

University of Colorado Boulder

Leeds School of Business Response to Academic Futures Document



This document was prepared by a sub-committee of Full Professors within the Leeds School and represents the collective views of the School. It is based on the following input: two meetings of the Leeds School Division Chairs; meeting with the Dean's Cabinet of the Leeds; all faculty and staff Town Hall meeting; written comments from some faculty/staff; and one on one conversations with those authoring the report.

We strongly support the continued efforts of the University to adapt to changing student and societal needs to provide the best public university possible, and appreciate the Academic Futures initiative as a pathway towards this. We support the stated goals of continuing to work to enhance understanding and funding for the University of Colorado Boulder as a public university. We heartily endorse the philosophy of faculty governance and propose that many of the overarching Academic Futures goals are likely to be best met by maintaining faculty governance and independence of colleges and schools. We look forward to working across all schools, colleges, and units to collectively engage in collaborative, individual unit-level efforts to promote these goals in the best interests of student success.

The Academic Futures document identifies five projects to drive our university forward:

- A common student-centered approach to learning
- Interdisciplinary teaching, research, and creative work
- Internationalizing the campus
- Teaching and technology, online and distance education
- Sustaining, supporting, and inspiring our community

For all five projects, we agree with all or most of the overall goals stated. We do, however, have concerns about the “hows” advocated as next steps in a number of instances. Specifically, we have two high level concerns. First, the advocated actions appear to be arts and sciences centric. The Leeds School is first mentioned on p. 69 of the document, and we have been working on our own initiatives related to the five projects for about the last five years. This report includes calls for centralization that we read as supplanting our own initiatives to achieve similar goals. We ask that the School of Business be acknowledged as an integral part of the University and that our efforts are integrated into future directions created in light of Academic Futures. We are also happy to share our learning with other units on campus as desired and look forward to learning from others as well.

Second, we agree that the University is not a for-profit business, but we believe that we must be aware of the costs and benefits of our endeavors and balance all activities in terms of their effects on the core teaching and research missions of the University. We believe that spending priorities put forth in the Academic Futures report skirt consideration of financial and opportunity costs. Paying for all the programs advocated would, we believe, have negative effects on achieving more central goals of the University. We must be continuously aware of our accountability to our students, their parents, and the citizens of Colorado.

Next, we comment on each of the five projects in the Academic Futures document, including information on activities Leeds is currently engaged in associated with each.

1. A Common Student-Centered Approach to Learning

For the past five-plus years, Leeds has been actively working to re-design our curriculum and our co-curricular environment in the best interests of student learning. We call it the “whole student” approach. Leeds has partnered with A&S in terms of requiring business students to take the A&S core. Including the core requirements, business students take 57 credits of non-business (mostly A&S) courses and 63 Leeds credits. We have a highly structured experience aimed to increase student four-year graduation and increase a sense of belonging for students in each class cohort. We re-designed the freshmen and sophomore core curriculum to meet goals of: a common, rigorous student-centered learning experience; critical thinking; smaller classes; more active engagement learning; a common knowledge base to build on in upper division courses; a signature applied and integrated, cross-disciplinary educational experience; whole student development; and helping students keep on track to four-year graduation. While we are now working on further, continuous improvement, we feel that our current (2013 cohort)

63% four-year graduation rate and 90-plus% annual post-graduation positive placement indicate that we are on the right track to supporting student success.

Project 1 proposes a goal of “coordinated and collective efforts in undergraduate teaching and learning, including a common learning experience, a teaching and learning center and a unified approach to advising.” We suggest that the goal of being a student-centric university may be more likely to be achieved by providing experiences to smaller groups of freshmen at the unit level that are more tailored to students’ own learning and career goals rather than by providing a uniform experience for all freshman. We suggest that a better experience can be provided to 600 freshmen students than to 6000. We encourage further consideration of approaches that are coordinated, but that function at the unit level.

We are unsure of what is meant by the concrete first step of “a campus-wide common curriculum.” Currently, there are two components of curriculum for the majority of undergraduate majors: “in major” and “out of major.” We have carefully structured the “in major” courses to meet the goals of a common core of knowledge about business and the economy, while enabling in-depth learning about a specific area and helping to develop the whole student. When considering the proposal for a common core, it is unclear what this is intended to replace.

Perhaps the proposal is to replace the current “pick a class from each of these lists” approach of the old Core Curriculum or the new General Education requirements with a narrowed choice of clusters common elements. We could support the narrowing of how our students use their 57 non-business credits if it contributes to our business students’ development and progress. Nationally, only 36% of enrolled freshmen at flagship state universities graduate within four years, adding an estimated \$68K per student in cost of attendance and lost wages. The “Four Year Myth” report advocates: informed choice and “meta-majors”, math aligned to majors, academic maps, default pathways, structuring of critical path courses, and intrusive academic advising. Poor advising and excessive degree requirements with poor structure leads to delays and wandering through the course catalog.¹ Some form of a common core could be consistent with offering “default pathways” for students who choose a “meta-major.” If that is what is being proposed, we would like to drive the conversation about which courses are most useful background for the study of business. The ideal arts and sciences preparation for a business school student differs from what will best prepare a student to study engineering, English, or anthropology. If a campus-wide common curriculum would be *in addition* to the current core requirements, that is problematic. We discourage *adding* additional core requirements that would decrease the ability for students to achieve their major requirements for on-time graduation and/or decrease the ability of students to include minors or second majors.

We are not clear why funding this from the provost’s office will be beneficial in meeting the goals and recommend we avoid creating bureaucracy that diverts funds from the teaching mission itself.

We ask that any developed common curriculum is sensitive to the needs of different units and comes back to all of the faculty for approval. Any curriculum changes should not be an effort to fill classrooms in areas with declining enrollments, but should be driven by how to best contribute to student success.

We heartily endorse the idea of providing deep experiential learning. We are less clear as to the benefit of a “collective, campus-wide effort.” We suggest that an experiential component could be most powerful in terms of creating student community and purpose if created and conducted at the unit level. Again, it is difficult for students to create community with 6000 students; “chunking” the freshman class into unit communities will help them to forge bonds both with each other and to feel more connected with the

¹ The Four-Year Myth: Make college more affordable, restore the promise of graduating on time.
<https://completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/4-Year-Myth.pdf>

larger University community. Smaller initiatives, such as localized research experiences, provide more scope for student agency and engagement.

Similarly, we are in complete agreement that all students deserve advising excellence and should be supported throughout their academic careers. We propose, however, that advising can be more impactful for students at a local rather than centralized level. As an illustration, we have worked hard on our advising and our four-year graduation rate has improved in response to our providing highly structured academic maps with default schedules. The curricular needs, internships needs, development, career-readiness, and relevant paths and potential employment and employers are different for music students, engineering students, liberal arts students, education students, business students, law students, etc. Individualized needs of the students can be much better met by dedicated advisors who are working in partnership with the students' majors to provide major-specific advising.

2. Interdisciplinary Teaching, Research, and Creative Work

Project 2 proposes that we “affirm interdisciplinarity as a key value in our teaching, research and creative work.” We would like to have greater discussion and understanding of the goal of interdisciplinarity. Business schools have strong interdisciplinarity across business disciplines, and with many of the social sciences, law, and other related units. At Leeds, we regularly engage in interdisciplinary teaching, often across courses rather than within a specific course. For example, our sophomores first take core classes in each of the business disciplines. They then take a required cross-functional course that is intended to be highly experiential and is taught by an interdisciplinary team. Their required junior and senior courses in their areas of concentration typically draw on cross disciplinary concepts from the social sciences. In addition, we are already working with other units such as A&S, engineering, CMCI, and Music. We have further plans to increase our collaborations with the Engineering school as we join our two buildings. Accordingly, it is not clear what the broad problem is that needs to be addressed. We do not believe that we should be prioritizing interdisciplinary work at the cost of disciplinary work and we doubt the added value of creating new, high-level administrative roles (Vice Chancellor for Interdisciplinary Teaching, Research and Creative Work; Dean of Interdisciplinary Faculty; Vice Provost, and Associate Vice Chancellor for Education). We propose that we work to find ways of meeting the goals laid out in Academic Futures that do not require the creation of multiple, high-level centralized administrative positions.

We do not favor the specific recommendation of granting tenured and tenure-track faculty control over every fourth course that they teach. The proposed policy to grant faculty control of every fourth course would limit the ability of units to provide needed courses for students to progress through their majors. This would also have possible unintended consequences in terms of accreditation. For example, for our accreditation, Leeds is required to have 40% percent TTT faculty teaching business courses; encouraging TTT faculty to teach every fourth course outside could significantly impact this. (Note that the language of “or any other endeavor they wish to join” p. 11 seems overly broad and permissive).

3. Internationalizing the Campus

Project 3 proposes internationalizing the campus. We are in complete agreement with further developing the University of Colorado Boulder for a world of increasing globalization and connection. In addition to providing “essential support for our international students,” more and better support for international faculty is also useful. We have developed our own efforts such as our Freshman Global Experience courses where groups of 20 students visit other countries and learn about business and our global internships for upper division students. This model may be helpful to other units considering greater globalization.

4. Teaching and Technology

Project 4 proposes that we work to provide teaching excellence, independent of modality. We support excellence in all teaching and are working hard on building out our distance capabilities. We support the recommended approach that technology advancement should remain with the units rather than being centralized. Unit-level efforts, with University support and collaborative discussions and best practice sharing across units, is an effective approach to promote innovation in this area. While we are unclear of the need for two new high-level administration positions to support this effort, we agree that centralized support and training on new modalities for faculty will be an efficient and useful addition.

5. Sustaining, Supporting, and Inspiring Our Community

Project 5 proposes emphasizing “sustaining, supporting and inspiring our community.” We agree that the people are the lifeblood of any great university campus and that the University needs to find ways to provide needed support for the entire community. However, as noted in our opening remarks, some of these proposals sound like centralizing student support activities where we already have successful models. We hope for a more federated model. Second, some of the proposed expenditures represent an expensive wish list (e.g., housing, childcare, a University club, improvement in benefits). We do not agree that these proposed expenses are the highest and best uses of our scarce dollars at this time and encourage additional work to prioritize activities that are most important in pursuing the core mission of our University.

Concluding remarks

We propose that we celebrate the breadth of the knowledge bases of the University. We question what benefits might follow from positioning the undergraduate program as “liberal arts.” It is not clear why this would cause a student to choose CU over another top university, or that this best leverages the areas of excellence at our university. We note that over 900 of the freshmen who ultimately choose CU wind up in liberal arts because they are hoping to get into one of the professional schools but could not gain admission as freshmen. It is notable that Leeds gets over 300 IUTs from A&S each year. This University has developed many areas of excellence, including the natural, social, and applied sciences; we have strong schools of business, law, engineering, media, communication and information, education and more. We propose that the goal of “fostering creative, critical, and independent thought” can be achieved in many different disciplines. We urge further consideration for how best to meet the goal. For example, study of the physical and social sciences and the scientific method could help foster creative, critical and independent thought. Learning about different types of economies and the inter-relationships of the rule of law, markets, and society likewise can help achieve these student-centered and societal goals.

The Academic Futures document specifies a goal that students graduate “debt-free.” We support the notion of controlling the costs of tuition and maintaining accessibility, but believe that decisions on the best way to finance investment in higher education are for individual students and their families to make. To aid students with their decisions, we propose that each major is required to provide the following information: four-year graduation rate; three-month and six-month post-graduation placement rates; and mean/median starting salary data. This information is crucial to student ability to repay any debt and to understand the future paths associated with specific majors. This enables students and their families to make informed choices about levels of debt they may or may not wish to take on. Making this information easily available would be a useful, student-centered service the University can provide.

We note a general lack of discussion of the role of graduate students. Graduate students, both Masters and Ph.D., play a crucial role in the vitality of the University of Colorado Boulder as an R1 university. We see a growing societal need for continued knowledge and credentials that can be provided by Masters

programs; developing such programs is an important public service. We consider PhD students to be our students, research partners, and instructors for our undergraduate students; they are an invaluable part of the University community. We encourage Academic Futures to further consider the roles of these students and programs.

While we understand and appreciate the inclusive process used to develop this document, we recommend a follow-on process to identify the extent of overall buy-in for specific elements of this document. That is, we believe that the process enabled broad input. However, the nature of committees is that there is a distillation process that may result in some recommendations that have more limited rather than broad support. Before moving forward, it will be important to identify the elements with greatest support.

Finally, we recommend an approach to implementing the broad ideals in this document that encourages entrepreneurial and innovative solutions, rather than one that is bureaucratic and highly centralized.