College of Arts & Sciences Strategic Planning
Undergraduate Education Working Group Preliminary Report

Overview

The Dean charged the Undergraduate Education Working Group to develop recommendations that will cement our College as the foundational future of the Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M University. Our goals and actions must account for the emergent challenges posed by our rapidly changing educational landscape and position our college to positively impact the future of Texas, the nation, and the world.

Opportunities

The College's undergraduate degree programs have considerable strengths. According to a student experience survey conducted by Hanover Research, academic excellence and real-world application are the primary attributes driving excitement among students in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Objectives

Objective 1: Improve first-year programming to align with departmental and University goals

Rationale: Hullabaloo U (HU), a University priority for improving sense of belonging and retention rates for FTIC (first time in college) students, attracted mixed views among stakeholders, with some arguing for abandoning HU and others arguing for the merits of HU.

Actions:

1. Identify funding to increase compensation to HU instructors.
2. Support discipline-oriented, cohort-building, high-impact, and career-focused content in HU to demonstrate the value of HU to students.
3. Support departmental implementation of flexible approaches that meet University-wide HU guidelines.
4. Measure the efficacy of HU programming.

Objective 2: Support departmental high-impact activities

Rationale: Stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for high-impact learning. Key challenges included broadening possibilities for students who cannot afford study abroad or unpaid internships and scaling up capstone and other high-impact activities for large degree programs. Indeed, 69% of respondents to the Hanover survey have not participated in research activities with faculty.

Actions:

1. Define high-impact learning and College-wide goals, develop a database for sharing best practices for undergraduate research experiences, and encourage sharing best practices.
2. Promote College-wide events or opportunities to raise awareness about high-impact opportunities and offer students opportunities to share their experiences.
3. Recognize faculty for leading or innovating high-impact learning or research mentoring of undergraduate students through an award category and annual review process.

4. Identify means to compensate faculty for leading high-impact experiences such as field trips.
5. Identify funding for students to participate in high impact experiences.

Objective 3: Create deeper engagement with former students

Rationale: Stakeholders emphasized the need for deeper engagement with former students for several reasons, including better understanding of career paths and potential for communicating the value of our degree programs.

Actions:

1. Invite former students to serve on career panels and department-focused advisory councils.
2. Departments should use social media to connect with current and former students.

Objective 4: Implement, broaden, or improve career programming

Rationale: A focus on career pathways for students builds on considerable success. The Hanover study revealed that 87% of respondents were positive about how their College and major "will help me meet my career goals." However, 78% of respondents have not participated in an internship.

Actions:

1. Create more ways of highlighting career pathways to students and embedding career readiness into the curriculum.
2. Initiate career panels that cut across the College's degree programs.
3. Compensate departmental internship coordinators and encourage internship coordinators to network and share best practices.

Objective 5: Develop a robust student recruitment unit

Rationale: Stakeholders considered that one staff member charged with recruitment duties is insufficient to meet the multidimensional needs of the College.

Actions:

1. Support departments in developing outreach events for high school guidance counselors.
2. Develop and implement a plan for communicating with prospective and admitted students.

Objective 6: Address challenges and opportunities of AI in the teaching and learning process

Rationale: Stakeholders were concerned that the rapid growth of AI was creating new and unmet responsibilities for faculty to provide robust instruction for students.

Actions:

1. Encourage instruction in appropriate uses of AI for specific course content.
2. Collect and disseminate best practices from faculty using AI in their teaching.

Objective 7: Strengthen connections between academic advisors and departments and programs

Rationale: Stakeholders prioritized the need to more deeply embed academic advisors in departments and programs and for faculty and academic advisors to work as a team. Provost-approved centralized advising and a career ladder for academic advisors put parameters around suggested actions; moreover, the Working

Group valued the importance of upward mobility, retention in the profession, and career autonomy of staff who begin their careers as academic advisors. A long-term relationship with a single advisor is ideal, but not always aligned with the career goals of academic advisors.

Actions:

1. To the extent possible, academic advisors should be co-located with the departments and programs they serve and should be promoted without switching departments.
2. Department leadership and faculty should meet with advisors regularly to discuss career pathways, the trajectory of the department, issues that students face, and update faculty-approved policies and procedures for academic advisors.
3. Organize regular all-College briefings, presented by the faculty, for academic advisors in the College and external parties on curricular updates, high-impact experiences, and career pathways.

Objective 8: Develop processes that motivate team-based interdisciplinary instruction

Rationale: Stakeholders were passionate about the need for the College to develop guidelines that encouraged team-taught interdisciplinary courses in the College, while also noting that the reason for team-taught courses must be student-centered, starting with the question, "how does team teaching benefit students?"

Actions:

1. Develop guidelines that incentivize team-based interdisciplinary instruction with clarity on compensation and process.
2. Revise annual review guidelines to encourage team teaching (e.g., include team teaching as a measure of teaching excellence) and offer recognition and credit to participating faculty.

Objective 9: Enhance the digital learning experience for students and faculty

Rationale: Many stakeholders identified the need for greater access to instructional designers to maximize their use of the LMS (Canvas), while others noted that the College's instructional designers, who offer consulting hours, are underutilized and eager to assist faculty. The Hanover student survey revealed that students overwhelming (> 90%) value faculty competence in the basic functions of Canvas.

Actions:

1. Enhance the visibility and expertise of College staff to support faculty seeking digital learning guidance, focusing on broad dissemination of basic Canvas competency.
2. Offer dedicated support for faculty teaching online summer classes to align with student preferences and course modalities in summer terms.

Objective 10: Communicate the value of the College's curriculum to external stakeholders

Rationale: Faculty stakeholders expressed significant concern over increasingly common external threats that challenged the value of certain disciplines and areas of inquiry that we consider to be fundamental parts of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Actions:

1. Develop protocols for communicating what to do, how to respond, and whom to contact when faculty are challenged, threatened, or confronted about the content of their course materials in ways that deviate from statutory requirements and TAMU student rules.
2. Encourage degree programs to balance imperatives for workforce preparation and informed citizens who continuously learn by emphasizing career readiness and a commitment to lifelong learning.
3. Develop protocols for handling media inquiries seeking information about curricular matters.

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