

**Strengthening University-Wide Interdisciplinarity
University Strategic Planning Task Force
Charge Meeting**

February 21, 2020
Winslow Hall

In Attendance: Paul Lunn, Fred Wright, Jenny Evans, John Begeny, Kevin FitzGerald, Peter Harries, Bob Kelly, Jane Lubischer, Mostakima Lubna, Ross Meentemeyer, Jorge Piedrahita, Joshua Pierce and Rob Smart. Owen Duckworth, Amy Grunden, Blair Kelley and Bret Smith attended via phone. Warwick Arden, Margery Overton and Kelly Wick were also in attendance.

Not in Attendance: Jason Delborne, Sarah Desmarais, David Hawley, Jonathan Horowitz, Jennifer Kuzma and Chris McGahan.

Charge and Discussion with Provost Arden

Provost Arden opened the meeting and gave the committee its charge. He stated that while we have come a long way in expanding interdisciplinarity we still have many more opportunities for progress. He aspires for NC State to be a leader in interdisciplinarity amongst land-grant universities. Concepts discussed included:

- Cluster hires
- Possible new interdisciplinary units, even perhaps schools
- What do we need to do over the next 5 years?
- Next 10 years?

Action items for the Task Force include:

- The report should be 5-25 pages, not prescriptive.
- The report is due at the beginning of June.
- Look at the realistic appraisal of where gaps are now.
- Review progress over the last 10 years.
- Then, focus on three - five thematic areas with strategies and actions under each.
 - Do not spend too much time on implementation planning.
 - Do not consider the budgetary constraints.
 - This should be “big picture, bold ideas” instead of a small number of medium ideas.

Overton: She reminded the group these are open meetings. You may get comments through the website. Kelly Wick will set up a Google Drive folder for the committee. Meeting schedule and time is up to the group to decide. Goal is to approve and post minutes within 3-4 days of each meeting.

Provost: The questions from the Leadership Retreat in September helped form these task forces. There will be monthly co-chair meetings with the Provost. There will not be grand meetings with members of all the task force members coming together as that would be over 160 individuals.

He also said it is important to keep in mind that instruction, teaching, learning, discovery, bold moves, structures, etc. all come together with interdisciplinarity. We have made significant

progress on graduate interdisciplinarity but need to make more progress in undergraduate interdisciplinarity. What practical steps do we have to take at a university to make this a reality?

Wright: The committee should draft a definition of interdisciplinarity, detail the benefits of interdisciplinarity, and define the scope of what interdisciplinarity success would mean.

Lunn: What will it look like if we succeed?

Provost: It is challenging to generate measurements of interdisciplinarity success, and this was the experience with the last strategic plan. The CFEP program was one of the most significant innovations in this area with proposals coming from the faculty. Administrator-generated programs are less likely to generate enthusiasm.

Lunn: We need to consider how interdisciplinarity connects us beyond NC State. For example, with regional and local partners.

Provost: He is a member of several Triangle-based groups. We need to have internal strength and come to the table as a strong player. What structures do we need internally so that we play well with others? (Note: The Leveraging Partnerships to Advance Engagement Task Force is focusing on this as well).

Smart: Should we be thinking of research strengths put forth by the Office of Research and Innovation?

Provost: We should be aware of what research strengths already exists at NC State. There is only one university strategic plan process. We must think as one university.

Lunn: We need to really think in terms that engage our whole campus, and avoid too much "granularity". We are trying to develop ideas that could support the bigger picture.

Provost: This task force is instrumental in developing the big picture ideas of how we can improve interdisciplinarity. We are not where the university wants it to be now.

Lunn: The Cluster Faculty Hires were certainly a very successful program, but we saw instances where departments were reluctant to participate because incoming faculty did not fit neatly under the discipline of specific departments. This is antithetical to the idea of interdisciplinarity.

General Discussion

Provost: The generation of new faculty that we are working to hire want to work at universities with interdisciplinarity opportunities and where they will be rewarded for their work in this area. Faculty are what makes universities successful, not administrators. It is important to create a structure that will recruit and retain strong individuals.

Harries: Students are also looking for interdisciplinarity opportunities.

Piedrahita: We must discuss dealing with issues with interdisciplinarity today instead of what we did 10 years ago.

Harries: It would be good to get the reports from the strategic plan and other interdisciplinary reports from the past.

Wright: There are about 50 institutes or centers on this campus. These are reviewed every five years. The criteria for success is working with other institutions. Getting an understanding of challenges these institutes and centers face could be a good starting point. There is a reason separate disciplines still exist. It will be important to maintain strong individual disciplines to support interdisciplinarity. Potential questions before our next meeting:

- How do we view interdisciplinarity?
- How can the interdisciplinarity strengthen the university at the undergraduate and graduate level?

Lubischer: Suggest looking at the successes and barriers to the institutes and centers. What structural changes were made over the last 10 years?

Piedrahita: It might be good to find out current status.

Lunn: Would it be worth creating a survey to send out soon?

Wright: It should be easy to gauge graduate interdisciplinarity but harder to identify undergraduate interdisciplinarity on our campus.

Overton: The timeline is tight for surveys. There could be a way to gather information already available. Several data (e.g., COACHE Survey) is available on the website. You could also consider doing focus groups.

Lunn: The Task Force Charge is a great way to approach this. Instead of surveys we could hold Town Hall meetings after defining the successes and barriers of interdisciplinarity. Get input from the campus from these forums.

Smart: It is important to get everyone in the room to get the baseline foundation together first and then go from there.

Meentemeyer: It would be helpful for everyone to share their experience with interdisciplinarity.

Brief Overview of Interdisciplinarity Experience of Task Force Members

Meentemeyer: He came to NCSU for the interdisciplinarity research opportunity. He is now part of an interdisciplinarity program.

Harries: He comes to the Task Force from the graduate program perspective and fields the concerns from the DGPs.

Lubna: From a graduate student perspective, she was looking for interdisciplinarity research.

Pierce: He is associate director of CMI and has worked with a lot of people to build interdisciplinarity programs. There is a lot of issues with "who owns what and who pays for what" approach.

Wright: He is most familiar with the issues on the research side.

FitzGerald: His concerns about interdisciplinarity is it is easy to play "small ball" and we need to focus on big picture issues as much as we can.

Smart: He came here thinking about interdisciplinarity research. He is a cluster hire lead. He has faculty from 15 departments and seven colleges. Biggest barriers: very human health centric but works with a lot of people involved in other environments.

Lubischer: Her focus is on undergraduate programs. Administratively, all of her programs are under one college. She has been wanting to change how freshman and sophomores are taught in different disciplines.

Piedrahita: He leads a program that involves three different universities, so not just programs at NC State.

Begeny: Interdisciplinarity is at the core of his teaching and scholarship. He will bring a lens of community engagement and cross-disciplinary.

Kelly: He is part of a faculty group of interdisciplinarity.

Lunn: As a clinician, much of what he did in his career is interdisciplinary by nature, and that is the case for much of the work in his college. However, where we underperform is in teaching and where disciplines are taught in silos, which is not how our students will work in the future.

Kelley: She is familiar with challenges of interdisciplinarity in instruction, especially departmental "credit" for teaching.

Next steps

Co-chairs will formulate a more detailed agenda for the next meeting.

The next meeting will be Friday, February 28 from 3-5 p.m. in Winslow Hall Conference Room.