



Department of Modern Languages · Campus Box 26 · P.O. Box 173362 · Denver, CO 80217-3362 · Phone: 303-556-2908 · www.msudenver.edu/~mdl/

FROM: Maria Akrabova *M. Akrabova*
Chair, Department of Modern Languages

TO: Dr. Vicky Golich, Provost
Dr. Arlene Sgoutas, Interim Dean, College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

RE: University Realignment – Joint Statement from the Department of Modern Languages

DATE: November 14, 2018

Abstract

The Department of Modern Languages respectfully submits this memorandum with our considerations regarding the hypothetical realignment of academic programs and departments. We appreciate the request for input on the concepts that have been put forward; we recognize that all universities are facing significant challenges now and as we look ahead to the next decade. We also recognize that, like any living organism, we have to evolve, adapt, and grow to flourish. We want to provide you with the most insightful counsel and to do so, we request:

- A problem statement of the core motivation for this conversation: is realignment necessary? Is it the only way?
- A summary of the specific challenges, as well as their perceived urgency.
- A budgetary estimation with both short-term and longer-term financing considerations, should a restructuring occur.

With the above information, we can offer an informed opinion on whether realignment is the best way to proceed or whether we can generate other solutions to efficiently and effectively resolve our challenges. Without this foundation, we cannot, in good faith, answer yes/no or “how-to” questions about the realignment of departments and programs.

Narrative

This extended overview of our considerations is driven by the desire to participate in a constructive way in the conversations related to the realignment of departments and programs.

When invited to participate in the debate on reorganization/restructuring/realignment, we have noticed that questions are formulated in a way that steers the conversation towards discussions on what kind or what scope of reorganization we would support. This is based on the presupposition that the necessity of reorganization has been accepted as a given. However, the reasoning behind the “why” of realignment has not yet been presented in a clear and concise way. We would like to re-establish the conversation exploring the core motivation: is realignment necessary? Is it the only way? If we know what the specific challenges are—as well as their perceived urgency—we could form an opinion on whether realignment is the best way to meet them or whether we can come up with another set of solutions to efficiently and effectively address these challenges.



When asked whether we support the realignment of academic programs and departments "to better level the loads and best reflect and market our mission," we would welcome a clear statement of rationale and objectives. We would also request that the debate be explicitly framed: if a decision has been made that restructuring is necessary, let it be stated. Otherwise, let us participate in a forum that explores whether restructuring is necessary, before we move to the specifics on how to best implement it.

Without clarity about what specifically we want to solve, it is difficult to form a grounded opinion on how to solve it. In addition; we don't have sufficient information to gauge the implications of a completed realignment effort: how will we curb the financial burden of a major restructuring; how is revenue going to be shared and distributed in the future; how are marketing efforts going to be managed (centralized, decentralized, combined model?); how is sponsorship money going to be allocated; will revenue from donations be proprietary to the units that receive it; how are new discipline groupings going to solve financial, visibility and academic challenges; etc.

With the above in mind, we cannot, in good faith, answer yes/no questions about supporting the realignment of departments and programs. Questions on the specifics of hypothetical structural changes are also difficult to address. Envisioning the future structure of the university, at this point, is little more than an exercise in hypothesizing. To better contribute to the discussion of the "how," we would need an answer to the "why" - as well as a cogent overview of the philosophy behind the proposed new structure(s), and the fiscal/academic/administrative organizational model that would lie at its basis.

REALIGNMENT/RESTRUCTURING/REORGANIZATION

NOTES from the Department of Modern Languages

The answers below are provided as “chair’s notes” to honor the request for detailed feedback. As a whole, the Department of Modern Languages opted for submitting a joint statement (forwarded separately), which can be summarized as:

While we would like to participate in a constructive way, our department is uncomfortable responding to questions for which we don’t have sufficient background information. We cannot make an informed decision with the amount of information currently available to us.

At the department level, we ran an internal survey where faculty were invited to share their thoughts in an open-ended format. Some of these are quoted below. The opinions summarized below were expressed at three different department meetings held between August – November, 2018.

- 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.**

After months of conversations which tend to remain circular, it is yet unclear what are the priority factors that have triggered the conversation about realignment. It looks like it's driven by concerns that have to do with (1) the size imbalance between colleges, and (2) "identity" issues with branding/visibility/fundraising for academic programs. The needs related to retention, size, visibility and funding are implied but not explicitly stated. We need a clear and detailed outline of what specific problems we are supposed to solve by reshuffling existing structures. It is unreasonable to be asked to make a decision on whether departments in CLAS and CPS be realigned without being provided enough information on the pros/cons of this decision – therefore, answering a yes/no type of question is not an option.

On the consideration of “size”: while smaller colleges create a better visual on an organizational chart, it seems unreasonable to sacrifice established colleges simply based on their size. Smaller colleges need to establish themselves, and grow – not to create an expectation that larger structures will bend and split simply to conform to size requirements.

Why does size matter? Is this a STRUCTURAL realignment (as opposed to ACADEMIC, where the groupings are based on discipline affiliations)? If so, then we need to define what is important to us as an institution—and by extension, define ourselves as an institution. Our mission to provide accessible high-quality education may stay the same, but a lot changes if we define ourselves as an institution that is ‘tuition and donation-funded, with X% public support.’ This shifts the emphasis to our fiscal model, and the internal structure will (ideally) reflect a balance of revenue-producing and non-revenue producing programs grouped in each unit. From this perspective, the whole definition of colleges may morph into something different. If we keep the traditional discipline clusters without applying a creative angle, we will likely end up with money-maker groupings that are self-sustainable, and non-revenue producing groupings (typically in the Humanities) left to die a slow death.

Who do we want to be? An institution labeled “university” but actually functioning as a conglomerate of trade schools? Who do we want our students to be? People taught narrow specializations that sell the promise of immediate placement on the job market or people with a broad view, transferable skills, and

flexibility that would allow them to adapt to the 2-3 career changes expected in their lifetime?
Whichever vision we choose, it's a good idea to be clear about it, and stick to it.

Bottom line: to use the Cover the Bases model, we are unclear on two fundamentals – what is important to us, as an institution, in this realignment effort, and why is it so important. We are asked to address the *how* and hypothesize about the *who* without having clarity on the *what* and *why*.

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.

On the consideration of “identity”: The biggest concern in any reorganization is survival. Because of reformulated groupings, departments are in danger of losing identities, and being cut – this risk is especially acute for special, “service” programs that foster social justice through diversity. In addition, in the Humanities we constantly have to justify our existence, which is detrimental to our position as academics and academic programs. Will the upcoming reorganization solve this particular challenge? It seems doubtful – and this doubt is, possibly, the brick we need to smash (to use the verbiage of one of the Inclusive Leadership tools). To understand the attitudinal resistance that may come from a good number of departments in CLAS, it's important to keep in mind that this college is the largest generator of CHP, while being consistently undermined and criticized for a variety of reasons. Most visibility issues and “messaging” challenges are easily solvable by dividing CLAS into schools – a reorganization with minimal budgetary impact, that may prove to bring the desired solutions.

To quote an opinion submitted by an MDL faculty member:

“To understand the size imbalance, I would speak with the CLAS team. Do they think they are too big to cope? I am not so much worried about this type of imbalance as the clear imbalanced way MSU-Denver is being marketed. In the seven years I have been part of this institution, I have never seen the marketing powers shining light on the humanities as part of a much-needed education. Flying planes? Yes. Finding jobs in the military-industrial sector? Yes. Making beer? Yes. Fighting cybercrime? Yes. Nothing about the well-grounded virtues of studying the humanities. This form of imbalance has repercussions on the way students are being advised. This is a national-wide phenomenon, as we all know.”

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.

It is difficult to predict this impact, but the areas of concern are:

- Voting representation: who will gain and who will lose seats on bodies such as Faculty Senate and Council of Chairs & Directors
- Collaboration with other departments: typically, cross-departmental collaboration is easier within the same college; leaping through college boundaries will become even more complex with a multiplicity of colleges
- Financial impact of the new “neighborhoods”: what will be the revenue share model? How will support for non-revenue generating programs be handled? For instance, in a college like CLAS there is a spirit of collegiality and mutual support that has generated an attitude of “I can take a bit of a burden so that we can have a X program (which is highly valuable) at our institution.” This mentality is not shared across all colleges.

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

Academic inertia is a force that should be taken seriously. The flip side of creating a college is creating a silo – and one desire, repeatedly stated by the MSU Denver community, is to avoid silos or transcend them. Clear guidelines on how to create and sustain cross-college programs will be a necessity.

One example from the drafting board: our institution is well-positioned to create an interdisciplinary minor (and possibly major) in Latin American and LatinX Studies by pulling together existing curriculum from a variety of departments, and creating one specialized *Introduction To-* course. Most of the existing curriculum can be found at CLAS, which would be the logical “home” for a program like this. With the multiple colleges model, this will remain easy to conceptualize, but difficult to “house” and ultimately unlikely to bring to fruition. A loss for the HSI side of our identity.

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?

- Baseline for RTP
- Peer feedback on teaching
- Travel
- Professional development for faculty and staff (primarily funding)
- Summer revenue

Impact remains unclear. Likely, we will have to once again explain what is it that we do, and why we deserve to exist.

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?

No major fundraising at the department level – we typically exchange sponsorship roles with organizations such as the Colorado Translators Association, and the local chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.

Since traditionally we are given low priority, fundraising for a department like ours may not be impacted in a major way, no matter what the collegiate structure ends up to be. An academic profile like ours is more likely to receive internal, rather than external support. Therefore, healthy institutional finances are a big priority – and concern.

To expand on the financial impact of reorganization, from a different angle. We know that, as a start, splitting into smaller colleges will have an initial cost close to a million dollars. At one point during the conversations about realignment we were asked how would we spend an extra million. To quote an MDL faculty member:

“I would first need to see the university's balance sheet. I can approve an expense only if I have a general view on the fiscal situation. Assuming this is a one off, with no string attached, the fiscally responsible side of me would not spend it on a something that would require an additional million (or more) every year, such as a salary raise or the creation of a new Dean team, or a quarter of a million, such as the purchase of equipment that needs maintenance or replacement or extra people

to make it run. I would not blow it on a single shiny project that we will forget about. I would therefore distribute it as scholarships to deserving students, in order to increase retention and graduation.”

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?

Generally, we like the “constellation” we are currently in.

CLAS is frequently described as “too big, too much like a small liberal arts college”- now, why is this a bad thing? It is exactly what it should be, the core of a university.

The combination of natural/theoretical sciences, arts and humanities is the very concept of a well-rounded education. Not all university graduates end up being polymaths, but we need to give them the opportunity to take multiple paths of knowledge, and find out how these paths intersect.

The reorganization chart has already generated grumblings and potential for turf wars. If the natural sciences get moved out in bulk to applied sciences, we end up with Psychology (which has a clinical component linking it closely to Biology and Chemistry from which it won’t want to split) under the same roof as Engineering. This makes less sense than what is in place now. In addition, over-emphasizing the applied side of science cuts off its link to the big questions such as what it means to be human, conscious, and a generator of epistemological models. In other words, Philosophy. Another, even less happy example, is the Communication Arts and Sciences department (which has both Arts and Sciences in its name, and roots in Rhetoric): CAS is decidedly unhappy to be labeled a Humanities department—which is a death sentence, as it seems—although the area is a child of the Humanities. To add to the complexity, the clinical portion of CAS currently houses American Sign Language: this is where a department like Modern Languages finds a “family” member, especially given the fact that ASL is now universally considered a foreign language accepted by ACTFL, and nation-wide ASL is housed in a World Languages-type department (in Colorado only two schools, CU-Boulder and MSU Denver buck this trend). Under the roof of CLAS, the contested territories are less contested, as ultimately it is shared turf. This will change dramatically, with a sad loss of good will, as it tends to happen.

Where does the Department of Modern Languages belong? The short answer is, we can make a case that we belong in almost every conceivable combination. The philological model of a language department implies three major branches:

- literature (letters and arts),
- linguistics (sciences and letters), and
- translation (arts, letters and sciences).

The literature portion links us to departments such as English, History, Philosophy, Visual and Performing Arts, as well as all intersections of cultural studies with social and behavioral sciences, in other words, with departments such as Chicana/o Studies, Gender Studies, Africana Studies. The linguistics portion creates a cluster with Sociology and Anthropology, Psychology, Biology, and all of the beforementioned departments (a quick reminder that a language acquisition specialist with a linguistics profile may specialize in any of the following areas: historical linguistics, geographical linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, neurolinguistics, etc.). Translation/Translation Studies combines knowledge and skills from literature and linguistics, and is the applied branch, closely related to Communication. As we grow our Translation Studies area, we are steering students into a

fertile professional field, the huge industry of language services which right now has a market share close to 47 billion dollars. If this becomes a dominant area, we will be a good match to International Business or even a fit within CPS. It's doubtful, however, that the environment in a college such as Business or CPS would be as nourishing as the one we are currently inhabiting.

To use Translation/Translation Studies as an example, the point is that it would be a mistake to over-emphasize the applied part of an area of studies, and disregard the ground it sprouts from. Severing translation from literature and linguistics (apart from making zero sense) creates a hollow shell with little substance, and vastly diminished academic rigor. To extrapolate, the traditional LAS cluster of disciplines cross-pollinate naturally, and beautifully, and need to be put into an environment where this cross-pollination is made easy.