Psychology

Preamble:

In its work last spring, the President's Advisory Council on Academic Excellence & Student Success (CAESS) has collected data and feedback from deans, chairs and directors, faculty, staff, students and community cabinet members. A summary of the process, including roughly a dozen different open-engagement opportunities available to anyone on campus, can be found in the CAESS June Report.

One unanimously supported outcome of that work was the recommendation that "changes to the academic organizational structure should be vetted by the impacted academic units; these groups should also be actively engaged in the implementation process."

To that end, the Provost asked the Academic Affairs & Student Affairs Assembly to help generate a set of questions that would be sent to each academic department and student affairs unit. I hope these questions spark discussion within the departments/units before written responses are sent back to the Provost's office (by Nov. 16th). If you do not feel comfortable or cannot answer each and every question, please answer those that you can.

In short, these questions are an attempt to gather relevant information and feedback from departments as a whole, especially any details that have not been addressed by previous efforts of the CAESS.

Questions for Academic Departments:

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.
    a. Student recruitment
    b. Student retention
    c. Student graduation rates

Relative to the current structure, with the Department of Psychology in CLAS, the reorganization is anticipated to have a positive impact on recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. In terms of recruitment, housing Psychology with other scientific disciplines more clearly communicates the orientation and focus of the department. Signaling the scientific emphasis of the field will help students with an interest in STEM fields to identify Psychology as a good fit to their interests and goals. In the five-college model, it would also be clear to students who have interests in physical and mental health that Psychology fits both within the STEM disciplines as well as with health professions.

Currently students are sometimes surprised to learn that our curriculum has a strong empirical and research focus, which leads to some students needing to change their major from Psychology to another discipline, and other students to change majors to Psychology late in their degree, which contributes to delays in time to graduation. In some cases, this lack of clarity and delay in progress leads students to drop out rather than continue and complete their degree, as time to degree and financial implications of additional years in school prohibit successful completion. In addition, as MSU Denver continues toward HSI status, the importance of Psychology being accurately identified among the sciences may increase. Research indicates that African American and Latino(a) students are more likely to declare STEM majors than other types of majors (Moakler et al., 2014), and the reorganization may allow Psychology to effectively recruit and retain more students, and students who are a better fit to the department programs. Negative implications of the reorganization for recruitment, retention, and graduation rate are likely to be minimal, and to be primarily due to students self-selecting out of Psychology due to a disinterest in the sciences. While this may reduce recruitment to some degree, that decline is likely to be offset by increases in retention and graduation rates. Any self-selection out of the department should be due to students who are not a good fit to the department's programs identifying this early on, leading to a decision not to declare a major or minor in the first place, rather than leaving the department later in their degree programs, which negatively impacts retention and graduation rates.

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.

   a. Professional recognition

      Professional organizations that represent psychologists have been working hard to solidify in the public's mind the message that psychology is a science. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) includes promoting the "psychology is STEM" message in its organizational strategic plan (APA, 2009) and in its 2012 guidelines for the psychology major (APA, 2013; Halonen, 2011). The APA has been encouraging departments to clearly identify as a science and thus as a STEM or STEAM field (http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/stem-discipline.aspx). The proposed reorganization would help demonstrate to students and the public that psychology is a science.

   b. Department reputation/image

      Clearly identifying as a science and a STEM/STEAM field adds to the reputation/image of the department because we would be following APA's recommendations for undergraduate programs. Additionally, an APA committee is working on creating a badge system to recognize outstanding undergraduate programs. Aligning with the sciences may place our undergraduate program in a better position to earn badges, which would enhance the department's reputation.

c. Department/College-School revenue and access

In the current university structure resources, including funding and access (e.g. faculty access to the Dean), is not well distributed among the colleges/schools. CLAS has the most departments and while it is efficient, it does not receive a proportional share of university-wide support/access. The re-organization would hopefully better distribute funding across the university, improve faculty level access to services and the Dean, and generally better serve the mission of the institution. We believe this is a complex issue that should be examined in detail.

d. Program accreditation

Undergraduate programs aren't accredited in psychology. However, as previously mentioned, there is an APA committee working on creating a badge system to recognize good undergraduate programs. Aligning with the sciences may help our undergraduate programs earn more badges.

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.

a. Voting representation (such as on Faculty Senate and Council of Chairs & Directors)

The number of faculty senators would likely remain the same; however, the psychology department caucus would change with the realignment. Currently, psychology faculty senators caucus with the social sciences, but it is unclear what the makeup of future caucuses would look like. It is possible the psychology department may end up with underrepresentation or overrepresentation depending on the structure of the new caucuses.

A similar issue relates to the Council of Chairs and Directors. While not directly influencing membership, there is the possibility psychology may gain or lose representation at the Executive Council level of the Council of Chairs after the realignment. For example, the College of Education has very few departments and faculty members in comparison to other colleges, yet they maintain one seat at the Council of Chairs Executive Council. It is unknown whether the creation of new colleges may allow for equal representation at the Council of Chairs Executive Council level.

b. Collaboration with other departments

Members of the psychology faculty have voiced concerns that collaboration among departments affiliated with the Health Institute would be less efficient in the 7-college model versus the 5-college model. The 7-college model would split departments affiliated with the Health Institute, while all the departments would be housed under the same college in the 5-college model. However, the current CLAS structure shares the disadvantage of the 7-college model in this regard, and

so reorganizing under the 7-college structure would not have a net positive or negative impact on collaboration, compared to the current model.

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

   There are no current projects that would be disrupted.

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?

   Our departmental guidelines are currently aligned with a subgroup of departments in CLAS. This include some departments that we have academic synergy with (e.g. Sociology & Anthropology) and others with whom we have less (e.g. History & Political Science). Should a reorganization take place in the current model floated, our guidelines would presumably be alighted with more similar departments in the sciences (e.g. Biology & Chemistry). Overall this is not likely to result in significant changes, though similar cognate departments would presumably align better in their guidelines.

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?

   With the exception of fundraising for two endowed scholarship programs, the Department of Psychology does not currently engage in external fundraising. We do not know, and are curious for, information from the Office of Advancement on how this would impact us, as well as trends for fundraising from other institutions based on colleges.

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?

   The distinction between the five- and seven-college model is 1) a College of Science, Health, and Engineering is divided into two colleges: College of Science, Engineering, and Math and Health Professions and 2) a College of Arts, Humanities, And Social Sciences is divided into a College of Arts and Humanities and a College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

   In both the five and the seven-college scenarios the Psychology Department is appropriately clustered with other STEM disciplines (either within a College of Science,

Health, and Engineering or in the College of Science, Engineering, and Math). The Department sees advantages and disadvantages to both models. Below is list of factors considered by the department and some thoughts about those factors:

Overhead Costs for University
The 5-college version involves much lower overhead costs for the University than does the 7-college version. Each college would require a Dean (potentially Associate Deans), support staff, office space, and branding/PR costs, along with other operating expenses; the more colleges, the higher the costs.

Representation in College
Because in the proposed 5-college model, the Psychology Department would be one of 15 departments it would have a more attenuated impact on the direction of the College than in the 7-college model where the Psychology Department would be one of 6-9 departments.

Alignment among College's Constituent Department's Missions
The department has mixed views regarding this factor. Some members of the department asserted that departments the 5-college model would necessarily be less aligned because there are more departments with more diverse missions than in the 7-college model. Others presented a strong preference for the 7-college model, because they view the Department's mission as aligning more favorably when the Departed is included in the "health" umbrella. These Department members feel more departmental kinship with health professions, nutrition, social work, human services than with math, chemistry, physics, etc. There was also a worry that the 7-college model (with the proposed name "College of Science, Engineering, & Mathematics") would alienate potential students and send them instead to other majors (within "College of Health Professions"). Still others worried that being labelled as a health profession department fails to accurately reflect the majority of faculty in the Department who are not in the health profession as they have no license to do applied clinical work: a suggested solution might be to change the name from "health professions" to "health sciences."

Resource Allocation
Perhaps the most important factor to be evaluated is that of resources allocation both from the University to the Colleges and to the departments from the Colleges. The Psychology Department asserts that resource allocation to Colleges and departments ought to closely reflect resource generation (i.e., FTE). No information is presented about how resource allocation will occur in either the 5- or 7-college model which makes it very difficult to evaluate the benefits of either model. This does not preclude subsidization and support for more costly departments and programs. For example, our Department Chair has strongly supported a distribution of resources (e.g. summer funds) with multiple factors including a component that distributes a portion of funds, regardless of an individual department's FTE.

Should MSU Denver continue down the path of collegiate restructuring where do *you* think your department belongs?

The Psychology Department firmly asserts its place among the other STEM fields. The American Psychological Association (APA) includes promoting the "psychology is STEM" message in its organizational strategic plan (APA, 2009) and in its 2012 guidelines for the psychology major (APA, 2013; Halonen, 2011). Psychological science, although diverse in its content, is grounded in scientific rigor. The field of psychology investigates behavior from a variety of scientific perspectives, such as biophysical, cognitive, developmental, clinical, and social. While the field encompasses a broad set of sub-domains and schools of thought, all rely on applying the scientific method to detect patterns and relationships among relevant variables. Psychology's scientific foundation is recognized by major external funding sources such as, the National Science Foundation, NASA, Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health, and the National Academy of Sciences. Further, the undergraduate curricula for all our degrees includes exposure to content that is based on empirical research, as well involving experiences intended to foster the development of skills required for understanding and implementing scientific inquiry, as well as involving experiences intended to foster the development of skills required for understanding and implementing behavior change, personal growth, and scientific inquiry.