Building a Culture of Partnership:
Staff and Operations of the College of Arts and Sciences

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Prepared by the College of Arts and Sciences Staff Advisory Committee
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Executive Summary

In fall 2013, College of Arts and Sciences Dean Steven Leigh convened the Staff Advisory Committee. The Committee's purpose is to develop strategic recommendations for staff involvement in enhancing the overall quality of the College and student success. For the initial phase of the Committee members' three-year term, the Dean provided the following themes as focal points: strengthening and supporting CU's academic mission; ensuring CU's long-term health; developing student-centered approaches; increasing efficiency and "performance excellence"; fostering staff empowerment and support; and developing staff leadership.

This report will address these themes and offer recommendations in two main areas: operational efficiency and staff development, complementary aspects of the College's long-term health. The College will strengthen its academic mission and enhance student experiences through improvements in operational efficiency. Moreover, the College will operate more effectively if staff members are partners and resources in its work, and if they are seen as integral to its academic mission.

The Staff Advisory Committee has identified the following priorities:

- Promote collaboration and shared accountability among staff members and between staff and faculty to address collective challenges.
- Improve operations by streamlining processes, using technology more effectively, and developing new employee resources.
- Support student retention by using staff to engage students from orientation to graduation and by sharing strategies for student outreach.
- Redefine the role of staff as contributors and partners in the A&S mission by incorporating staff into College-level planning committees in appropriate issue areas and developing ways to document staff skills and expertise.
- Create greater opportunities for staff members to network, communicate, and benefit from a collective knowledge base through learning communities and mentorship programs.
- Establish professional and training opportunities for staff as part of defined career ladders and in the spirit of continual learning by offering professional development support at the College level.

This report is intended to begin a dialog among the Dean's office, faculty, and staff. The aim is to include staff expertise and perspectives in College initiatives, and to suggest ways to improve operations and develop staff for the benefit of the College. As such, this report is a broad description of opportunities for development, and specific next steps can be determined based on the College's goals and resources.

Introduction

Highly functioning academic units further the College's academic mission and promote its continued success. Staff are uniquely situated to recommend and implement improvements to College operations, from the back office to the front lines.

Improvements in operations require a culture of partnership, empowerment, and accountability. Here, we take seriously CU-Boulder Chancellor Phil DiStefano's call to develop new partnerships, new ideas, and new levels of organization in order to thrive as a public institution.[1]

- The College will benefit by developing a culture of partnership and collaboration among its units and personnel. Increased cooperation, with a focus on achieving shared goals, allows for inefficiencies to be more easily identified and addressed on a larger scale. Developing A&S staff is a critical part of these efforts.

- The College has significant wealth in its human resources: its staff members have extensive job knowledge, a strong work ethic, and professional experience in academia, business, and beyond. Staff are well-positioned to implement operational improvements within and across units. Forums and networks can empower staff as contributors to policy and procedural discussions.

- Empowering staff to submit policy recommendations creates new levels of accountability. Managerial staff, along with their faculty administrator counterparts, will be responsible for results. Professional staff members who are held accountable for outcomes will develop sound strategies for improving operations and advancing shared goals.

Operational Efficiency

The College will strengthen its academic mission and enhance student experiences through improvements in operational efficiency.

There is campus-wide attention to efficiency, from the newly formed Office for Performance Improvement to the CU-Boulder Staff Council. In today's budgetary climate, the College of Arts

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[1] "DiStefano's State of the Campus Advances Collaboration, Efficiency," 25 October 2012, available at http://connections.cu.edu/across-cu/distefanos-state-of-the-campus-advances-collaboration-efficiency/.

and Sciences has a vested interest in effective operations. Essential to this discussion are the many staff members who serve the College's educational mission and successful operation.[2]

A&S employees have a wide range of roles as classified and university staff, as well as a range of educational and professional backgrounds that inform their work. Staff responsibilities include front-line student and faculty support, financial management, academic scheduling, advising, IT, event programming, outreach, parent relations, and more. With attention to the range of staff roles and contributions to operations, we make recommendations in the following four areas: 1) promoting collaboration to solve common problems; 2) streamlining and clarifying processes; 3) utilizing technology more effectively; and 4) improving student experiences and retention.

Promote collaboration to solve common problems

Staff and faculty face common problems, including cumbersome administrative processes, new policies and forms of compliance, and large workloads. Efficiency means minimizing the roadblocks that keep us all from doing our best work and sharing information well, and making everyone's workload more manageable. Consequently, to address the collective challenges we face, a culture of partnership is key. Open communication channels across the College can distribute best practices, address bottlenecks, and facilitate strategic planning for the future.

Central to these efforts is communication from the College to its staff: staff need to know the goals of the College, and how their work in individual units fits with these overall goals. That is, staff require a charge in order to assess what processes are working or not working, and how their offices, departments, and programs align with broader initiatives.

Action Items

1. Share A&S goals that include contributions at all levels, communicated from the Deans to the faculty and staff managers.

2. Create regular communication pathways from the College to its staff. This could include a College email list where all staff members can contribute or staff meetings that address issues raised with the Chairs and Directors.

3. Convene staff and faculty members in smaller groups to determine the implications of new policies for operations, offer data on the impact of existing policies, and establish best practices for implementation.

Streamline and clarify processes

The 2014 progress report by the President's Task Force on Efficiency notes that both staff and faculty are impacted by administrative processes across CU: faculty are required to complete

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[2] See Appendix 1 on A&S staff demographics.

many non-academic tasks and the burden placed on staff is unwieldy.[3] Given this challenging environment, staff need better ways to get the right information to the right person in the fewest steps, ensuring that their units are running smoothly. We have identified processes that can be streamlined or clarified in central areas of finance, HR, curriculum coordination, and space.

Action Items

1. Offer or recommend existing trainings from CU offices to ensure staff are prepared and accountable for financial management tasks. Financial management is an essential component of the College's long-term health, and reading unit budget reports, identifying and troubleshooting deficits, and administering grant funds must be done accurately and with an eye towards the best use of resources. In particular, the College would be well-served by establishing new employee materials for financial management and supporting new staff in obtaining the necessary skills.

2. Centralize HR functions and align personnel processes for A&S faculty and classified and university staff. Establish an HR matrix for routing within the College, including the different HR procedures for various job classes. As a result, units will not have to spend as much time learning and relearning the various HR tasks related to appointments.

3. Create online documentation for A&S curriculum office matters. With so many staff members working on various aspects of curriculum coordination, learning best practices and training new staff can be a challenge. Centralized online resources that document A&S procedures for course proposals, certificates, and other curriculum-related submissions would help staff better support the academic mission and help the curriculum office with repeated queries.

4. Make best use of space. This may include encouraging broader academic scheduling options for A&S courses, especially as students increasingly need more options, such as evening blocks, to allow for jobs or internships that support their education and future career plans. Beyond classroom space, staff members need adequate, functional office spaces to facilitate their work.

Utilize technology more effectively

Staff require support to make better use of existing technology and to recommend the adoption of new technologies. Increased training, delivered across multiple platforms, and shared resources are important components of this strategy. In particular, staff managers can make better decisions about operations with common procedures and resources for data analysis.

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[3] President's Task Force on Efficiency, *Progress Report and Campus Feedback on System Administration's Efficiency Efforts from 2009-2013*, January 2014, available at http://www.cu.edu/sites/default/files/PTFE-Jan2014-Report.pdf.

Action Items

1. Convert common paper processes to electronic methods in order to simplify and provide transparency, an initiative supported by CU-Boulder Chief Financial Officer Kelly Fox. Electronic signatures and electronic routing are two key examples. A system for electronic routing would be faster and more transparent, making it easier to identify bottlenecks and track lost documents.

2. Provide or identify existing hands-on and remote training to maximize staff proficiency with IT tools, from the A&S portal to Cognos reports. Encourage a culture of re-training and refreshing to update skills. Online and video training are helpful for staff members who have difficulty leaving their desks or rearranging their schedules. Build online resources in specific areas where the College has standards for staff performance: finance and budget, human resources, and new hire training.

3. Align processes for using data, so staff members can better plan for future needs and anticipate bottlenecks. The goal is to strengthen data analysis and reporting in service of A&S units. Data management would include analysis of enrollments, number of majors, incoming RAP students, student credit hours, Leaves and Replacement requests, etc.

Improve student experiences and retention

As the College anticipates growth in A&S student numbers through retention, the success of our students is a priority. Staff have an important role in retention efforts: a student-centered approach requires efficient operations and moreover, staff members have frequent contact with students, helping them navigate various CU systems and connecting them with opportunities that enrich their studies. We recognize both the importance and complexity of student retention issues, and our suggestions here are presented as points in a broader conversation across the College and campus.

The goal would be to create a foundation of engagement starting with orientation and continuing through the degree program. Coordinated information among various A&S units supports a strategy of retention throughout students' academic careers. However, on a regular basis, front-line staff hear how frustrating it is for students to go from office to office, trying to get the right form or the correct answer. In addition, students are navigating substantial amounts of information from various communication channels, including campus-wide bulletins and administrative memos via email, websites, and social media. As a College, we can move towards clearer and more integrated ways to communicate and engage with students.

Action items:

1. Establish an ad hoc working group to streamline orientation for A&S students as an important first step in overall retention efforts. The working group's tasks may include examining orientation practices on other CU campuses. Increase partnerships across departments to create clearer orientation procedures for students and staff: a key example

is the partnership among RAP Program Coordinators, Academic Advisors, and the Office of Orientation.

2. Develop more integrated information for students and examine the feasibility of a central resource hub for students that could direct inquiries across the College. The goal would be to assist students with information about College-wide academic opportunities like internships, undergraduate research, and certificates. Additionally, front line staff in academic units could cross-train to provide more consistent information to students across the College.

3. Share best practices for student outreach strategies currently being used or developed by A&S units. Connection to a community can help students thrive on a large campus, and some staff members have already established ways to make students feel connected to their programs, departments, and College. Examples include communication with students in certain GPA ranges about academic opportunities and individualized support, and coordination of student advisory groups that allow students to make suggestions and become involved in the life of the department or program.

Staff Development

The College will operate more effectively if staff members are partners and resources in its work, and if they are seen as integral to its academic mission.

Staff development is an essential aspect of operational efficiency. Well-trained and supported staff members can function at full capacity, which serves everyone in the College and leads to greater productivity, employee retention, and job satisfaction. Moreover, collaboration and shared responsibility among staff, and between staff and faculty, are critical for a well-run college. Because staff are central for successful operations and also impact broader College goals, they affect academic quality and support specific aims identified by the Arts and Sciences Council in its 2013 Academic Quality Initiative report.

A&S staff have well-considered suggestions that address operational problems, but they need venues to voice these ideas, as well as the support to do so. To address operational challenges, staff must be engaged, highly accountable, and recognized not only as tactical partners in the College's work but as strategic partners, as well. We make recommendations in three main areas: 1) redefinition of staff roles; 2) promotion of training and professionalization; and 3) creation of opportunities to network and communicate.

Redefine Roles

It would benefit the College to empower staff members and hold them accountable as stakeholders in its overall success. To this end, we see the need for staff to identify not only with their individual units but also with the College as a whole. Support from the College is key, fostering a culture where staff are invested in outstanding performance and delivering the message that staff perspectives are valuable. There is also a need to increase staff visibility within the College, in part because the wide range of staff roles may not be well understood.

Greater visibility creates greater awareness of staff achievements and professional skills, as well as an understanding of what staff can accomplish in service of their departments and programs.

Given the range of staff positions in the College, gathering better information about staff members' expertise is an important step in redefining their roles. Information on advanced degrees, certifications, language skills, or extensive private sector experience is not available or searchable. While staff members provide this information on their job applications, it is not regularly updated and is not easily accessed through CU-Boulder's Human Resources. Without ready access to this information, the College cannot truly know or utilize the value of its staff. For a better-run College, the entire skillset of the staff can be highlighted, making the best use of human resources.

Should new funding for staff development be made available as a result of the recent campus-wide HR review, the College would benefit from pursuing a portion of that funding. However, in the absence of new resources for salaries and promotions, there are other ways to recognize and reward staff members. Many staff highly value the campus mission and intellectual environment at CU-Boulder, even in a fiscal climate where salary and merit increases are limited. The sense of community on campus, the opportunity to work directly with students, and the chance to participate in educational activities are significant motivators for many staff members. As noted by the Staff and Operations Task Force for CU-Boulder's Flagship 2030 strategic plan, surveys indicate that staff across campus are dedicated and enjoy their work – however, staff morale is affected by an underlying lack of institutional understanding and appreciation for their roles.[4] At the College level, an effort to redefine and recognize those roles would help recruit and retain highly talented staff, an important factor in the long-term health of the College. The ultimate goal would be to establish the College of Arts and Sciences as the "employer of choice" at CU-Boulder.

Action Items

1. Recognize staff expertise and contributions to the work of the College. Examples include encouraging the inclusion of service and leadership activities in annual performance evaluations, establishing College-wide staff recognition programs, and highlighting individual staff members in publications or other forums.

2. Create a database similar to VIVO for faculty, documenting the skills and expertise of A&S staff. Such a database would allow the College and campus to deploy the skillsets of A&S staff, as well as increase staff members' sense of connection to the CU-Boulder community and academic mission. A database would also support future mentorship programs and learning communities, outlined below.

3. Include staff and faculty together on A&S committees in appropriate issue areas to foster a sense of partnership and to draw upon a broader range of expertise.

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[4] Staff and Operations Task Force, *Flagship 2030 Final Report*, September 2008, available at http://www.colorado.edu/flagship2030/sites/default/files/attached-files/TaskForceStaffingOps.pdf.

4. Promote improvements in career advancement and compensation structure. We recommend efforts to establish professional career ladders as a means to retain staff with significant expertise and recruit talented new employees. This process should be informed by data on staff turnover. For example, the reallocation of surplus budget due to staff retirements toward promotions can be investigated.

5. Include staff in strategic plans for the future. Given the budgetary constraints facing the College and campus, we recommend examining additional ways to recognize and develop staff beyond salary increases, such as leadership opportunities.[5] Inclusion of staff in the stated goals and strategy of a unit is another means to recognize staff as part of the College's future.

Train and Professionalize

In many A&S units, staff are the institutional memory, ensuring continuity of services and plans. At the same time, some staff members have growing responsibilities in areas where new training tracks are needed. An integrated approach to hiring and training will result in increased levels of knowledge and support.

Action Items

1. Provide comprehensive onboarding materials for new employees. For staff members new to CU, the number of IT systems, policies, and procedures can be overwhelming, and staff in various academic units with the same duties rarely have formal opportunities to interact. College and unit training plans ensure that staff members are brought up to speed faster, from managing operations to working with students.

2. Create a professional development pool that staff members could apply to for workshops, conferences, and other professional development opportunities. Encourage forums for trainees to share with staff and faculty what was learned. The College of Engineering has an extensive Staff Excellence Program that could be used as a model for a new A&S program, as do peer institutions, such as the University of Washington.[6]

3. Establish incentives for academic units that encourage staff development. Staff members are already motivated to pursue professional development, but their units may not connect staff professional development opportunities to increased skills and job knowledge, or may not see the long-term benefits of short-term impact to staff workloads or schedules. Incentives for units, such as limited financial awards, would help encourage

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[5] "Core Initiative 5: Supporting the Mission" of Chancellor DiStefano's Flagship 2030 progress report in January 2013 included expanded employee leadership programs as a campus priority in the next 18 to 36 months. Available at http://www.colorado.edu/flagship2030/sites/default/files/attached-files/2030%20Progress%20Report%20Final%5B1%5D.pdf.

[6] See the Staff Excellence Program in the College of Engineering, available at http://www.colorado.edu/engineering/sites/default/files/Staff_Excellence_Program.pdf, and the University of Washington Professional Development Grant Program, available at http://depts.washington.edu/psoweb/development/grants/.

a culture of professional development across the College.

4. Develop A&S certifications in areas where staff expertise will benefit units and the College as a whole (e.g., financial management, alumni outreach, or project planning). Identify existing training sessions provided by Human Resources and other campus offices that meet College priorities, and as necessary, modify for content and form. Such training could be provided in modular units during summer and other breaks, taking advantage of staff 12-month work schedules.

Network and Communicate

Isolation and inefficiency are related: when staff members are isolated, they are disconnected from a shared knowledge base. Staff may find themselves constantly reinventing or reestablishing processes about finances, human resources, or curriculum coordination that others have encountered previously.

Here, mentoring is critical and complements a strong framework of new employee orientation. Currently, a new staff member may learn by word of mouth certain procedures and norms of the College and campus. This is not an effective model, and departments and programs lose valuable staff time in the process. Communication networks are a key way to address this cycle, allowing for better sharing and implementation of best practices.

Action Items

1. Enhance networking and mentoring among staff members through learning communities in particular issue areas. These peer-to-peer learning communities, operating online or in person, would contribute to better operation of units. Additionally, learning communities provide new leadership opportunities for staff. Specific steps may include:

   a. Learning communities would create email group forums based on job code and/or subscription, with a searchable record for new staff, similar to the existing Research Administrators group. Such groups could elect officers to coordinate events and monitor emails.
   b. In-person meetings could provide opportunities for informal Q&A and shared best practices. Volunteers from the learning communities can organize meetings, and gathering in different spaces on campus offers a new appreciation for other departments and programs. The initial connection to a learning community could be part of new employee training.
   c. Learning communities could leverage their numbers to obtain group rates for certifications, enhancing job performance and knowledge in their fields. Such certifications include the CPA for accountants, SSCP for IT professionals, and PMP for project managers.

2. Create a voluntary staff mentorship program modeled after existing A&S resources, such as the Early Career Faculty Program run by the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program. It can be difficult for staff members to know where to turn for guidance, especially for sensitive matters concerning human resources or conflict resolution. Staff willing to serve

as mentors could provide a brief bio with areas of expertise and contact information for a section of the A&S website. This could also be accomplished through a staff database similar to VIVO, mentioned above.

3. Develop an annual A&S staff conference along the lines of the University of Michigan StaffWorks.[7] Such a conference would bring together a series of speakers and panels by and for A&S staff. This would support a culture of affiliation and recognition for staff, as well as provide opportunities to share information about new technologies and business practices.

Conclusion

We have put forward ideas to foster a broader conversation in the College about developing staff roles and involvement, improving operations, and strengthening the academic mission. This conversation also involves open communication and collaboration among staff members in our departments, programs, and offices.

The Committee should work with A&S leadership to identity next steps based on the College's priorities and resources. Many suggested courses of action in this report have low budgetary impact or are budget neutral. We understand the fiscal climate on campus and the constraints facing the College. With this in mind, we reiterate our recommendation that the College consider additional ways beyond salary to recognize staff, and that surplus budget from staff retirements be investigated for professional career ladders. The College would benefit from thinking strategically about how it uses the funds it does have for staff, and what kind of staff members it wants to recruit, train, and develop.

We recommend that the College's goals for its staff be shared with both staff and faculty. Including College and faculty leadership in staff development plans supports the operation of the College as a whole.

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[7] University of Michigan Voices of the Staff, "StaffWorks, Best Practices and Technology Conference," available at http://hr.umich.edu/voices/staffworks/.

Appendix 1: College of Arts and Sciences Staff Demographics, Spring 2014[8]

<u>A&S Classified and University Staff</u>

Classified	224
University	156
Total	**380**

<u>Gender</u>

Males	107
Females	273
Total	**380**

<u>Level of Education</u>

Not disclosed	70
High school or GED	13
Two-year college, technical school, some college	44
Associates	1
BA, BFA, BEd, BS, and some grad	120
MA, MBA, MBS, MAEd, MS, MFA, etc.	105
PhD, MD, DDS, JD	27
Total	**380**

<u>Ethnicity</u>

African American	2
American Indian	1
Asian American	15
Hispanic	24
Multiracial	6
Caucasian	332
	380

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[8] Data provided by Arts and Sciences Human Resources. The Office of Planning, Budget and Analysis (PBA) does not have current data that compares CU-Boulder staffing levels to those of AAU peer institutions. We suggest that the Committee work with PBA to obtain data in this area.