**Delaware Will Shine Concept Papers**

**Models of the New American Research University**

**UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

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**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The Academic Organization Working Group considered ways in which UD’s academic organization both hinders and assists different campus groups (undergraduates, graduates, faculty and staff) in their work at the university. The present concept paper focuses on issues that are connected to undergraduate education. The concept paper is organized around two themes that emerged in our discussions with stakeholder groups around campus. These two themes are Interdisciplinary Research/Education and Global Involvement. We plan to address both of these themes in this document as they intersect with undergraduate education. We also have a set of undergraduate education issues that are equally important, but do not fit into these two themes. These themes are presented in the last section, “Other Themes Related to Undergraduate Education.”

Undergraduates are the largest group on campus, and their tuition dollars comprise an essential part of the university’s operating budget. Thus, Delaware Will Shine should place the appropriate organizational emphasis on undergraduate education and support undergraduate development inside and outside of the classroom.

**Background on Departments/Colleges**: One decision that UD made several years ago was to move to a Responsibility-Based Budgeting (RBB) model, where colleges control the funds related to their operation. Central funds are distributed to colleges based on an algorithm; a very large proportion of this algorithm is based on undergraduate enrollment in classes and on enrollment in undergraduate majors and minors. It is possible that this budgeting model has changed the way that UD undergraduates experience education.

**Background on Interdisciplinary Education:** A few years ago, it was the case that to achieve a BA or BS degree in two majors in different colleges (e.g., Business administration and Chemistry), students had to take an extra 30 credits for this “double degree.” In the more recent past, this requirement was lifted, making it easier for students to double-major across colleges.

UD has a “dean’s scholar” option for undergraduates who wish to design their own majors. Not many students appear to use this option and the option is not widely advertised to students.

**Background on Global Involvement:** The Path to Prominence featured a “Global Initiative”: The University of Delaware community will foster knowledge and awareness of the economic, environmental, political, cultural, and social issues that face the world—and the skills to address them. This initiative has historical roots in UD’s strong commitment to student participation in study abroad programs. Organizationally, UD has an Associate Provost for International Programs. UD also has a premier English Language Institute, which attracts students from around the world and is a model program in English language learning. (Recommendations for strengthening UD’s global initiative can be found in the New American *Global* Research University white paper in the Appendices.)

**LESSONS LEARNED**

One perception of the RBB model, garnered from conversations around campus, is that colleges become motivated to increase the number of undergraduate majors and minors who call their college home. Having more majors and minors means more money from the central budgeting pie. One possible outcome of this budgeting model is that the number of minors (and to a lesser extent, majors) has increased in the past few years—one interpretation of this is that colleges are trying to attract more dollars through adding students via minors.

In our listening tours, we heard that colleges might not be motivated to provide undergraduate majors or experiences that would require “sharing” undergraduates (credits or majors) with other colleges. Some stakeholders focused on a perceived zero-sum game in which one college’s loss is another’s gain. Additionally, stakeholders across campus described a system where undergraduate students are offered similar courses throughout different departments in order to keep tuition dollars within the departments. Examples of this include courses in statistics, math and microbiology. This practice may cause students to become confused about degree requirements, ultimately impacting their course schedule and fulfillment of their degree requirements. While courses such as statistics might be taught in ways that are discipline-specific, it also makes sense to assess the extent to which colleges are offering redundant courses simply in response to a budgeting model. Suggestions and implications of the budget model are further discussed in the concept paper on “Issues Outside of Undergraduate and Graduate Education.”

Another theme that pervaded conversations about undergraduate education at UD was the breadth of what UD students do outside of the classroom, including research, internships, volunteering and student organization involvement. It would be valuable to find a way to recognize their extracurricular involvement. The sentiment seemed to be that capturing and promoting this involvement could be central to the UD brand.

**NATIONAL and GLOBAL TRENDS**

Based on our research into AAU university structures, we found that some universities have administrators for undergraduate education. In particular, Stanford has a Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education. This implies that certain undergraduate academic services and goals are university-wide, not housed in each college. Having a vice- or associate provost for undergraduates also sends a message about the importance of this group on a campus. We heard that UD might try to promote itself as a place where undergraduates can approach a liberal arts college experience within a major research university. An office directing this undergraduate experience would add credibility to that aspiration.

In terms of interdisciplinary education, New York University has a special college, [Gallatin](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/mission.html), which enables students to design their own, self-directed major. Undergraduate students at Gallatin are required to take 32 credits in undergraduate core courses (e.g., writing, research and first year seminars), 32 credits in foundation courses and 64 credits in coursework including internships, an intellectual autobiography and plan for concentration and a senior colloquium. Our working group referred to NYU’s program several times, and to the idea of having a place where self-directed students could be flexible in designing academic programs.

Elon University, albeit a much smaller university than UD, has introduced the idea of an [independent major](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/core_curriculum/integration.xhtml), in which students bring together related courses from different disciplines, all of which fit a central problem. At Elon, students are also rewarded for outside of the classroom activities. The fullness of student lives is on display at Elon via braids or cords that are earned for extensive engagement throughout their college tenure and worn with great pride during graduation.

**STRATEGIC THEMES**

**Interdisciplinary Education:**

One critical issue identifed in stakeholder meetings was the idea that undergraduates—especially those who intend to develop or combine several academic interests—feel confused about how the university works. At the academic level, students do not always know that there are seven colleges or that if they choose to double major across colleges, they may have to take college-level requirements twice. Students who wish to design their own majors in a creative and flexible way are not encouraged to do so. Many faculty and deans may not know about the “dean’s scholar” option for students—this option is not normally advertised to students. There seems to be very little encouragement to students who want to combine subjects in their majors.

Perhaps because of the lack of encouragement or understanding, students often double-major or triple-major, combining majors and minors across campus, so that they can develop and market themselves based on their interdisciplinary interests. This approach might work for some students, but double-majors can require fulfilling a large number of college requirements. On the other hand, colleges might prefer that students double-major because, under RBB, they get more money for a double-major (if one of the majors is in their own college) than for a flexible or interdisciplinary major. However, our focus should be on the best interest of the students, not on what serves colleges under the current budget model. Many UD students strive for an individualized undergraduate education, so our academic organization should make this possible for them.

Our working group explored the idea of an “experimental” college, similar to Gallatin, which would encourage and mentor students who wish to combine academic interests that cross colleges. Such a college could also be the petri dish for experimental, interdisciplinary or new majors that don’t have a single academic home.

With an eye to flexibility, UD could consider alternative models for programs and curricula, including alternatives to the four-year/8 semester structure. Some programs might also be competency based.

Finally, our working group heard from many places that RBB impedes cross-college collaboration, and that this extends to undergraduates. UD should find a way to refine RBB so that interdisciplinary education is not impeded and colleges are not monetarily motivated to become silos.

**Global Issues:**

UD students are interested in being engaged with the world, and a very large percentage of them want to study abroad. Many are attracted to UD’s diverse opportunities to study globally. The international student population continues to grow at the University of Delaware. We heard that students from other countries are not always integrated with the domestic students.

The main undergraduate problem with global issues is one of coordinated services. Our working group explored the idea of combining the several offices that handle global education issues into one umbrella, so that they do not perform redundant tasks. These offices include C-GAS, ELI, IGS, and OISS. We have heard that these global education offices currently plan to meet once a month to reflect on their respective missions. However, a stronger, more visible organizational structure of UD’s global initiatives is required.

**Other Themes for Undergraduate Education:**

*Student Engagement/Advising*. Across campus, student life (including residence life and housing, student centers, career services, assistant dean’s offices, etc.) works with students in very different ways from faculty. Through many of these offices, students are encouraged to enrich their university experience with involvement in on-campus and off-campus opportunities by becoming student leaders, joining student organizations, participating in internships and conducting peer mentoring. Faculty are not incentivized to engage with undergraduates in these ways or to support the offices that are spearheading these efforts with students, and are generally not recognized for doing so. Further, faculty may not be incentivized to work with students who need intensive advising or wish to create their own majors. As a result, faculty members are not normally familiar with where students need to go to take advantage of these resources. Students in need sometimes feel like beach balls that are bounced around campus for different services—across different colleges and different areas.

Faculty advising is promoted by administrators, who talk about it at admissions events, claiming that “Every student has as faculty member advisor in their major.” But the quality of faculty advising is extremely variable. Some faculty members know the curriculum well and can advise students to a variety of majors; other faculty members are not familiar with the curriculum requirements or procedures at all. UD’s curriculum is complex, and it takes regular exposure to curriculum questions to keep current on the offices, rules, and updates. And yet students ask their faculty advisors many detailed questions, such as “Which Math course do I take?,” “For what foreign language course should I register?” and “Can I take this course pass-fail?” Faculty are not always equipped to answer these questions accurately, and do not know to whom they should refer students. Many universities of our size (e.g., The Ohio State University, University of Colorado Boulder) hire professional advisors that reside in departments. These full-time advisors provide high-quality, responsive advising for students. Several times on our listening tours we heard that UD might benefit from developing advising staff positions.

*Engaged Learning.* UD requires a single “DLE” course, which students often approach as a check-off requirement. Elon’s curriculum might provide a model of how DLE courses would be more intentionally integrated into undergraduate programs. However, it will take faculty involvement and engagement, as well as strategic coordination with internal and external stakeholders, to make discovery learning more meaningful. As previously noted, structures do not currently incentivize faculty for such involvement.

*Curriculum Barriers in STEM, and Underrepresented Students*. In some cases, introductory courses are gatekeeper courses. When students struggle in these courses, progress in their major is impeded. This might be especially true for underrepresented students. Support for underrepresented students is present (through NUCLEUS, RISE, McNair, the Center for Black Culture). The leaders of these programs work to communicate their services to both faculty and students, and provide excellent mentorship. However, this support could be more structurally supported and coordinated. In other words, all players should be brought to the table to ensure underrepresented students are aware of services that can contribute to their success at the University of Delaware. This might be accomplished by working with senior administrators, more specifically, the Vice Provost for Diversity or the proposed Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. The importance of this issue was addressed this fall in Richard Tapia’s discussion of the “Diversity Crisis in Higher Education” and the conversation should not stop there. Colleagues from many of the programs mentioned above can provide specific examples of diverse students feeling and being discouraged from pursuing degrees in STEM. As stated by Mr. Tapia, lack of preparation of underrepresented students does not mean a lack of talent.

*Diversity.* For so long, and rightfully so, diversity has been a conversation point on-campus. An evaluation and coordination of our current resources for diverse students needs to be conducted. These resources should be involved in coordinated efforts to expand and nurture the University of Delaware’s current diversity initiatives including the attraction and retention of a diverse student body. In order for this to happen and be effective, resources need to be appropriately allocated to these initiatives, and one party should bring all university players to the table on a regular basis to discuss these initiatives, make recommendations for inclusion in curriculum, and inform the university community.

*The Associate in Arts (AA) Program. The AA program* was an important topic raised by many in the stakeholder conversations. UD’s AA program admits and educates Delaware residents who choose a more affordable first step into higher education, or who might need to improve academically prior to admission. AA graduates may transfer to the main campus after 2 years. UD’s AA program is unique among universities we have researched. It has numerous success stories, and houses dedicated faculty. However, our working group heard about several important issues with the AA campus. One is that the AA program may not enable the students to graduate with a BA or BS with only 2 additional years of education, especially if they wish to major in the sciences. Our working group heard suggestions that the AA program might expand its scope to include more science core classes.

We also heard that the AA program shares classroom space with Delaware Technical Community College. Because UD’s AA program does not have its own classroom space, there is tension with DTCC. The AA program has some space in lower Delaware, but UD does not seem to have a strong presence, overall, in lower Delaware. Additionally, AA students do not have a strong sense of UD identity—they may not be well integrated with the UD main campus; this could improve. Some of the stakeholder groups said something like, “invest more in the AA program, or get rid of it.” The AA program might need a larger investment—perhaps expanding its ability to prepare students for sciences—in order to meet its mission.

Our working group suggested that it might need to offer an “AS” program in addition to the AA program. The program may need to establish its own classroom space separate from DTCC, perhaps in Lewes or Newark. Additional details about information we gathered during listening tours and relevant suggestions are laid out in the “Beyond Newark” section of the concept paper on “Issues Outside of Undergraduate and Graduate Education.”

*Online Education*. UD does not currently have a well-developed online learning program for undergraduates. Some faculty in our stakeholder meetings expressed suspicion and dismay about the fact that the administration seems to be moving ahead with plans for online learning programs. Other faculty members strongly support online learning and are excited by it. Our working group heard that faculty must be engaged in the decision-making process related to online education.

**SHORT-TERM TASKS**

One short-term option might be to change RBB algorithms to foster and encourage faculty and school/college collaboration, eliminating the perceived need to duplicate courses and streamlining the undergraduate student experience. While many students might not be aware of the university’s budgeting model, they are certainly impacted by it in advising sessions and in completing course requirements, which might negatively impact UD’s overall, strong, 4-year graduation rates (2012’s 4-year graduation rate was 68% whereas 2013’s 4-year graduation rate was 65.3%). Changing the budgeting algorithm might also foster additional collaborative efforts between departments, enabling students (and faculty) to work with greater ease between departments and encouraging interdisciplinary study.

Another short-term suggestion might be to incentivize faculty in advising and encourage faculty engagement with departments and services that foster and provide UD students with rich co-curricular experiences (e.g., student leadership and internships). Additionally, it makes sense to train faculty who advise students, and then reward them for engaging in advising activities. Incentivizing faculty can be particularly important when faculty face competing research and additional promotion and tenure pressures.

Addressing curriculum barriers and supporting underrepresented students requires long-term tasks and funding, but a few short-term remedies might help while planning for the future. Some of these remedies might include a committee of individuals who serve underrepresented students meeting to discuss cases and students to ensure they receive the appropriate resources for success, and to ensure that students follow through on mentorship. Such a committee might be tasked with supporting underrepresented students in traditional “gatekeeping courses” through faculty mentorship, similar to the model at Rice’s Richard Tapia Center for Excellence & Equity.

**LONG-TERM TASKS**

In the long-term, the University of Delaware might benefit from forming a new, interdisciplinary college that encourages student entrepreneurial learning and collaboration among various faculty members and departments. NYU appears to have a strong example of this in Gallatin. In addition to the services afforded by this administrative commitment to undergraduate students, it will also enhance collaboration between departments and faculty, furthering interdisciplinary research efforts.

A number of the issues raised in this document point to the need for more coordination among offices that do similar work (such as international programs and student support). UD might consider converting one of the current provost lines to a Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. This office could foster coordination as well as promote interdisciplinary programming for undergraduates. Importantly, our listening tours revealed that most faculty are alarmed at the perceived increase in the number of high paid administrators, so we do not recommend adding one more administrator. Instead, we propose renaming or redefining one of the current positions.

Concurrently, changes might need to be addressed to encourage faculty advising and stewardship. These processes might also account for faculty mentoring of underrepresented students who are trying to complete “gatekeeper courses.” These changes could also advance engaged learning among UD students with faculty placing emphasis on the need to get and stay involved on- and off-campus. As mentioned above, another model, used at a number of universities, is to invest in professional advising staff and to limit the number of faculty who are responsible for advising students. The quality of advising is likely to become more standardized with professional advisors.

Also, in the long-term, it makes sense to develop the strengths of the Associate in Arts program. More specifically, the needs of students who are interested in the sciences and completing a 4-year degree should be considered in the AA program. An Associate in Science program could provide students with a strong foundation and transition into the many science programs offered at UD. This might also go a long way in furthering diversity efforts in the sciences, as the AA program brings with it a diverse group of students. The university should also address needs for campus space in the AA program, to help build its identity and effectiveness.

Last, online education should be addressed and a streamlined point-of-contact should be established. This might look similar to models existing at other universities including Iowa State University where there is a central Associate Director of Distance Learning who coordinates with designated contacts in colleges/universities to enhance online offerings. Indiana University has a director and two professional staff in a Center for Distance Learning. The Center for Distance Learning has an advisory board comprised of faculty members. Faculty new to online teaching may also participate in a faculty peer mentor program. A centralized system with the ability to collaborate between colleges might be most beneficial. One thought is that UD’s Center for Teaching and Learning could be expanded to include online mentorship and training.