Is UCR’s College Structure Optimal for Students and Faculty?
Exploring the Alternative of a College of Arts and Sciences at UCR

White Paper

November 2014

“...To both maximize administrative/resource efficiencies and to reflect future directions in broad disciplines, UCR must consider the optimal organizational structure for its schools and colleges. Concerns have been raised about the two large undergraduate colleges, CHASS and CNAS, in regard to college structure.

An alternative to dividing the two largest colleges along divisional lines would be to develop one large college of arts and sciences...following the model employed at UC Berkeley and the University of Michigan.”


I. Summary

The time is ripe to revisit UCR’s college structure for a combination of reasons, including plans to hire 300 new tenure-track faculty; a budget redesign process; a long-range planning process envisioning future enrollment, buildings and space; as well as the presence of a new senior leadership team. The question of whether to form a College of Arts and Science was explicitly raised in the strategic planning process that took place in 2010, and it has yet to be answered. Whether the ultimate decision of the campus is to reaffirm the status quo or to put forward a new college structure as a proposal for the President and UC systemwide review, in either case UCR will benefit from taking an affirmative decision about how we want to organize ourselves as we reach for new heights.

At this fall’s Chancellor’s leadership planning retreat – which included deans, vice provosts, Senate representatives, vice chancellors and other campus leaders – the advantages and disadvantages of several college organizational models were discussed and considered in relation to UCR’s current structure. The consensus was that the only two viable options were to restructure UCR to form a College of Arts and Sciences or to continue with UCR’s current structure. Since members of the UCR community are already familiar with our current structure, including its strengths and weaknesses, this white paper is focused more on the alternative option and our present structure is only referenced by way of contrast and in discussion of historical context.
II. Background
UCR’s current college structure is perhaps unique among leading North American research universities. Though UCR has added new colleges and schools over the years (e.g., engineering, medicine, public policy), our core organizational structure of colleges and schools has been relatively stable for decades. Many of the changes in our collegiate structure were pragmatic responses to the struggles faced with shrinking student enrollment and budget consolidations in the 1960s and 1970s, an era President Clark Kerr later described as one when UCR faced the “once-upon-a-time possibility of hurtling to disaster.”

It is not abundantly clear that the organizational structure forged in that crisis is ideally suited to meet the needs of UCR’s future faculty and students – and few if any campus stakeholders would describe our current college structure as something that was consciously designed to serve long-term strategic objectives. Dissatisfaction with the status quo has been demonstrated in recent years by the proposal by faculty in the physical and mathematical sciences to split-off from CNAS and by the related project within CNAS to review the design of the college.

In contrast to the woes we encountered in the very distant past, today UCR is a truly remarkable university and one poised for even greater accomplishments. In this context, conversations about whether to adopt a different college structure take on a decidedly different cast, and the essential question is an affirmative one: How might we build an even better future?

III. The Rationale for a College of Arts and Sciences
A College of Arts and Sciences brings the core disciplines of a liberal education—arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences—together in a single college. Symbolically, it establishes the centrality of that core. Organizationally, it puts the general education requirements on which students across campus depend in a single unit. Academically and financially, it allows key decisions to be pushed downward from the Provost to the schools/colleges, since the basic distribution of resources between the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences does not need to be resolved by the Provost. As a result, the deans across campus become stronger. For deans outside arts and sciences, there is one place to go with concerns about general education and service courses.

A. Potential Impact on the Curriculum and Education
For students, forming a College of Arts and Sciences would put the core liberal arts education in a single college. Potential benefits include:

- Making the core liberal arts education a focal point for students.
- Ensuring that students will be much less likely to get “lost” in transitioning between majors (e.g., from STEM fields to a humanities, arts or social science major), with students being provided more seamless advising services even as they flow across majors.
- Vesting the locus of responsibility for the provision of seats that meet general education requirements in a single entity, avoiding the collective action problems—in which divided responsibility means that no one is fully responsible—that currently exist.
UCR has a relatively decentralized model for delivering the undergraduate curriculum across its colleges and schools. Decentralized models (and decentralized accountability) can dilute responsibility for delivering the undergraduate curriculum. As highlighted in the recent Graduation Rate Task Force Report, UCR has had more than its share of difficulties in recent years offering sufficient courses and the right mixture of courses to meet student demand and to support timely graduation.

While certainly not all vices (or virtues) of the current system should be attributed exclusively to college organizational structure, the question is whether our current model of undergraduate education creates to some extent built-in headwinds vis-à-vis our strategic goal of improving graduation rates and time-to-degree. The tradeoffs inherent in a decentralized educational model have been with us all along. In fact, in the early 1970s after UCR responded to crisis conditions by replacing a College of Letters and Sciences with a multiple-college model, one of the Academic Senate’s most immediate areas of concern was “insuring that the present disciplinary thrust of the college structure does not present barriers to intercollege cooperation and campuswide requirements.”

### B. Potential Impact on the Faculty and Research

The most significant impact of forming a College of Arts and Sciences would be to facilitate better, easier and more robust faculty research collaboration across departments, colleges and schools. The structures we inhabit can subtly shape and reinforce our perspectives and horizons as faculty members; a more cosmopolitan and unified structure holds promise for opening up new possibilities for disciplinary cross-pollination. Reorganization of UCR’s college structure can be (and perhaps should be) agnostic with respect to organization at the department level, which is where a great deal of faculty activity is concentrated at the University of California (e.g., Senate Bylaw 55 voting rights; the academic peer-review system).

### C. Governance and Decisionmaking

With respect to governance around budgetary decisions college structure matters a great deal. A consequence of UCR’s current decentralized structure is that it tends, *de facto*, to consolidate authority for allocation decisions in the hands of the Provost (or Chancellor). Any issue that overlaps CHASS and CNAS must be decided above the college level. An arts and sciences model, by increasing the scope of issues that can be addressed *within* colleges, shifts the locus of the decision-making process closer to departments and faculty.

### IV. Leveraging Agriculture

The creation of a College of Arts and Sciences would allow UCR to broaden the role of Agriculture. It makes sense to view Agriculture not as a set of disciplines but rather as a set of issues. For example, some faculty in Environmental Science already hold joint appointments in Public Policy. One option might be to create a cross-university Agriculture institute that, by potentially including all disciplines, would foster innovative collaborations, expand the scope for agricultural research, and set UCR apart from others. Of course, other options for Agriculture would also be on the table.
V. The Arts and Sciences Model at AAU Public Universities

A College of Arts and Sciences (or Letters and Sciences) is a common structure at many of the leading public research universities in North America (see table below). Moreover, the model would in a sense return UCR to its roots, since UCR was organized as a College of Letters and Sciences in its early days as a university, until that college was reorganized in the late-1960s.6

**Arts and Sciences Colleges at AAU Publics***

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*There are some variations within this basic model (e.g., in some cases a separate Fine Arts College)

^ Universities with a major land-grant/agriculture component.

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3 This term is more common in the social sciences, and can be defined as follows: “[A] collective action problem exists where rational individual action can lead to ... an outcome which is strictly less preferred by every individual than at least one other outcome.” MICHAEL TAYLOR, THE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION, p. 19 (Cambridge University Press, 1987).