

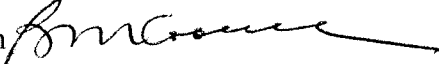
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

College of Liberal Arts
Office of the Dean

December 8, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: Jeffery S. Vitter, Executive Vice President for Academics and Provost

From: Ben M. Crouch, Executive Associate Dean 

Subject: College of Liberal Arts Research Plan

On behalf of Dean Johnson, I am pleased to forward the College of Liberal Arts Research Plan as part of Texas A&M University's Academic Master Plan.

The attached document was developed through a process overseen by an ad hoc Research Strengths Committee of faculty chaired by Dean Johnson. The Dean's Executive Council (all department heads), the Liberal Arts Council (elected faculty from each unit), and faculty at large reviewed and provided feedback on the plan through presentations by the dean and drafts posted on the college website. Our research plan reflects faculty and program strengths, advances Vision 2020 and will guide personnel and programming decisions over the next decade.

Please let us know if you need further information.

Attachment

cc: Charles A. Johnson, Dean

College of Liberal Arts Research Plan

December, 2008

The College of Liberal Arts encompasses a dramatic range of scholarly interests exploring the human condition from the perspectives of humanists, social and behavioral scientists, and performing artists. The college supports individual scholars and interdisciplinary groups through organized research units such as the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research and the Public Policy Research Institute, as well as through college-funded scholarly awards for faculty initiated research projects, funding supplements for such activities as international and residential fellowships, start-up funding for newly hired faculty, and appointments to endowed positions for faculty with outstanding records for scholarship, teaching, and service.

The eclectic and dynamic academic interests found among the college's 400 tenured and tenure-track faculty requires broad interpretations of research strengths in the College of Liberal Arts and a flexible plan for research program development in the coming decade. Recognizing that solitary thinking characterizes research and creative activities in several disciplines, the college aims to support excellence by individual scholars. We also aim to support excellence in disciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work where scholarly interactions and collaboration extend our knowledge about the world in which we live – past and present.

Research Strengths

Five research strengths for the College of Liberal Arts have emerged from a process in which faculty were invited to recommend areas for college research strengths, discussions occurred with the Executive Council and the Liberal Arts Council, and proposals were widely shared and reviewed by an ad hoc Research Strengths Advisory Committee. This section lists and describes the five research strengths identified by these processes within the College. These strengths are both disciplinary and multidisciplinary, representing concentrations of scholarship within specific departments and centers, as well as work which cuts across two or more liberal arts programs.

Diversity and Society

This research strength recognizes that the human experience involves the social categorization and construction of differing groups. Liberal Arts scholars study diversity in social, historical, and cultural contexts. They address disparities in education, health care, and economic opportunities that can result from differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disabilities, and social class. Research in the college has focused on the consequences of social categorization for societies, organizations, and individuals. Additionally, scholarly interests include research on diversity resulting from large population changes which have long-term implications for opportunities and challenges in society – locally and globally. Scholarly inquiry is also directed toward the recognition that different groups use various forms of expression in art, literature, film, and other media in different places and at different times, and that part of the human experience involves learning to interpret and appreciate such varied styles of self-expression.

Governance, Social Institutions, and Behavior

The central focus of this research strength is the theoretical and empirical analysis of international, governmental, non-governmental, and social institutions. These analyses include the development of theory, the collection and analysis of data, and the discussion of implications for society. The scholarship on American political institutions and behavior illuminates the practice of democracy in America. The research examines governance across nations, thus bringing greater understanding to politics from a comparative perspective. This research strength also includes the empirical examination of families and family relationships, including their development over

time. Empirical examination of complex organizations contributes to this research strength by focusing on including how organizations change, how they respond to their environment, and how they resolve conflicts and crises.

Culture and Change

This research strength in the college encompasses an examination and appreciation of the content of cultures, the media, and dynamics of cultural exchanges around the world in the present and across time. Liberal Arts scholarship advances an understanding of the centrality of culture in defining, valuing and revaluing, and constraining human relations, productions, and behaviors. This research includes the discovery and preservation of materials from cultures in the past, and the application of new technologies to advance new modes of research on the human past. Scholarship extends and deepens our understanding of culture and change in the human experience as preserved in the arts, letters, artifacts, and other historical evidence, and expressed in contemporary media and popular culture. Scholars explore the ethical implications of challenges facing society and changing values across cultures.

Transnationalism, Globalization, and International Systems

The college's research strength in internationalism focuses on the growing interdependence between countries, international flows of people, ideas, culture, communication, technology, capital, and goods and services, and conflicts between nations and with terrorist groups. Research strengths include area specialists in Latin America, Europe, and Asia (especially China) who explore social, economic, and political conditions in single nation-states and multiple countries in comparative studies. Researchers illuminate the roles of media by focusing on communication systems for international information, images, ideas, and cultural materials. Scholars examine patterns of international relations among nation-states, including economic relations, national and international security, and political violence.

Health, Human Wellness, and Health Care

Research strength in the area of health and health care encompasses medical/physical, mental, and psychological well-being, human development and aging, and the organized and institutionalized provision of healthcare and its associated social services. Researchers examine the contributions of basic neuroscience research to understand drug abuse, the effects of stress, and the recovery of physical functions affected by disease or accidents. Researchers focusing on factors affecting mental health and well-being include those examining children and family health care needs, interpersonal relations, stress and deviance, and substance abuse. The role of communication in public health campaigns and doctor-patient communications are subjects of researchers in this area of research strength. Researchers explore health policy by examining micro, meso, and macro factors affecting health care markets, government policies and spending, and generational implications for health care.

Research Plans for Liberal Arts

The College of Liberal Arts' current research strengths emerged from targeted initiatives during the past two decades. In the 1980s, for example, the college's Departmental Development Grants (DDGs) led to the articulation of "leadership" as a research strength in political science which, in turn, contributed to that department's emergence as a top-10 department in public institutions. Similarly, a DDG funded a group of faculty in the Department of English pursuing a common research interest in Historical Literary Studies. This initiative eventually led to creation of a center for humanities research that only a few years ago received a substantial endowment gift from Melbern and Susie Glasscock. These are only two of many, many scholarly initiatives that have directly strengthened scholarship and creative work in liberal arts. More recent investments have included the creation of research centers focusing on race and ethnicity, the funding of interdisciplinary programs and faculty positions, and the allocation of reinvestment faculty positions to build specific fields in several departments.

Given the nature of scholarship in this college, we will continue to make targeted investments for exceptional scholarly plans and to support demonstrated success across the variety of fields represented in the college. In making future investments, the College of Liberal Arts will pursue three specific objectives:

- Encourage departments and interdisciplinary programs to identify areas of scholarly and teaching excellence that will clearly lead to levels of national prominence consistent with Texas A&M University's aim to be a top-10 public institution by 2020
- Support the development and enhancement of research infrastructure to advance individual scholarship and interdisciplinary research in the humanities, arts, and social sciences
- Promote the five research strengths identified in this report as targets for investment of research funds, programmatic development, and external funding

These objectives are not mutually exclusive, but instead are intended to be interactive; and we will aim to pursue policies and make decisions that will maximize outcomes for each objective.

National Prominence for Departments and Interdisciplinary Programs

Nationally prominent disciplinary departments and interdisciplinary programs are key features of every nationally visible university. Top-10 public universities host a number of top-10 to top-25 departments and programs that bring national visibility to the entire academic enterprise. Moreover, those nationally prominent departments and programs represent a wide-ranging sample of liberal arts and sciences disciplines, as well as professional programs in technology, business, architecture, education, and other professional areas.

The College of Liberal Arts will encourage departments and interdisciplinary programs to build areas of national distinction, usually by emphasizing excellence in a defined number of fields or by embracing an overarching theme by which to demonstrate significance and excellence. The college will support these goals through resource allocations based on the "Indicators of Success" program and periodic program reviews.

Development and Enhancement of Research Infrastructure

While much scholarship and creative work in the humanities, arts, and social sciences involves individual scholars pursuing individual projects, it is imperative that the university and college provide the infrastructure needed to support that work. This infrastructure comes in a variety of forms and means.

First, library resources are critically important – up-to-date journals and books, electronic databases, and primary source collections are essential to support world-class scholarship.

Second, funding is critical for pilot projects leading to external grant applications, internal grants to encourage research program development, travel grants to collections and international conferences, start-up accounts for newly hired faculty, and departmental operating expenses to support routine faculty research.

Third, base support for research programs, centers, and institutes is essential to encourage the kinds of interaction and collaboration that mark the very best scholarly programs in top-tier universities. This base support varies by program, and the sources may vary from state appropriations, returned indirect costs, or private endowment funds. Regardless of its source, base support for faculty workshops, core facilities, and integrated projects can make the difference between routine scholarship and high impact scholarship.

The Glasscock Center for Humanities Research has provided vital support for humanities scholars in the College of Liberal Arts and throughout Texas A&M University. This critical infrastructure for the humanities needs to be matched by an overarching institute for social science research. This institute would serve the needs of social scientists in the college and across the university, encourage collaboration among social scientists, and support the acquisition of large-scale grants in key areas of research strength. Base funding for this institution is needed for FY10 through FY12 as a combination of private and external grant funding is acquired to support development of this critical infrastructure.

Fourth, buildings and facilities whose quality, size, and location enhance scholarly development, interactions, and collaboration are essential. At present, liberal arts faculty and programs are housed in buildings whose quality ranges from outstanding to embarrassing. Many of our faculty and programs are crammed into spaces that are simply inadequate and provide no room for growth. Our programs are scattered on east and west campuses with two premier social science programs in the Bush Presidential Library Complex. Additionally, we have psychology laboratories and offices scattered over five buildings of varying quality. The college must work with the university and with private donors to plan a social science building to house the Departments of Political Science, Economics, and Sociology; a social science institute; and a mix of large and small classrooms. The Department of Psychology needs a single large building or the development of contiguous buildings surrounding the current Psychology Building location. Finally, the Academic Building, which currently houses the Departments of Hispanic Studies, European and Classical Languages and Cultures, Sociology, and Performance Studies and the Arabic and Asian Languages Program, needs serious renovation and updating. While the exterior has been well maintained and some interior spaces have been renovated, the interior of this much beloved and often photographed building needs updating, renovation, and restoration.

Promoting College Research Strengths

Each of the college's research strengths is characterized by (1) nationally visible senior faculty; (2) research published in the very best venues; (3) high-achieving faculty across all ranks; (4) identifiable support for high-impact research in the area; and (5) representation of multiple departments. The college will seek to build on these essential elements for defined research strengths by policies and initiatives that would strengthen departments and encourage multidisciplinary interactions and collaborations. Toward these ends, the college intends to pursue the following initiatives.

First, the college will encourage departments and interdisciplinary programs to maximize opportunities to add to college research strengths through new or replacement faculty positions. Teaching and distributional needs in a department may take precedence in some instances, but the college will encourage flexibility and creativity by departments and interdisciplinary programs as they consider new faculty hires.

Second, the college will provide funding to support working groups of faculty from three or more departments wishing to build scholarly communities within these research strengths. These scholarly communities should aim to enhance the research strength as a result of their proposed interaction or collaboration. External funding and awards will be of high priority in supporting these working groups.

Third, the college will work with department heads, interdisciplinary program directors, and the College of Liberal Arts Planning and Resources Committee to review periodically progress on current research strengths and the identification of possible new research strengths. Over time, achievements by current and newly hired faculty, changes in funding opportunities, and the emergence of new research issues may lead to new research strengths in the college and university. We must be prepared to change direction, make additions, and reconsider prior commitments if warranted by changing circumstances.