

# **NEW HORIZONS INITIATIVE**

## **A Report from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Budget Advisory Group**

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## INTRODUCTION

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the “university’s college.” Being a top-ranked university requires a solid, comprehensive, and healthy college of liberal arts and sciences. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the type of university all of us want to have, e.g., an AAU, Carnegie Research Extensive University, without the range, depth, and quality of instruction and research that is found in this college.

At present the twenty-two academic departments and one professional school in our college teach courses leading to forty undergraduate majors and forty-seven minors. Faculty in our college not only teach essential skills, but also take the lead in teaching about some of the most sophisticated topics imaginable (bioinformatics and biostatistics, plant genomics, miniaturized analytical instrumentation, bioethics, and more).

The college is also home to a number of internationally renowned graduate programs. Analytical chemistry, counseling psychology, statistics, condensed matter physics, the history of technology and science, and our rhetoric and professional communication major in English are just a few of the outstanding graduate programs in our college that provide educational experiences that are nationally recognized. As the university positions itself for NRC and AAU appraisals in the coming years, the excellence of our departments and programs will be essential in determining the overall ranking of the university.

The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences continues to have some of the most exciting research programs on the campus. In the last year for which we have complete data, LAS faculty and staff attracted \$67 million (FY04) in extra-mural funding<sup>1</sup>. This is up from the \$51 million that was reported three years before. In FY04, the college moved from second to first place in the number of indirect dollars that came to the university as a result of research programs. As

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<sup>1</sup> This figure does not include the \$10,849,100 in funding that came from the Ames Lab during that year.

important as the returns on indirect dollars are, what is even more important and exciting is the variety and range of research that takes place in LAS.

In very broad strokes, we are doing exactly what we should be doing. However, although we are performing with excellence in the eyes of many, we have reached a point where we can no longer afford to continue doing things as they have been done in the past.

## **CHALLENGES**

Like many state universities, Iowa State University has gone through some severe budgetary challenges in recent years<sup>2</sup>. In November 2003, in response to the seventh budget cut in four years and in reaction to the continuing budget problems facing the university, a Budget Advisory Group (BAG) was commissioned by the dean to assist the college in developing a coherent strategy for addressing precipitously declining finances. This group consisted of two department chairs from each of the three divisions within the college (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematical and Natural Sciences), divisional representatives from the college's Representative Assembly, and members of the dean's staff.

In discussions with department chairs, it was very clear that virtually no budget flexibility existed at the departmental levels and that departments over the years understandably were handling their reductions by taking the only possible route—cannibalizing open lines. This approach is having negative effects on all groups. It simply is not a good way to plan. As a college, we are trying to do too many things with not enough resources. We need to bring resources and goals into alignment.

In preparing last year's budget reduction plan, the BAG spent many hours reviewing Student Credit Hours, Full-Time Faculty Equivalents, research excellence (and external dollars brought into the university), and mission objectives of departments and programs. There was consensus that the college must enhance programs and departments of excellence and those central to the missions of the college and the university.

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<sup>2</sup> ***During fiscal years 02-04 the LAS College had a total budget reduction of almost \$6 million*** – much of which came from discretionary dollars. Given the unavoidable cost increases over a number of years, the magnitude of the cut is further compounded. Over 20% of this amount was absorbed by LAS.

All of us recognize the challenge brought about by shrinking faculty and staff numbers, dwindling state monies, decreasing enrollments, and rising tuition. We are aware that we cannot continue without change. With the immediate budget decisions for FY05 completed, the BAG has evolved into a long-term advisory committee that is addressing the second part of its charge. It is now engaged in planning a redesign of the College for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, taking into account the broad issues of student learning, discovery, and engagement consistent with the land-grant mission of ISU. Although the BAG has been charged with coming up with innovative suggestions for addressing these changing times, we invite thorough discussion from the faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Reallocation. As we look at our budget situation for the next couple of years, we know that recovery from recent reductions will come about only through some hard work, communal vision, and persistent reallocation of available resources. Reallocation is not a new concept at this university. For years the Board of Regents has required that anywhere from one to two percent of the institution's resources be reallocated on a yearly basis. When budgets were relatively more robust, this was not a huge or insurmountable problem. Although reallocation occurred regularly and in a transparent fashion, its effects were invisible to many. The results of the budget cuts last year were counted as reallocation for that period; but combined with the previous history of budget reductions, cutting the budget again was an excruciatingly painful process.

Target. This year, however, even without the mandated call for reallocation in the recent Board of Regents proposal, we must move resources to fulfill our objectives of becoming more focused in our emphases and more efficient in what we do. For the next several years, we need to set our target for reallocation within the college at **two percent per year**. With an annual budget of approximately \$66 million, that amount would be approximately \$1.33 million per annum.

Our recovery plan has these objectives:

- enhance excellence by maintaining and leveraging the strengths of the College
- meet pressing teaching needs central to the mission of the College
- overcome weaknesses in several critical areas
- fund essential needs, such as faculty retention, partner accommodations, and faculty diversity.

Our recovery plan will follow these steps.

*Step One: Faculty Lines.* Because much of our budget is in salary lines, the only possible way the college can reallocate resources is through capturing open faculty lines (primarily through retirement or resignation) and then reallocating them. This is the method routinely used by several other colleges. Because of student enrollment demands, we have not been rigorous in reclaiming lines: we have generally returned lines – at an entry-level rate – to departments.

Over the past five years roughly 34 faculty members have left the college each year. Each departure generates approximately \$60,000 in salary return (or \$2.04 million/year).

To provide the college with the necessary budgetary flexibility, we propose these reallocation practices.

- a. *LAS will pull in all tenure-track faculty lines that become open through resignation or retirement in FY06 and in subsequent fiscal years.<sup>3</sup> (Please note that open positions resulting through negative tenure decisions will remain with departments so that they are not punished for having high standards. Lecturer positions will be handled somewhat differently, as described in Point e below. The process for returning or reallocating tenure-track faculty lines is described in Points b, c, and d below, and summarized in Table 1.)*
- b. *Ten of the openings would be reallocated to departments on a competitive basis to build on established excellence in scholarship, maintain and expand critical and strong programs, and the like. In all cases, departments will be expected to have well developed and focused plans for how the requested faculty lines would enhance excellence.*
- c. *Ten lines would be retained in the Dean's office to supplement depleted funds and to establish a funding source for many critically needed programs, such as faculty retention, faculty diversity, partner accommodations, and other special initiatives. Please note that most of these funds would be returned to departments.*
- d. *The remaining lines will be returned whenever possible to the department where the opening occurred, if the department provides compelling justification and rationale based primarily on the centrality of the department's teaching mission and needs.*

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<sup>3</sup> The date at which a position is "open" is not when the papers are signed, but rather when the position is vacated.

e. *Lecturer lines would be handled differently, depending on the source of funding. A lecturer line funded through a temporary teaching contract with the college, would remain with the department and be used for the purposes stipulated by the teaching contract until the renegotiation or expiration of the contract. A lecturer line funded by department supplemental lines would remain with the department until such time when the person in the position leaves. At that time the line would revert to the college. Those funds would then be returned/reallocated through the same procedures as those just described for tenure-track faculty.*

<i>TABLE 1: An Example with 34 Open Lines</i>	
34 lines anticipated to be open	\$2.04M
10 lines reallocated to departments to build or strengthen excellence	\$617K
10 lines reallocated to LAS for critical needs at the departmental level	\$617K
14 lines returned to departments to address pressing teaching needs	\$864K

*Step Two: Faculty Assignments.* Responding to these changing times will require innovative and serious thinking by all of us. Because we are at a critical moment in the history of the college, occasioned by our financial circumstances, this is also a time when we should be asking more profound questions about what we are doing and where we should be going.

We must look at faculty teaching assignments and the curriculum for efficiency. All faculty are expected to be fully engaged in a combination of teaching, research/creative activity, service and outreach. Not surprisingly, in a college as diverse as LAS, standard teaching assignments vary substantially across disciplines. Although all departments have some provision for differential teaching assignments for junior faculty and for faculty in administrative roles, standard differential teaching assignments are common only in the natural, mathematical, and social sciences. Generally speaking, departments with differential teaching loads make a meaningful distinction between the minimum and maximum. Most departments allow research substitutions for teaching courses, provided there is adequate support from contracts and grants. **We strongly endorse the concept of differential work loads in departments.**

Implementation of differential work loads would necessarily vary in the details across the disciplines and departments.

*Step Three: Curricular Reform.* In an effort to maximize efficiencies and strengthen programs, we need to review all existing majors and their requirements. Faculty will be asked to recommend how majors might be merged with other existing, related majors; which majors should be discontinued; how the requirements or specializations within majors can be revised; and which prerequisites need to be modified.

Our college plan to review all existing undergraduate majors – the numbers and types – has as its goal a substantial reduction in offerings, be they majors, minors, specializations, courses, or rigid requirements. For example, how often is a program with very few majors holding a department hostage because low enrollment courses must be taught in order to ensure the viability of the major? Low enrollment undergraduate courses, including courses limited by external accreditation are costly. There must be compelling reasons to maintain each major we currently offer. **We will ask each department to provide the College with a statement on curricular changes by March 15, 2005. This statement must include a department plan on curricular cuts and a projection on the realization of resource savings.** We will provide the departments with guidelines for this report.

As we review our majors, we must also consider the value of interdisciplinary programs of study. Should we create a certain number of interdisciplinary majors that build on a core but then branch out to various disciplines? For example, would an interdisciplinary degree in “cultural studies” (comprised of courses from anthropology, sociology, history, English, and religious studies) be of value to an undergraduate student? Would such a degree program adequately prepare a student for graduate school? Would it suffice for going into the workplace? If so, how can we design such a major? Should it replace other majors? What needs to change?

*Step Four: Reconfiguration.* We must also look at the existing academic structure of our college. Could we achieve more focus and efficiency by looking at different types of administrative arrangements? Periodically, but with some regularity, the college office receives inquiries about whether there should be some reorganization of departments around disciplinary scholarship and research. An example of the reorganization we have in mind is the recent realignment of faculty, research areas, and resources in the biological/life sciences.

Do we have the correct configuration of units and departments? To initiate discussion, consider the following possibilities:

- A realignment of faculty expertise and relevant courses along disciplinary lines could bring about better focus and a more coherent core course distribution. For example, a **Department of Rhetoric & Professional Communications** that brings together faculty strength and the pertinent undergraduate and graduate courses in RPC, communication studies, technical communication, and speech communication could spotlight the national excellence of these programs and provide a strong base for collaboration and team-teaching.
- The **Department of English** could be reorganized to focus on literature, classical studies, creative writing, and English education.
- A Department of **Modern Languages and Linguistics** that includes language courses, the languages in the professions program, linguistics, TESOL, and applied linguistics could bring greater visibility and independence to this area of the humanities.
- The nature of programs in the current **Music Department** might be better understood and highlighted if it were to be renamed the **Department of Music and Theatre**.
- A **Center for American Intercultural Studies**, designed to explore the comparative multidisciplinary experiences and histories of Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, and US Latino/as, would incorporate the existing disparate ethnic studies entities into a single degree-offering center. It would be the focal point for serious scholarly inquiry in a variety of areas related to the development and understanding of the American cultural mosaic.
- Rethinking the boundaries of our current Department of Anthropology, could we incorporate some faculty from Religious Studies and those teaching cultural studies in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures to create a new **Department of Anthropology and Global Cultures**? This configuration would allow for research collaboration and course development along natural and ever-more important interdisciplinary lines.

Such examples should stimulate discussion. Are there other ways to strengthen our departments and programs? How can we best emphasize our disciplinary strengths, make our faculty research more visible nationally, and simultaneously achieve fiscal efficiency? Is it possible during the reorganization to have at least one graduate program in each department?

As part of the reconfiguration process, we must also look at the role of staff. There is no question that budget cuts in recent years have resulted in the downsizing of support staff across the college. The widespread use of computers by faculty has lessened the impact of having fewer clerical workers in some areas. Whether it is due to the necessity of having more individuals trained in various areas of instructional technology or to the requirements of having qualified support staff in fiscal areas and human resources, many units are woefully understaffed. **We will explore the possibility of split positions or shared jobs where possible. We ask departments to think creatively about ways this can be accomplished.**

Step Five: First-Year Experience. In addition to looking at the numbers of majors that we offer (with accompanying costs) and a reconfiguration of some of our programs, we will also examine strategies for improving LAS students' first-year experience. For example, can we build on the success of Learning Communities by offering a series of modules in which students are given the opportunity to select from clusters of three courses that look at interrelated over-arching themes? Such a system may not immediately save resources, but it may prove more effective in the use of time and staff, and it may produce a more pedagogically sound transition year. Another proposal is to frame the typical first-year experience of introductory courses – small class, online course, and large lecture – with a pre-class seminar/workshop (scheduled before classes begin, along the lines of “Destination Iowa State”) that will stimulate students intellectually.

We have met with individuals from various departments that probably teach anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of all students during their first year at ISU. Our goal is to design a high-quality foundations year that will integrate orientation and academics -- a first-year experience that can be identified as both common and unique, a first-year to inspire continued intellectual development. Some of the proposed changes will involve administrative coordination of course planning, staffing, and delivery; other changes will involve redefining the academic experience of first-year students. Throughout this planning period, we will examine proposals that include provocative and intriguing issues. Ultimately we will make decisions that will redefine and reorganize the college.

Outcomes: New Horizons Initiative. We see the possible outcomes of these initiatives as multiple and exciting. They might include broader, more flexible learning experiences for

students; more clearly defined uses for faculty talent and expertise; greater opportunities for faculty to teach interdisciplinary courses; and increased collaboration in research by faculty. Ultimately (but not immediately), we expect that significant resources will be shared and redistributed on the basis of shared faculty, shared courses, and shared majors. Resource allocation should not necessarily be driven by large numbers of multiple and rigid program requirements. Changes will require vision and ingenuity. We must realize that we cannot do everything that we thought we once could do. Our curricular focus must be tight. We may not be able to afford small programs that require dedicated resources. In addition to being motivated by financial considerations, we are using this time to think about future needs. There will be great ideas that do not necessarily save money, but will make good programmatic or pedagogical sense. We recognize that many pieces of this initiative will not be easy to implement. All of us will need to think imaginatively and not be constrained by old ideas mired between disciplinary boundaries and academic specialties. We call this initiative “New Horizons.”