General education for undergraduate majors outside of our college.
- Unique programs capitalizing on historic strengths of the university (e.g., the PhD in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media).
- A strong cost-benefit ratio for graduate and undergraduate programs, in which relatively small monetary investments yield large returns because our degree programs generally need less space, equipment, and other support than other degree programs on campus.
- The alignment of humanities and social sciences to broader system goals (e.g., UNC Tomorrow, NC State’s goal of becoming a comprehensive university and member of the American Association of Universities).

The discussion also identified ideas for targeting and building the college, including:

- Building graduate programs in the humanities.
- Building or expanding research and graduate programs with high potential for collaborations across campus.
- Supporting programs that have career and employment demand/avoid developing or supporting programs where there is relatively little demand for graduates (e.g., see the Humanities Indicator Prototype developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at <http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/humanitiesData.aspx>).
- Building around themes that cut across disciplines, including internationalization, diversity, and STEM-related collaborations.
- Combining multiple goals where possible. One example was building graduate programs, which then allows for graduate students to teach or add value to

undergraduate education (e.g., lead discussion or small group sections), which builds both graduate and undergraduate offerings.

Some of the points of controversy included:

- The relative merits of doctoral vs. masters programs, especially in philosophy (e.g., there was general support for doctoral programs, but some expressed strong support for a masters—not a doctorate—in philosophy)
- Breadth vs. specialization, particularly at the graduate level. Some noted the virtues of specialized programs, particularly those linked to historic strengths of the campus in STEM and agriculture areas, which include meeting “uniqueness” demands imposed by UNC General Administration and the ability to attract resources and support across campus. Others argued the virtues of traditional disciplinary programs that ensure broad disciplinary exposure, and expressed concern about “boutique” programs aimed at trendy ideas, or that lacked sound and broad introduction to the discipline.
- Allocation of resources to three distinct needs: enhancing/restoring undergraduate instruction, replenishing infrastructure (e.g., staff), or replacing lost faculty lines.
- The relative importance of a disciplinary vs. inter-disciplinary foci. Some argued that departments should engage in discipline-driven planning and requests, whereas others advocated for inter-disciplinary programs.

It was also noted that there are a number of issues over which we have little control, but which may have substantial influence on our future. These included:

- The hiring of a new chancellor. Current university leadership is strongly supportive of developing CHASS, and appears willing to align fiscal decision-making with that goal. However, it is not clear that our new chancellor will share those values.
- Policies and practices at UNC’s General Administration. Many voiced frustration with GA’s unpredictability and inefficiency (e.g., the handling of the proposal for a PhD in Public History), and some wondered about the relative emphasis that GA/the Board of Governors will apply to new degree program proposals (e.g., the degree to which overlap with other programs in the UNC system or alignment with UNC Tomorrow priorities might influence support).

The discussion was helpful in defining areas of consensus and of controversy. Of one thing I am sure: There will be more good ideas than there will be money to fund them. Therefore, I would like to suggest some issues that can help us move us toward defining the principles by which we will allocate the resources that will come to us:

- To what degree should we use resources to restore lost capacity vs. build new capacity? On the one hand, losses of faculty, staff, and operating budgets strain our morale and our ability to meet our goals for academic excellence. On the other hand, there may be ways we can meet obligations for general education, advising, and other important capacities through less expensive means (e.g., creating or expanding large undergraduate sections, using graduate students as advisors) that may help us achieve multiple goals with our investments.

- To what degree should we allocate funds to undergraduate vs. research and graduate programs? Although we must fulfill our obligations to providing for the general education program, we will not build our scholarly reputation (or recruit leading scholars) with programs directed largely towards transmission rather than production of knowledge. Where should we put our priorities, and are there ways to promote excellence in both undergraduate and research/graduate education?
- To what degree should we allocate funds to traditional disciplinary structures (i.e., departments and programs) vs. targeting inter-disciplinary themes (e.g., health and well-being, energy and the environment, technology and society)? There are good cases to be made for focusing on disciplines (e.g., ensuring depth and breadth in a discipline), but there are also good arguments for inter-disciplinary targeting (e.g., building capacity and reputation in a given area).
- To what extent can we foster thinking about goals that might pit our own specific interests against the greater good? For example, NC State does not offer degrees in performing arts (i.e., music, dance, theater). I believe we are the largest research-extensive university in North America that does not offer a music degree. Although we might concede the point that our lack of a degree in this area hurts our standing and our desire to enhance our reputation, we may be reluctant to advocate for a music degree on the grounds that doing so would diminish the resources available for our other priorities. How can we identify and build support for initiatives that may have few or no advocates within our current configuration, yet that would help us more quickly reach our strategic goals of excellence and comprehensiveness?

### Next Steps

In January and February, I would like faculty within units (e.g., departments, programs) to address these broader issues. Interim Provost Arden has asked to join us as an observer at our next general college faculty meeting, at which I'll ask for units to share their discussions with the faculty as a whole. I encourage you to discuss these issues with colleagues in formal and informal settings so that we can begin to identify common ground for making some of the tough calls that lie ahead. I am optimistic that we will get new resources, and I hope to have understanding (if not consensus) about the principles by which we will allocate those resources.

Sincerely,

Jeff