

Gender Institute for Teaching & Advocacy

Questions for Academic Departments:

GITA faculty and staff have determined that we do not have enough information about the models to adequately determine whether the change would impact us heavily, although we do believe there will be some impact to our department/program. We begin with a recognition of a general sense of unease at how the entire process of realignment has been handled thus far. In particular, the President's Council on Academic Excellence and Student Success seems to have concluded that the majority of faculty/staff do not favor a major change to colleges, and specifically proposed that minor changes allow for departments to move colleges, leaving the rest as they are currently defined. This said, the graphic presented and questions about it seem to reflect the minority position that major realignment was desired (i.e., why ask these questions, rather than "If no realignment is desired, how else can we support your colleges/departments with recruitment and retention?"). Because we were not asked about how we work well together as a college already, our feedback about possible realignment according to the graphic is incomplete, at best. Our larger fears about how the University views where we belong are related to the fact that the Council's six proposed models reflect Council participants' feedback (some of whom reside in GITA), yet the model attached to these questions seems to have appeared from elsewhere and does not adequately define our department/program and the interdisciplinary work that we do; Model 6, which defines GITA as social justice oriented is a better fit.

1. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department – both positively and negatively – in terms of the following enrollment-related topics? Please explain.

Student recruitment will likely be impacted negatively with the redistribution of Departments as identified in the graphic. GITA and GWS collaborate with many different departments in CLAS currently, including those redefined as Humanities and Sciences. The benefit of having a more inclusive college is that Chairs get to work with one another around common issues related to recruitment and retention, which would be diminished if we were moved into poorly defined categories. Further, GWS is interdisciplinary and should not be designated as Social Science exclusively. The national association of our discipline, National Women's Studies Association, characterizes the scholarship of our field as "comparative, global, intersectional and interdisciplinary" (see <https://www.nwsa.org/about>). Within our faculty, we have three who completed their graduate studies in the humanities, one in the social sciences, and two in interdisciplinary studies.

Student retention and graduation may be negatively impacted with realignment as Departments are further siloed into "specialty areas" of focus. Currently, our Retention and Success Advisor works with many other advisors from across the school to find solutions for student retention concerns. For instance, CLAS advisors collaborated on the creation of mini-workshops to help students learn how to successfully navigate the university system. Retention and graduation may be positively impacted if we were guaranteed that the realignment would not negatively affect

our budget, which helps us offer the positions and programming that address these university-wide concerns.

2. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department – both positively and negatively – in terms of the following identity-related topics? Please explain.

Professional recognition for GWS and GITA rests largely on the fact that we, along with most other GWS programs across the nation, identify as interdisciplinary. Although we have a heavy social justice emphasis, we do not specifically identify as a Social and Behavioral Science. As such, we would be grossly miscategorized if the graphic represents how departments would be realigned. Our professional recognition, thus, would possibly be negatively impacted by the siloing of our diverse curriculum and faculty. Our department reputation/image would also be negatively impacted. GWS is diverse in its methodology and its theory. Gender and sexuality studies are reflected in Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Writing, etc. Our image right now is of diversity, so moving us to a less diverse college is hugely problematic for our image, reputation, recognition, and the production of knowledge in alignment with our discipline.

Department revenue may be negatively impacted if we are expected to fundraise for our smaller college with less buy-in from our own university and our community. The value of a liberal arts education has been argued in various contexts, while less current discourses exist on the value of isolated social science schools. At least in the liberal arts people can recognize that these are inclusive of programs that develop a variety of “hard” and “soft” skills, while the social sciences are often mischaracterized to develop “soft skills.”

Program accreditation is not of concern for us, although we are partners with the National Women’s Studies Association and the American Association of University Women. Both organizations define GWS as interdisciplinary and social justice oriented.

3. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department in terms of the following internal university topics? Please explain.

Voting representation will probably not be impacted much by realignment. However, there is confusion around what realignment may mean for how curriculum is approved through Faculty Senate curriculum committees. Will expanding colleges (and thus shrinking numbers of participants in certain committees) mean that more faculty will have more committee work?

GITA and GWS collaboration with other departments is extensive. We work on issues related to women in STEM and Philosophy fields, we work with the English department to bring guests to campus for events, and we work with many other departments on crosslisted courses. Having a diverse CLAS has been one impetus for our collaborative work; making our college smaller will likely make it more difficult to collaborate and to learn about all of the important work being accomplished by our colleagues.

4. Are there current projects or projects in the planning stages that you feel would be disrupted by an academic re-org? Please explain.

Too many changes at once can be both exhausting and challenging. Change in President, change in Dean, change in General Studies. Why are we not focusing on the things we do well so that we can continue to improve in these areas?

5. Are there specific policies or procedures that your department uses that reference or use the current school/college structure? How would they be impacted by an academic re-org?

Currently we submit our curriculum and study abroad proposals to several CLAS curriculum committees, and we sit on several of these committees. We imagine that with a re-org, we would still sit on these committees, but would possibly have less review work, as we would receive fewer proposals. This is great, in terms of having fewer committee-based responsibilities, but also problematic in that we will have fewer opportunities to learn about what is being proposed across the campus. How would we know about overlap in course content?

We also request travel funds from CLAS to attend conferences. With a re-org, we could imagine having more time to work through the process with Rebecca Dobbin, but wonder whether these funds would be evenly distributed across all colleges, especially if we are now having to pay for additional Deans and Admin.

6. Does your department currently engage in external fundraising? Do you think an academic re-org into smaller colleges (such as the 7 shown in the graphic) would impact fundraising for your department? How about for your college?

Our department does engage in fundraising for our department-based scholarships. The fundraising task is time and resource intensive and often results in a general feeling of unease at having placed so many resources into this task with such little payback. Knowing this about what it takes to fundraise at the department level, we do not feel there is sufficient evidence to suggest that having a smaller college will be any easier/better for fundraising than how our college currently exists—we still do not have the time and resources to fundraise in one college, much less in several more.

7. Using the graphic re-org as a point of discussion, how would your department feel about being in the 5-college version? In the 7-college version? Should MSU Denver continue down the path of collegiate restructuring, where do you think your department belongs? [Remember, these are being put forward as models to promote discussion. They are not finalized plans being voted on.]

These questions have largely been answered in the previous responses. Restructuring is desired by too few in the university, we do not have the financial means to restructure, and the proposed graphic was not even the most popular from those presented by Council participants. Further, restructuring colleges seems to be a result of a few departments wishing to move out of CLAS. Given this, we wonder why we do not simply create policies that would allow them to do so? Finally, the new graphic does not support MSU Denver's vision for diversity and equity—when you silo, you break important connections that have histories of movement and change.