Name: The Vice President for Instruction (No name change is recommended at this time).

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The reorganization and consolidation in this paper focuses on the Office of Vice President for Instruction.
“THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES HAVE TOO OFTEN failed, and continue to fail, their undergraduate populations. Tuition income from undergraduates is one of the major sources of university income, helping to support research programs and graduate education, but the students paying the tuition get, in all too many cases, less than their money’s worth.” REINVENTING UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities. The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University.

I am proposing a significant restructuring of undergraduate education and the manner in which we deliver instruction at The University of Arizona, especially in General Education.

At this time, the general education component suffers from a number of issues and problems that greatly affect our students. First and foremost is the continuing problem of class availability. Many students and academic advisors often complain that they or their advisees cannot enroll in classes needed for graduation or completing their general education requirements. There is also the matter of range of course offerings to fulfill general education requirements. As departments and colleges have become increasingly strapped for resources, they have been offering a smaller range of classes from which students may choose. The quality of the general education courses is uneven. Some of them are well taught and meaningful, others lack that quality. In some cases, departments have had to eliminate the break out discussion sections, lab sections, and even the critical thinking and writing intensive requirements because the funding that covers GATs or smaller student sections has been consistently reduced. Furthermore, because of the current structuring, appropriate assessment measures for general education are not always part of the formula used in teaching gen ed courses. Finally the level of quality or preparation on the part of tenure-track faculty, contingency faculty, and graduate teaching assistants to work with first and second year students varies greatly from term to term, department to department, and college to college.

As part of the restructuring of undergraduate education, I am proposing that we employ teaching intensive faculty at all ranks. This teaching intensive faculty would practice the tenets of Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship of Teaching. Their work load would be adjusted so that teaching intensive faculty would offer 3 to 4 courses each semester in general education. This faculty will be supported by a team of student and learning specialists drawn from other administrative units in the university. This support team would consist of academic advisors, learning specialists, tutors, SALT and Disability Resource Center professionals, writing specialists, support staff from the Learning Technology Center who specialize in the use and application of learning technologies, staff from OSCR, staff from the University Learning Center, and staff from the MASS cultural centers on campus. Other student professionals will be added to each team as needs change and are identified. The number of faculty engaged in teaching will determine how many of them would be assigned to each support team.
Teaching intensive faculty would be required to undergo extensive and continuing professional development in the art and craft of teaching. For example, they would develop or enhance their skills in cultural competency, so as to be prepared to teach, interact, and more effectively communicate with students from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. They would also learn different Models of Teaching and about the different learning styles of students. They would learn to use instructional technology more effectively and creatively. They would also receive yearly orientations from enrollment management and student affairs staff about the students who will be entering the U of A and their respective classrooms. Student life professionals have accumulated a great deal of information about entering students that can be of use and value to the faculty and GATs as they go about their work and preparation. That information will be incorporated and integrated into the orientations and professional development activities that each teaching intensive faculty and graduate assistant must undergo. They would also interact with their support teams, who are imbued with the same kind of information, as they teach the courses they are assigned. To further enhance the level of preparation, faculty would interact in interdisciplinary forums and discussions with other faculty who are similarly engaged, but who teach at the Tier 2 or Foundations level. The goal here is to bring greater integration of subject matter into the curriculum so that faculty is building on common skill sets, content, and learning. Finally, faculty are expected to remain at the cutting edge of their field and work, to engage in some form of scholarship related to teaching, learning, to regularly assess student learning outcomes in their respective courses, and to remain active in their respective professional organizations.

Faculty who choose to be teaching intensive in their workload assignment will be affiliated with or assigned to University College and the oversight of the Vice President for Instruction (VPI). All faculties who wish to participate in this program must undergo a review and assessment process to determine fit with mission and focus. Because of the level of development and preparation required, faculty selected for the program must commit to at least three years of service. Faculty will be assessed and evaluated each year, and must agree to undertake a self assessment that will, in part, be used to modify their syllabi and, if needed, their course content to include new pedagogy, teaching and learning methods, and instructional technologies that support learning. Scheduling of general classes will be the responsibility of the VPI to assure both quantity and quality of offerings.

The Integrated Learning Center (ILC) will once again become an incubator for ideas, practices, and programs that enhance learning, increase retention, and lead to best practices that will be disseminated to the larger campus community. Space for faculty interaction, professional development, and meeting and interacting with students will be central to the function and use of space and facilities in the ILC. The ILC is well suited to this mission because of the partnerships and interactions that currently exist between the ILC, UTC, University College, OSCR, and the Library. More can be done under the auspices of the VPI to strengthen, grow, and integrate the instructional roles of these units.
A goal of the restructured general education curriculum will be to more actively engage students in their own learning from the very outset. We will more actively utilize Learner Centered Education models and strategies. In addition to applied learning in the classroom, students will be encouraged to engage in supervised service learning programs, learning communities, internships, directed study and directed research activities. Leadership studies and social justice components will also be part of the undergraduate experience. There will be peer mentoring and peer guided and led learning activities. Attention will be given to further developing courses and applied learning experiences for Honors students. We will reintroduce the First Year Experience for students, including requiring students to enroll in credit bearing first year seminars, along the lines that have been used recently by University College to better prepare students for the transition to university life.

How will we pay for such an elaborate program? To help pay for the cost of a teaching intensive faculty, we can redirect the student success funding and the funding already allocated to colleges to support general education courses. Additional funding will come from tuition dollars as we implement a process and system whereby tuition dollars follow student credit hours. There is also the tuition increase that has been proposed for FY 2009-2010. And this proposed structure can be used to attract donors who will support the program.

The utilization of other units will make for more efficient and centralized use of student and faculty support services. For example, through collaboration, mergers, integrations, or reassignment units that have instruction as a central component of their missions will be used to serve the needs of students and faculty in the program. This coalescence will lead to the elimination of duplication, waste, and mission drift that is currently at work. In fact, I propose that an evaluation of the mission fit of these units be undertaken, and those who are most heavily involved in instruction or whose resource could be directed to instruction and student learning be consolidated under the direction and leadership of the VPI.

There are of course a number of challenges and questions that need further study. For example, we will have to make adjustments to our administrative and personnel functions to accommodate the evaluation and career progression of teaching intensive faculty. The last thing we want to create is a two tiered system of faculty, whereby those who choose to be teaching intensive are treated as second class citizens in terms of salary, promotion and tenure or continuing status, status, rank, career progression, and merit awards. We already have a policy in place that allows for workload adjustment. How the units of faculty who decide to be teaching intensive will be incentivized to allow their faculty to enter into the program is another issue that needs to be considered and resolved.

We must also consider professionals who are not “faculty”, but whose skill, expertise, and teaching acumen can be put to better use. This group of professionals represents a rich repository of instructors that can alleviate the heavy teaching load, increase the number of qualified instructors, and supplement the work that faculty do in class. For
example, they could be assigned instructional responsibilities under a faculty of record as we expand the number of credit hours in general education courses to include information, learning strategies, and support that is currently taught in success courses. Thus some courses would incorporate the talents and teaching skills of writing specialists, information knowledge specialists, mathematics and science specialists, and learning specialists to teach students. Or we could consider creating a special designation or title that would allow such specialists to engage in the instructional process. This is an important resource that we need to develop and utilize more fully. We must also carefully revisit the role and status of contingency faculty, their professional development, and contractual arrangements. They, too, are a valuable resource that we have to recognize, support, and use more effectively.

First, however, we must make some structural changes to the Office of the Vice President of Instruction. When this unit was assembled, some of the components that would increase effectiveness and efficiencies were assigned to other non-instructional units. While collaboration with these units has been somewhat useful, the reality is that instruction is not central to the mission of the contributing or cooperating units. Thus valuable time and energy is expended in arranging these activities. Furthermore, because some of these units involved in instructional programs or activities do not completely align with the mission of the units they report to, there is a tendency to drain valuable resources from them to fund activities that are more central to their parent units. If this administration is serious about delivering quality instruction to undergraduates, it must begin by aligning units that have similar or identical instructional missions and assign them to the VPI. I have discussed this with some of the cooperation units and they have indicated a high interest and willingness to join the instructional mission of the university, which the VPI is ostensibly charged with carrying out.

Secondly, the Office of the Vice President must be adequately funded and supported, just as the other vice presidential units have been. At this writing, the VPI has yet to be allotted an operating budget. The budget proposal that was thoughtfully prepared and presented to the Provost by the outgoing interim VPI has not been allocated. This has handicapped the ability of the newly established office to fully carry out its responsibilities, or to stabilize the staffing needed to carry out such a large responsibility. Adding to the problems is the aforementioned misalignment of units that have a better mission fit with the Office of Vice President for Instruction, and the educational needs of students at The University of Arizona.

Budget: Information still being developed and researched.