

## **College Reorganization Task Group Report**

### **April 9, 2007**

The College of Forestry Reorganization Task Group was charged with: 1) developing evaluation criteria and principles to be used in evaluating potential future organizational structures for the college if the current structure is dissolved or modified; and 2) proposing several alternatives (e.g., zero, two and/or three departments) relative to those principles and criteria, and describing their short- and long-term benefits and/or consequences. The first task proved manageable for the large group of faculty (and one graduate student) assembled – the latter proved largely unmanageable given the need for detail about specific options in order to evaluate them against most of the criteria. Nonetheless, by considering future options in general (e.g., no departments), we were forced refine criteria and principles sufficiently for the FEC subgroup to continue the development of option details.

#### **Criteria and Principles:**

Any future reorganization needs to consider:

- 1) **Student Success** (graduate and undergraduate), including curriculum design, class availability and social dynamics created within the College. This criteria involves, at a minimum, the:
  - attraction and recruitment of the best and “right” students for the college,
  - advising they receive from the first day they arrive until they are completing graduation paperwork,
  - mentoring available from faculty and administration,
  - quality and number of courses (depth and breadth) that are offered, including ‘trans-discipline’ courses (e.g., statistics, GIS and remote sensing) and transferable skills (critical thinking, communication and team work)
  - efficient curricula as a whole that really work for and make sense to the students,
  - student-to-teacher ratio in classrooms and laboratories, and
  - open access to and the dynamics of student social groups.

There is no one administrative structure that lends itself particularly well to any of these student success items, but there are administrative elements that provide for these important tasks and can work in either a centralized or decentralized fashion. For example, there are compelling reasons to centralize much of the recruiting and advising functions within the college, but there is no substitute for having a nationally recognized program with happy and energetic faculty drawing students to the campus, providing outstanding courses, and advising/mentoring them through their years. The number and name of departments is irrelevant IF the faculty are productive and students can find support somewhere - departments can be largely transparent. Indeed, there are compelling reasons to purposefully decouple administrative structure from curriculum structure to avoid the potential for rigid, top-down programming and program stagnation. Students therefore may benefit from a major overhaul of current departments OR may suffer terribly if the new structure does not provide for the above seven bullets.

- 2) **University Core Mission** for outstanding academic programs, student engagement, and service to the State of Oregon (or whatever they are these days as this is a vague and shifting target). Here, the only new consideration (beyond #1 above) is service to the State. Our college has a

statewide reputation for certain degree programs and certain products that will need to be maintained to meet this criterion (relates to #7 on constituencies and funding bases). But, again, there is no particular number of departments that impact our ability to continue delivering those core degree, outreach and research programs. For example, changing from the Department of Forest Engineering, with its well recognized degree program and strong alumni base and funding support, to only the (thriving) FE degree program within the college would go unnoticed by many and viewed negatively only if we project it as a negative change. Indeed, cutting out the department layer there may be viewed quite favorably by the business-oriented alumni of that program. The question becomes whether FE faculty and students can be adequately supported without the Department as it currently exists.

- 3) **COF Strengths** (historic, current, and long term) including our reputation for excellence in research, teaching and outreach – nationally and internationally. Strength areas are varied and our group did not take on the task of listing them nor identifying which are/should be past strengths vs. future strengths. However, it may be best summed up as maintaining our college identity and pride in some basic areas of identity; faculty members, staff and students need to be within an organization that helps them to maintain a sense of belonging and functioning in core strength areas. Transferring some administrative burden to faculty will work when it is consistent with identity, and can even promote a sense of belonging to the college as a whole. Not having every service to which we are accustomed is palatable if there is that sense of belonging. The administrative change will promote new programs as old ones fade, and programs evolve within strength areas, not despite them.
- 4) **Flexibility** for the long-term – we need a structure that will be nimble for the future (the topic of another report) to allow for such evolution of degree, outreach and research programs. Administrative structures can impede flexibility, of course, but there is no number of departments inherent in flexibility or the lack thereof. Generally, the zero/many department model likely promotes the most flexibility as does a lack of hierarchies and/or rival programs
- 5) **COF Strategic Plan**, which contains ideals for the three i's: interdisciplinary, international and innovative. As with the above, there is no inherent number of departments in this criterion.
- 6) **Professional Programs** in forest engineering, forest management and wood science (and how they fit into and related to other programs at OSU). Again, largely independent of administrative departments if the structure remains functional to support the faculty and programs.
- 7) **Current and Future Funding and Constituencies.** These are typically linked to individuals' research programs and degree program for students, rather than departments. In fact, there is pressure more funding from research grants and contracts, and our future administrative reorganization should better accommodate current granting efforts as well as future growth. There will be obvious trade-offs between faculty spending more time in administration (less departmental service) and, perhaps, more in the classroom, relative to their abilities to attract high-yield external grants. For our degree programs, we should probably be doing a better job than currently linking our students to their respective constituent groups; the reorganization may help that cause.

- 8) **Feasibility of Implementation**, including social fallout and installation time. The “implications function” is asymptotic rather than linear – small changes create rapidly increasing fallout and require rapidly increasing installation time/effort, and an organization quickly reaches the amount of change where everything/everyone is impacted and beyond which the magnitude of change does not matter. Current times call for substantial change, and such change will cause upheaval of many individuals and associated distraction to all. There is no inherent new number of departments that avoids this issue of fallout, though the simplest merger of two departments (e.g., Forest Science and Forest Resources) would not create the maximum fallout possible, but would be substantial. We have already started the process in many ways, but the bottom line is that the vision of the future will be crucial to surviving the change.
- 9) **Cost Savings Realized**, in terms of retirements, exits, pink slips and program drops (purposeful and inadvertent). Some of the current administrative burden will have to shift to faculty, some will purposefully disappear as it will no longer be necessary (supervision of some department staff) or as we chose to amend procedures (annual performance evaluations), and some will just not get done in the new organization despite the plans to do so – or it will not get done as well. Faculty and parents make such decisions every day, and we cannot continue to everything we currently do (and as well as we do it) with fewer people. Hence the position that we are no longer only cutting costs, we are cutting people and tasks. Immediate cost savings will be associated with currently departmental staff leaving or being laid off, replacement with instructors with faculty

This last criterion is the jump-off point for actual consideration of (and pondering the details of) THREE future organizational options:

“**No Departments**” – this would involve centralizing many current departmental business functions into the Dean’s office (accounting, P&T, classroom reservations, etc.). Faculty would administer degree, research and outreach **programs** (including some things called “departments” if need be), which would be led by part-time and/or rotating appointments. This approach “eliminates” four full-time department heads and a substantial number of their support staff. However, three of the DHs will still be on salary as 1.0 FTE faculty and likely heading up a program/department or two, and some of their staff will need to move into support roles with these degree programs or at the college level. Therefore, there are limited cost savings in the near term until attrition and retirements kick in (at which point even more pressure is placed of remaining faculty to pick up the load). This approach/change is as feasible and consistent with the Strategic Plan/COF Strengths criteria as any reorganization proposal, as it focuses on the program level, and it breeds high flexibility. The details of which programs are kept and which go (including those lost over time to attrition) will impact the criteria on funding bases, constituencies, and the professional programs. Forest Engineering has a strong base and identity and must be kept for this criterion; Natural Resources is relatively new and has a broader, less focused/vocal base of support. The impact on student success and the University core mission is similarly hard to assess without specification of programs kept and cut. Programs could be completely decoupled from any administrative structure anyway (as argued earlier) and all housed in the college; however, too large of a house will certainly translate into lost children, so there will need to be some design/structure the clusters students into meaningful units to foster their success (i.e., the “many programs” model).

**“Two Departments”** – this model builds on the role/purpose of good departments for supporting faculty and students. We would not have to condense every business function to the Dean’s office or the faculty, and the two Departments would be of a more meaningful size for faculty P&T and such. However, they would still likely be too big from the student perspective to foster student success -- smaller degree/constituency units would still be needed. Also, there is inherent danger in both a discipline split (ecology vs. management) or service split (teaching vs. research) within the college. It will accent current “sides” in long running debates and invariably exclude some folks that view themselves as both or neither. This can be solved by “potluck departments” (A-M and N-Z) for administration of faculty; students would be linked only to undergraduate degree programs and graduate research program areas to maximize their success and university’s core mission. The main distinction from “no departments” above is better support to and review of faculty...it becomes an expensive and complicated way to achieve this goal when appropriate planning/staffing within the Dean’s office could handle most of the work. We have heard little support for this model.

**“Three (or Four) Departments”** – this model could be viewed as an extension of the two-department model above and with the same advantages and flaws. However, the department unit MIGHT be small enough in this arrangement to serve as the point of contact for students, but the smaller, program level is still better and more meaningful to students. This model could also be viewed as the simple idea of combining current departments (scoring high on feasibility), and *likely* translates into combining Forest Science with one of the other three (given the student success, professional programs, and OSU mission criteria) which is *likely* Forest Resources. However, that model reverts quickly to discipline separations, which have both pluses and minus in terms of college function and identity, and is scored low on future flexibility.

This is NOT an exhaustive list of possibilities but three basic options and some ideas on how they fit relative to the criteria and principles. A clear and common theme is the decoupling of administrative function (P&T and budgets being most important) from curriculum/degree program function. This group did not complete a thorough listing of the pros and cons of such decoupling, nor did we revisit the list of departmental functions to segregate which functions would go where during reorganization. Both of these tasks would serve the FEC subgroup well. Substantial work remains to develop the options with particular detail to programs (for student engagement) and to a structure that supports the faculty. The nine criteria should be repeatedly visited as these details are developed.

- The Reorganization Task Group