Introduction to Arizona Outreach: Mission and Structure

The mission of Arizona Outreach is to make knowledge generated at the University of Arizona more accessible and more relevant to Arizona’s citizens, to the nation at large and to the global community, and to inspire in each of these connections the parallel desires to learn and to create beneficial change, both in partnership with the University of Arizona.

As a support unit, the Office of the Vice President for Outreach (“Outreach”) translates and delivers the teaching, research and service of UA faculty to broader audiences. Specifically, Outreach is a primary UA venue for disseminating knowledge through both credit and non-credit activities, and serves as the institutional incubator for The Arizona Experience: Our goal is not simply to deliver knowledge, but to create transformative experiences and relationships among our family of faculty, traditional and non-traditional learners, and the communities we serve both here and abroad.

Structurally, Outreach consists of one academic unit (UA South), and two distinct support units (Arizona Outreach College and International Affairs). In addition, Arizona Cooperative Extension is a hybrid support/academic unit which reports dually to Outreach and to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. This whitepaper will focus on executed and prospective administrative and operational changes across the first three units. Cooperative Extension will be addressed in CALS documents as appropriate.

As context for these changes, note that Outreach serves three specific tactical functions. First, we are creating and implementing new business models to support and incentivize faculty outreach efforts, and are actively involved in assuring that the University and Regents’ strategic plans recognize and accommodate student access, dissemination of knowledge to the public, and University service benefitting the state of Arizona. Second, Outreach provides an active interface with government and education officials throughout the state and abroad interested in advancing opportunities for citizens of their respective regions in collaboration with the University of Arizona. Third, Outreach is exploring how to support and market in a more consistent fashion the distributed programs independently generated and sustained by faculty (historically with minimal administrative support) across the UA campus and at UA South.

With respect to implementation, our projects are assessed against four criteria. Is the activity central to the UA mission? Is the project revenue positive? Is the business model sustainable and scalable? Is our content or outcome compelling in the sense that it inspires continued engagement with or support of the University of Arizona? Only through this constant assessment of project relevance to mission, community and economics can we hope to modernize the concept of the land grant university, and indeed
entirely rescale that concept to reach and serve a global audience. Moreover, we believe this evolution and resulting differentiation is critical to the University of Arizona’s future.

Outreach Assessment and Realignments Undertaken to Date

Prior to consolidating the described units under Outreach, the UA had not considered the efficiencies to be attained through structural alignment of those units. Distance or off-hours education played no reasoned role in institutional strategy, and CEAO and UA South were in many ways disconnected from broader institutional goals. Further, despite the fact that international activity provides an effective recruiting ground for diverse and well-prepared out-of-state students, we had not explored the opportunities presented by a coherent international strategy, nor developed common business models to incentivize education, research or service collaboration off-campus, whether in China or in Chandler. Instead, the institution neglected these units and left them to evolve divergent traits, or worse, spawned directly competitive administrative units.

We immediately undertook a significant streamlining and redesign of what was CEAO, transforming it into the new Arizona Outreach College (AOC). We reduced personnel from 53 to 28 (with only 2.7 lines state-funded), jettisoned several programs not closely related to main campus faculty (reducing general business divisions from eleven to five), and realigned the new AOC to define itself as a more exclusively mission-driven organization (with Faculty Senate approval and an additional SPBAC briefing of the college concept). We created institutional support via rolling our headcount into the 22:1 appropriation numbers, increasing the UA base appropriation by $1.8 million, and created faculty incentives through a standard 70/30 revenue split on distance offerings, returning nearly $3 million to UA departments last year. We also consolidated discordant TRIF initiatives and solicited additional TRIF resources from the Regents to create additional content to be offered by UA or UA South faculty.

As a result, AOC’s contribution to UA enrollment and resources is significant and increasing. Credit programs offered through the AOC generated 26,964 SCH for the Fall ‘07/Spring ‘08 semesters combined, compared with 21,600 SCH for Fall ‘06/Spring ‘07, and 18,499 SCH the year prior, thus increasing 45% since realignment began. In terms of students, the AOC served 5,518 students (unduplicated head count) in Fall ‘07/Spring ‘08, compared with 5,050 in Fall ‘06/Spring ‘07, and 4,513 students the year prior. Similarly, the number of sections offered by AOC has increased steadily, from 572 unique sections in ‘06/’07 to 698 individual sections in ‘07/’08.

Similarly, UA South has undergone a leadership change, and now coordinates its hires with corollary main campus departments. Equally important, UA South and main campus faculty are exploring collaborative offerings at Ft. Huachuca, and main campus programs (through AOC) will be offered side-by-side at UA Santa Cruz and eventually at other locations. Outreach is also facilitating extensive 2+2 discussions with several Community Colleges on behalf of UA South, in partnership with UA main programs offered through AOC. After bottoming out at 322 FTE, UA South increased enrollment by 14% to 374 FTE students this year. UA South also retains H.S.I. status, flexible curricula and a teaching-intensive evaluation process, factors which highlight the importance of a “branch programs” model within the UA delivery infrastructure.
As the University determines how it will accommodate 14,000 new students by 2020, Outreach will support a minimum of three thousand of those students through UA South and AOC. Outreach has received funding for coordinators in Yuma, Nogales and Casa Grande, enhancing 2+2 programs with local community colleges, and integrating as appropriate UA South and AOC-delivered main campus content. Outreach is exploring similar relationships in other communities, including Chandler and Paradise Valley. These activities, aside from producing sustainable access models, will dramatically expand our political relevance in those counties directly served.

Next Steps

As a part of those community college discussions, we will create “virtual 4-year degrees” based on program integration, seamless transition between community college and UA content (whether offered on main campus or remotely at the Community College), extensive advisor training and structured marketing. We are also extending our electronic infrastructure through piggybacking on community college infrastructure.

Our reorganization of International Affairs is presented in a companion whitepaper, but most relevant to this discussion is our new Global Studies Initiative within AOC, applying our now standard 70/30 revenue model to create incentivizes for sustainable international content delivery, a critical component of international recruitment. We are currently negotiating contracts in China and Saudi Arabia applying the 70/30 model to out-of-state tuition rather than “sheltering” these programs as one-offs within Study Abroad. Our new contract review process is a critical element in getting these programs off the ground. We are also restructuring marketing within AOC, UA South and International Affairs for better leverage, brand consistency and content access.

Also within Outreach, we are creating Arizona Educational Extension (A2E), a virtual watering hole for UA and UA South faculty committed to leveraging their expertise in the service of Arizona communities, whether through teaching, community engagement, or applied research. Faculty would retain their tenure (or continuing or contract status) in their academic home, but aggregate their distributed content for coherent delivery through A2E. Applying the AOC 70/30 model, A2E would pull together faculty from multiple tenure homes to deliver content in target disciplines or locations. With appropriate process approval, A2E could also administer continuing or contract status on behalf of participating units in a fashion analogous to Cooperative Extension, providing a consistent University-wide methodology for the retention of critical instructional faculty, master teachers or professors of practice. This model will also allow the university to better segregate costs for teaching-intensive ventures.

Our efforts have been aimed at stabilizing two of our new reports (UA South and AOC), and expanding the vision and breadth of both AOC and International Affairs. In each of these efforts, we have focused on increasing access to UA programs, and creating sustainable business models which also encourage faculty utilization of advanced tools to extend their reach. While we have laid the groundwork for success in these efforts, the next steps in our reorganization process will determine the limits of that success.