

College of Arts & Sciences Strategic Planning Research and Scholarship Working Group Preliminary Report

Overview

The College of Arts & Sciences at Texas A&M University aims to establish itself as a leader in the nation for foundational research. The greatest challenges and questions facing the state of Texas, the nation, and the world, often require visionary and collaborative solutions. The College of Arts & Sciences is poised to address these challenges given the breadth of research excellence across our multiple departments, centers, and institutes. To capitalize on this breadth of resources, the college must support, promote, expand, and celebrate research excellence. We further have the opportunity to lead the nation in public higher education and the development of leaders in the state of Texas and beyond.

Opportunities

We must take advantage of our size and diversity of expertise to advance game-changing research that addresses complex societal challenges including those in health, energy, sustainability, space, ocean (blue) economy, agriculture, and democracy. We have the advantage of being able to leverage partnerships within our comprehensive educational system, drawing from campuses spanning cities to rural communities.

The actions proposed below aim at achieving research excellence across the College of Arts & Sciences and to ensure we are greater than the sum of our parts. These efforts seek to address needs that support sustained research excellence as well as disseminate the value and impact of this research with external stakeholders. They also promote the ability of departments to translate research excellence into high impact opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. Lastly, they will work to enhance our mission to develop the leaders of tomorrow, cultivating dynamic skills for career success and for a lifetime of civic and community engagement.

Objectives

Objective 1: Recruit, develop, and retain world-class research faculty

Rationale: Research excellence in the College of Arts & Sciences builds on the excellence of its units, which, in turn, builds on the excellence of their faculty. To establish itself as one of the premier Colleges in the nation for discovery of new knowledge, we must be home to intellectual leaders who drive national conversations in their respective fields as well as cross historic research boundaries to create paths to new frontiers. This will require the recruitment, development, and retention of exceptional scholars at all ranks.

Actions:

1. Bring College salaries on par with peer aspirants within five years.
2. Increase the number of endowed positions across the College.
3. Provide faculty start-up packages on par or greater than peer aspirants.
4. Develop impactful mentoring programs for faculty at all ranks.
5. Create a vibrant professional community of research faculty in the College.
6. Support hires that leverage interdisciplinary activities across historic research boundaries.
7. Strengthen policies for intra- and inter-college joint appointments to effectively enhance interdisciplinary research excellence.

Objective 2: Decrease barriers to faculty success

Rationale: College faculty expertise is vast; faculty should pursue research excellence in their specific area, as well as leverage this expertise to push forward into new research directions that are interdisciplinary. Research faculty must have the time and energy to do so, and roadblocks from the College and University should be minimized.

Actions:

1. Improve effectiveness of College and University services which support faculty research efforts.
2. Distribute workloads that enable impactful research, graduate mentoring, and undergraduate teaching.
3. Create a comprehensive internal funding program that encourages individual faculty research excellence and sustained collaborative research.
4. Ensure promotion and tenure policies minimize challenges and roadblocks for faculty engaging in cross-disciplinary work.
5. Establish professional development programs on research communication and stakeholder engagement for research faculty.
6. Strategically develop collaborative teams to lead new research initiatives.

Objective 3: Recognize and reward research excellence

Rationale: Recognition and rewards are critical to fostering a culture of research excellence. Scholarly excellence should be an incentive through promotion, compensation, and resource allocation. This also includes clear and ongoing efforts to share research successes with those outside of the College and University.

Actions:

1. Reframe College awards programs to increase competitiveness of nominations for external recognitions.
2. Create a culture that incentivizes research excellence at department and College levels through faculty promotion, compensation, and resource allocation.
3. Develop college- and department-level strategies for dissemination of research successes.
4. Create a College-level committee to coordinate faculty nominations for highly competitive and highly visible University and external awards.
5. Recognize and reward faculty research engagement with external partners such as the public, industry, and national labs.

Objective 4: Communicate the value and impact of research to stakeholders

Rationale: Communicating the impact and value of research is paramount to the long-term success of the College. These efforts underline the importance of current and future investments in research programs and faculty. The College will work to communicate the value of our research to stakeholders, including state and federal representatives and agencies, corporate partners, existing and potential donors, future students, former students, and the public.

Actions:

1. Create a strategy that prioritizes communicating the value of College research to targeted stakeholder groups.
2. Enhance collaboration between the College and departments to identify and highlight valuable research to stakeholders.
3. Train and support faculty to communicate with and engage with the public, including leveraging the University marketing group.
4. Engage media outlets that promote the value of research and scholarship.
5. Encourage faculty to publish in publicly accessible outlets that reach broad audiences.
6. Continue to highlight the close connection between the education and research missions of the University and College (e.g., student researchers).

Objective 5: Create and maintain world-class infrastructure and enabling technology

Rationale: World class infrastructure and enabling technology is critical to maintaining and growing research excellence across the College. Our goal is to provide an infrastructure that is modern and functional that meets the needs of state-of-the-art research faculty and staff and maintains excellent utilization and efficiency. The research space must reflect our position as a global leader in research excellence.

Actions:

1. Develop a comprehensive renovation plan, including funding and timelines, for current space within the College.
2. Identify resources to maintain and create new state-of-the-art facilities and technology, including research equipment.
3. Create a set of College guidelines for department space allocations that maximize impact and productivity.
4. Evaluate current and future programmatic needs of units and coordinate with the University master planning and space usage analysis.
5. Constitute a standing College committee on space, infrastructure, and sustainability that works closely with University centralized facilities.

Objective 6: Contribute to the betterment of the state of Texas and the nation.

Rationale: We are uniquely positioned as a Land-, Sea-, and Space-Grant Institution and the College is poised to play a central role in addressing societal grand challenges. We seek to be a model for engaging external stakeholders, providing leadership to develop solutions to serve the public good, and training the next generation of scholars.

Actions:

1. Develop stronger ties with the Government Relations Office to ensure we are addressing the needs of the state and nation.
2. Increase the number of standing contracts with, industry, national laboratories, and private foundations.
3. Facilitate faculty and student engagement with existing external partnerships.
4. Develop seed grant programs to support new relationships with external partners.
5. Support interdisciplinary collaboration with other units in the TAMU system.
6. Expand internship programs with National Labs and Industry partners.

Submitted April 11, 2025

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