

ULM ACADEMIC STRUCTURE COMMITTEE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

SUBMITTED TO PROVOST & VP DR. MARK ARANT

FEBRUARY 14, 2023

I. Background

The ULM Academic Structure Committee was established by Provost and VP for Academic Affairs Dr. Mark Arant during the Fall of 2022. The task of this committee was to examine each colleges' organizational structure, propose recommendations for academic restructuring, and outline an implementation plan while focusing on the overarching goal of producing well-rounded students poised for success in their lives and careers. Notably, some areas, such as budgets, were not considered because they were beyond the scope of this committee and not part of the charge.

The committee was charged with delivering recommendations to the Provost for organizational transformation that focused on

- A). Redefining academic program oversight – bolstering academic leadership, potentially through a department focus as opposed to a program or school focus.
- B). Committing to more inclusive and equitable advancement opportunities for all.
- C). Identifying options for organizational change to better support faculty, staff, and students by reducing barriers to success.
- D). Promoting administrative efficiencies – ensuring resources focus on quality of teaching and research as well as improving and enriching the educational experiences of our students and the working experiences of our employees.
- E). Examining and comparing peer institution's and ULM's current structure regarding academic organization, degree offerings, and university data.

The members of the ULM Academic Structure Committee:

Fall 2022 members:

- Dr. Mary Adams, Chair | Professor & Program Coordinator English
- Dr. McKay Bonner, Professor Criminal Justice
- Dr. Jessica Dolecheck, Professor & Program Director Health Studies

Spring 2023 members:

- Dr. McKay Bonner, Professor Criminal Justice
- Dr. Ralph Brown, Professor History
- Dr. Jessica Dolecheck, Professor & Program Director Health Studies

At the forefront of the committees' conversations was the desire to examine academic restructuring while being ever mindful of the need to maintain our focus on student success, investing in talented individuals seeking a path for advancement, and improving the efficiency of our administration. The committee also emphasized the importance that all future decisions regarding academic restructuring be made with the true collaboration of faculty and staff. In addition, the committee examined whether there might be a need to establish a new office dedicated to continuous development and improvement that would be charged with providing an unbiased and public approach to the restructuring process, especially in terms of overseeing the standardization of

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administrative job titles, teaching loads, and stipends. Furthermore, discussions about shrinking enrollment and state allocations, increased competition, and escalating costs were also pertinent to our discussions regarding how to reposition ULM for long-term success.

Several resources provided support for our discussions relevant to principles on organizational structure in higher education, institutional employment and career opportunities, administrative bloat, and the need for higher education to be proactive in providing premier educational experiences that better prepare our students for success in careers and life. (See Appendix A)

Two articles and a notable podcast from *Changing Higher Ed Consulting Firm* provided significant arguments for the value of academic restructuring, cutting overhead costs, and creating opportunities. Gajendragadkar's, et al (2021) article, "*Building Operational Excellence in Higher Education*", Papini's (2020) article, "*Academic Reorganization*" and Dr. Varlotta's Podcast provided valid points about administrative efficiencies, budget challenges, and the need to explore academic restructuring that best supports our academic mission.

*"When colleges and universities think about building academic enterprises for the 21st century, they often overlook one of the most critical aspects: the back-office structures needed to run complex organizations. By failing to **modernize and streamline** [bold added] administrative functions (including HR, finance, and facilities), universities put themselves at a serious disadvantage, making it harder to fulfill their academic missions." (Gajendragadkar, et al., 2021).*

"The current economic crisis and associated budget woes in universities requires us to be open to more radical and rapid change than we are used to. What follows is a description of a method to transform the academic organization of the university to fit the current mode of intellectual inquiry – which is broader, more individualistic, and more interdisciplinary than previous modes – and at the same time to conserve university resources." (Papini, 2020)

"If an institution embarks on academic prioritization process, it can't be just about cuts and reductions. There also needs to be opportunities for growth and augmentation. Institutions with financial issues must grow while making reductions at the same time. You cannot cut your way to growth." (Dr. Varlotta, President of Hiram College, Academic Restructuring and Prioritization Podcast. 2023)

In sum, there is a precedent to begin making serious and substantive changes now so that ULM is prepared for the predicted drought of students in 2025. Furthermore, considering the higher education environment, a deep investigation into academic restructuring is warranted to identify opportunities for efficiencies, savings, and educational opportunities that will strengthen ULM's mission and prepare our students for current and future markets.

II. Key Findings – A Case for Transformation

Since ULM's major re-organization in 2014, changes in composition of our Schools and Programs have led to significant variations in terms of staff, student numbers, scope of research activities, management of these units resulting in duplication of efforts, inconsistent administrative processes, and diminished interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, the potential challenges that ULM faces include declining enrollments, decreased

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state funding, and external demands for reform. The most promising approach for tackling these challenges is through a focused, transparent, and collaborative process which involves selecting and evaluating current leadership roles across campus to make appropriate structural changes that are in the best interest of our students, faculty, and staff. Currently, our research and analysis suggest the usefulness of fully examining ULM's existing hierarchy to determine if our present structure is best serving our students and employees.

Below are the committee's major findings and recommendations related to academic restructuring. These recommendations are supported by our strategic focus based on critical committee discussions, assessment of peer institute data, ULM's current structure and practices, and research on restructuring principles in higher education.

- It is recommended that ULM's current structure could be revitalized to better position the organization to deliver on its stated mission and strategic plan. The university could be proactive and intentional in evaluating its structure to deliver degrees of the future that best meet the needs of our students and society. Administrators, in concert with faculty and staff, could identify an intellectual framework that guides the academic reprioritization process.
- It is recommended that ULM consider re-establishing departments with Department Chair titles to eliminate current administrative layers and cut red tape regarding excessive program coordinators, school directors, assistant school directors, and associate school directors. Re-establishing Department Chairs may provide enhanced autonomy and authority for their units with a more direct line to their college administrators who maintain the decision-making power.
 - Opportunities could be considered and explored regarding potential program consolidations in each college that would streamline structure, eliminate bloat, and enhance the potential for interdisciplinary collaborations. Creating additional smaller units/schools and more leadership layers is unlikely to be conducive to a streamline process for faculty and students.
 - If implemented, the restructuring process should focus on fewer layers of approval and reduced processing times to ensure our culture is more adaptive and responsive to students and employees.
- It is recommended to consider a new **Office of Continuous Development and Improvement (OCDI)** be established which would oversee the data collection, implementation, and ongoing assessment of the restructure as well as future performance assessments related to the changes. Organizational change is not static in time – it should be a continuous process which includes market and environment monitoring, ongoing adjustments, and continuous improvements. We recommend this office report to the provost as well as make its work available to the university at large through a continuously updated website.
 - If budget limitations prevent the creation of this office at this time, the current **Offices of Assessment and Evaluation and University Planning and Analysis** should be considered to work conjointly to fulfill the intent of the OCDI. Neither the OCDI or the Partnership of the two current offices (which will hereafter in this summary be referred to as ***** the Partnership) are intended to add to administrative bloat or an additional hierarchical layer. Instead, the purpose is to provide a completely unbiased approach to the evaluation, planning, restructuring, and ongoing assessments that is outside of any one college. This unbiased approach may also enhance the acceptability and commitment of all affected individuals.
 - A **Task Force** comprising faculty and staff may be considered to help the OCDI/Partnership in their mission. This **Task Force** could assist with forums and provide recommendations and feedback.

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However, it is unlikely that every Task Force member would have the time or expertise to serve as the primary mechanism that would oversee, implement, and assess an entire restructuring process. The **Task Force** should be a mechanism of quick feedback and suggestions for the OCDI/Partnership and not the primary instrument of change.

- It is recommended that all ULM employees be consulted and engaged throughout the entire restructuring process. The OCDI or Partnership should strive to regularly post on a website page all information, contribution opportunities, and the progress of the overall project. Everything should be open, transparent, and easily accessible.
- Faculty should have equitable support of their teaching and professional development. This committee highly recommends for ULM to consider providing different and specific avenues for employee advancement.
- Standardization and transparency of administrative evaluations, job titles, definitions of roles, stipends, and release time is strongly encouraged.
- The restructuring process should be communicated openly with ongoing monitoring, and it should be evaluated annually indicating to what extent the reorganization has been successful or what adjustments should be made.

III. Next Steps – Timeline and Tasks

Following the submission of this report, should President Ronald Berry and Provost & VP Mark Arrant conclude that academic reorganization is warranted, we envision a comprehensive, inclusive process that is supervised by an independent newly developed ULM office called the **Office of Continuous Development and Improvement (OCDI) or the Partnership of the Office of Assessment and Evaluation with the Office of University Planning and Analysis**. This office or partnership should solicit feedback from the campus community, hold program level meetings with faculty and staff concerning restructuring, evaluate restructuring models in higher education, make recommendations, and help facilitate the implementation of the plan in consultation with ULM administration. The OCDI/Partnership should maintain a website that will allow for public comment and review of the restructuring process and for the fielding of questions concerning the process. For an example of FAQs, see [Academic Structure Implementation \(westernsydney.edu.au\)](http://westernsydney.edu.au). The committee recommends a multi-year process that includes the following tasks, steps, and proposed timeline. Please note, there is some overlap between the phases. We suggest for the reorganization to be fully implemented by the Fall 2025.

Proposed Timeline for Inclusive Restructuring Process

Phase 1: Preparation Phase: Facilitate Faculty Conversations & Transparency March 2023 – August 2023	
Tasks	Timeline
1. Academic Structure Committee posts report to Dean’s Council and Website	March 2023
2. Collect feedback from all – AA meetings, faculty senate meetings/college meetings/website	March 2023 – April 2023

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3. Post FAQ about process	March 2023 – April 2023
4. Administration begins investigation/planning on New Office – OCDI or the Partnership duties & responsibilities	March 2023 – May 2023
5. Elicit additional input during faculty activity week - forums	August 2023
6. Elicit additional input during AA talks	Fall 2023
7. ULM Administration commit to creating a budget to fund restructuring and implementation	Summer – Fall 2023



**Phase 2: Transition Phase: Create New Office/Partnership & Data Collection:
Continuous Development & Improvement Office or Partnership: May 2023 - Nov 2023**

Tasks	Timeline
1. OCDI/Partnership collects job descriptions, titles, stipends, course releases; begin standardization Fall 2023	Summer/Aug Fall 2023
2. OCDI/Partnership collects data on re-org: forums, surveys, website	August – Oct 2023
3. OCDI/Partnership compiles data and disseminates	November 2023
4. Provost to consider creation of Administrative Fellow position (in each college and AA) for advancement opportunities and to assist with re-org; Three-year appointment in colleges; Solicit applications and conduct interviews. Positions to begin Jan 2024	Sept 2023 – Nov 2023
5. Create an Academic Re-Org Task Force for recommendations and feedback	Fall 2023
6. Administrative Fellows, OCDI/Partnership, and the Task Force participate in continuing education on academic restructure	Fall 2023



Phase 3: Proposal Phase: January 2024 – December 2024

Tasks	Timeline
1. Administrative Fellows appointed & begin work in colleges and AA	Jan 2024

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2. Administrative Fellows work with Task Force and OCDI/Partnership to develop full proposal	Jan 2024 – May 2024
3. Elicit feedback on proposal; website, forums, faculty activity week	Fall 2024
4. Modifications to proposal	November 2024
5. Post revised proposal for additional feedback	
6. Final approval of ULM Admin/BoR	December 2024
7. Annual report from OCDI/Partnership – progress, outcomes, adjustments	December 2024



Phase 4: Implementation Phase: January 2025 –August 2025	
Tasks	Timeline
1. Present Implementation Plan & Solicit Feedback – faculty activity week	January 2025
2. OCDI/Partnership, with assistance from the Administrative Fellows, and Task Force, work to begin implementation phase	January – March 2025
3. Create new job descriptions/org chart	January – May 2025
4. Approval of new titles BOR/Fall 2025 contracts	March – May 2025
5. New positions/re-org begins	Fall 2025

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Appendix A: References

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