

The Path Forward
M. Katherine Banks
Texas A&M University President
December 14, 2021

“The recommendations in this report provide both direct and indirect pathways to achieve TAMU’s goal of becoming a globally recognized, top-tier institution. Keys to achieving that goal include greater collaboration, transparency, strong operational accountability, and effective use of TAMU’s wide range of talent, research, and resources. The recommendations throughout this report are designed to ultimately benefit students, faculty, and staff, along with state-wide constituents and stakeholders, furthering TAMU’s land-grant mission.” – MGT Report

I would like to express my appreciation to all who reviewed the MGT report and engaged in thoughtful commentary. Individual input on the website, as well as many emails, surveys and reports have been extremely helpful. Like those who have shared input, I, too, found the report to include some good ideas, some that require modifications, and some that I do not believe are necessary or appropriate for our university.

As I reflected on the report and stakeholder input, and considered the optimal organizational structure of our university, several issues became clear. The role of university president and structure of the president’s office varies across academe and must be flexible to meet the needs of the institution. I believe our university is at a critical juncture where the chief executive officer must be better integrated with the academic mission of the institution. It is my responsibility to be appropriately involved in key aspects of university leadership while engaging fully in oversight of the teaching, research and service mission of Texas A&M University.

Ultimately, my goal is to build upon the tremendous strengths, investments and culture of Texas A&M to maintain the upward trajectory. Many of the recommendations I support are a continuation or culmination of the *Vision 2020* roadmap. We will not make structural changes just for the sake of change. But there are recommendations in the report that will help this institution grow even stronger while also respecting and embracing our unique mission, traditions and history. The leadership team and I are committed to helping this great institution advance without losing who and what is at its core.

The following is a summary of my decisions on key recommendations; however, the Board of Regents has final approval authority on many of these actions. Further approvals will be necessary throughout this process. While not every recommendation is discussed in detail, there is a description of next steps at the end of the document. You will also find a summary table with decisions for each recommendation along with the name of the implementation leader on the website.

Provost Office

As the report noted, the span of responsibilities in the Office of the Provost had expanded and become extremely broad and complex. Based on the recommendations and significant input, we will reorganize the Office of the Provost to allow sharper focus on excellence and full engagement in the academic life of the university. To underscore this critically important role in the health of our institution, the provost title will be changed to “provost and chief academic officer.”

Some faculty expressed concerns about presidential influence inhibiting academic freedom. I assure you that I respect the role of the provost and the importance of the office. However, the impact of the office will be enhanced by allowing the provost to focus on the excellence of academics, without other responsibilities that distract or dilute that purpose. This change in the administrative structure will also allow the provost to engage more fully with university leadership to work as a team to ensure broad success.

Another recommendation that solicited strong response from faculty, staff and students was to centralize undergraduate advising at the university level. I will not accept that recommendation but will make a limited modification to the existing structure.

Currently, all but two of our colleges have college-based advising reporting structures. I will be charging the two colleges without college-centralized advising to move to a unified administrative advising reporting structure. The Provost will be responsible for ensuring that all Colleges follow unified guidelines, reporting, and processes, and will convene the advising College leaders often to confirm that

advising across the university is of the highest quality. In addition, we will adopt a campus-wide common advising platform and software to improve student service, particularly for those who transfer between colleges.

The report called for elevation of the Higher Education Center at McAllen. I wholeheartedly agree. I believe all of our remote programs are crucial to reaching students statewide, delivering quality education and ensuring community outreach – all part of our Land Grant mission. We will provide increased focus on efforts to enhance our branch campuses and teaching sites in Qatar, South Texas-McAllen, Houston-EnMed, Fort Worth/Dallas and Galveston.

Faculty Affairs

One of my primary concerns as I moved into university leadership is the inefficiency and excessive requirements of our faculty processes in general. Our faculty are performing groundbreaking research, teaching large classes, and connecting to the world through remarkable service, but are also expected to complete increasing amounts of administrative tasks. Too often, they are not recognized for their exceptional efforts and accomplishments. To address these issues and elevate faculty interests, I support the recommendation to create a Vice President for Faculty Affairs. Because of the importance of this role, this position will report directly to me and will effectively replace and elevate the current Dean of Faculty. The vice president of faculty affairs should be a senior-level tenured faculty member with extensive experience and knowledge of current faculty systems and processes at Texas A&M. I will be moving forward to create this position immediately, establishing a selection committee consisting of me, Interim Provost Tim Scott, Chief Operating Officer Greg Hartman, Interim Vice-President of Research Jack Baldauf, and Speaker of Faculty Senate Dale Rice. I am requesting that Texas A&M faculty interested in serving in this important role submit a letter of interest and CV to me by January 7, 2022. An email providing more information about the position duties and requirements will be distributed soon.

Academic and Strategic Collaboration

I strongly support the section of the report that reimagines the Land Grant institution through the recently formed Office of Academic and Strategic

Collaboration. Texas A&M must refresh how we serve the needs of Texas. This new office will bring several key initiatives together to ensure the relationships between the university and the state of Texas are fostered in ways that enhance our impact.

The report recommends moving a number of campus units to the new office. I agree with the recommended transfer of organizations, with the exception of the Music Activities Center and the Cushing Library. The Music Activities Center will eventually be transferred to the new Performing Arts program. Until that initiative is underway, the Music Activities Center will remain under the Division of Student Affairs while also developing a close link with our new focus on the arts. The Cushing Library will remain under the direction of University Libraries. One additional program that will benefit greatly by placement in this new office is the Public Policy Internship Program.

The Office of Academic and Strategic Collaboration will utilize its many connections to ensure families statewide are informed of the educational opportunities at Texas A&M. This effort, however, will focus solely on recruitment, and will include the centralization and coordination of college/unit recruiters. The MGT recommendation included retention, but that function will remain in the Office of the Provost.

The report also recommended moving the reporting structure of the Vice President for Diversity. However, this recommendation will not be accepted and the position will continue to report directly to the President.

Texas A&M has invested significant resources to broadly serve the state of Texas. The majority of these outreach programs and initiatives are impactful. If not, they should be eliminated. This is a critical component of continuous assessment and will become a more formalized process managed by this new office.

This Office of Academic and Strategic Collaboration will be instrumental in ensuring cultural events occurring on our campus are coordinated with the cities of Bryan and College Station, and Brazos County. As we continue to expand our role as a cultural hub, we should create a welcoming gateway into our world-class university. Toward this end, I support the construction of a performing arts center, a Texas A&M museum, a Texas A&M/AgriLife hospitality center, and

expansion of our campus gardens. Of note, the Board of Regents must approve all capital projects.

Academic Realignment

As stated in the report, “coherent, strategic academic organization centralization and targeted realignment of academic units would greatly enhance operations and unit focus. This will ultimately increase the effectiveness and strength of the academic units and colleges, elevate student success, and further major university initiatives.”

I was pleased to see recommendations that aligned with the seminal Vision 2020 plan. In that document, “Imperative 4. Build the Letters, Arts, and Sciences Core” describes how Texas A&M “will never be seen as a premier institution nationally without a far stronger letters, arts, and sciences program.” In the MGT report feedback, some questioned why a STEM-based institution would deviate from its position of strength in agriculture and engineering to enhance the arts. However, at many institutions, the arts and sciences serve as the center-point of the university, the foundation upon which all degrees are built. We must step forward to strengthen this core of our institution. It is a bold step, but I believe the correct one to take. We will bring together the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Geosciences and Science to form the College of Arts and Sciences. This merging of arts and sciences will create a critical mass by which all programs will benefit. To succeed, we must develop a fully integrated administrative operation from the beginning. In the next few weeks, we will identify an implementation working group led by the Provost, identify an acting/interim dean through the appropriate university processes, and begin to build the college structure. In addition to full integration of the three colleges, there may be the opportunity to consider other administrative unit consolidation as working group discussions progress. The new College will be fully operational by September 1, 2022.

I also support the creation of a School of Visual and Performing Arts, of which the Department of Visualization will become a cornerstone. I am open to further discussion about the administrative location of this new unit. There were many positive comments in support of this recommendation, including proposed strategies to strengthen the popular Visualization degree program, and consolidation and expansion of other arts majors. We will identify an implementation working group led by Greg Hartman, identify an administrative leader, determine investments needed for success, and build the new

administrative structure. The location of the School will be in the new Performing Arts Center.

The recommendation to establish a Department of Journalism cited the opportunity to increase media literacy and capabilities of our graduates. There is a significant need for Aggie journalists committed to upholding our core values and the tenets of journalism. Many alumni of our former journalism program have expressed strong support and interest in reviving this program. I agree and accept this recommendation; however, more discussion is needed about the administrative home of this unit.

The Bush School is one of the most impactful and nationally influential academic units at Texas A&M. The connection with the Bush Foundation/Library and the new Washington, D.C. teaching center is unique and provides an excellent opportunity to broaden our academic reach. However, the full potential of this unit has not been realized throughout campus due to the lack of undergraduate programs and limited engagement with students and academic units across the university. A major initiative with appropriate investment is needed to showcase and expand this exceptional School.

I support the recommendation to invest in and significantly expand the Bush School, including consolidation with the Department of Political Science and the International Studies Program. This reorganization would eliminate redundancy between programs and would create synergy between units with similar interests and focus. Of note, the International Studies Program is currently housed in the Department of International Studies, which includes the language programs. This merger will only involve the International Studies academic programs and faculty. The language programs will be located to the new College of Arts and Science in an appropriate unit. The working group, led by Dean Mark Welsh, will develop an implementation plan and assessment of resources needed for success.

Another section of the report that yielded significant and thoughtful commentary was the recommendation to create an Institute of Biological Life Sciences in AgriLife, which would contain the Department of Biology and the Biomedical Sciences Program. I believe both of these programs belong with the sciences in the new College of Arts and Sciences, which will require the Biomedical Sciences program to be shifted to the new college. Of note, there will be no change in the

Biomedical Sciences degree requirements, only a new administrative home. This will allow our veterinary medicine college to focus on its professional degree, expand the research portfolio, and design and construct a new state-of-the-art small animal teaching hospital.

Placement of the Department of Biology and the Biomedical Sciences program within the same college provides the foundation for a life science meta-major. The meta-major approach allows students to generally select life science as major, complete a common first year while learning about the different majors available in life science across campus, and then move into upper-level courses seamlessly in year two after a major is identified. A life science meta-major approach would reduce change of major delays, increase retention, and decrease time to degree. Therefore, as a modification to this recommendation and to build upon the co-location of two large undergraduate biology programs in the new College of Arts and Sciences, a life science meta-major proposal will be developed by a working group led by Tim Scott.

The University Studies program was developed to provide an opportunity for students to create an interdisciplinary degree program outside of traditional pathways. It was not intended to replace or substitute for degree programs within a college. To ensure that our University Studies students are advised and mentored appropriately, we will consolidate all University Studies programs within a new unit, Interdisciplinary Programs, located administratively within the College of Arts and Sciences.

The new Interdisciplinary Programs academic unit would administratively include the University Studies Program, Transition Academic Studies Program, Biomedical Sciences Undergraduate Program, all interdisciplinary undergraduate degree programs, and appropriate interdisciplinary graduate degree programs. The University Studies students will be able to continue in a program track within a College or School, only the administrative oversight for the program will be changed. Also, additional resources for and support of a refocused pre-professional advising program located in this unit will benefit students across campus.

The report recommended placement of the University Libraries into the new College of Arts and Sciences with a new Department of Library Sciences. Based on

a variety of stakeholder feedback, I am going to modify that recommendation. There is no doubt that the libraries provide a critically important service for the entire campus. Therefore, I agree that the University Libraries does not belong within one college and Cushing Library should remain within the libraries. However, I do believe that a significant change is needed in the administrative structure of the libraries. The University Libraries will be administratively modified to become a service unit to efficiently and effectively provide top quality service to the campus community. The leader of this administrative unit will be the University Librarian, which will replace the current Dean of Libraries, and will report directly to the Provost. As a service unit, the University Libraries will no longer serve as a tenure home for faculty. Tenured and tenure-track faculty currently in University Libraries will be accommodated in a new departmental home with a full-time appointment in the University Libraries service unit.

Perhaps the largest amount of feedback provided by numerous stakeholder groups was regarding the possible move of the Department of Construction Science from the College of Architecture. The feedback overwhelmingly underscored the unique workforce developed within the program. I agree with the majority of the comments and this program will remain in the College of Architecture.

Several recommendations addressed operations in the Health Science Center. The first suggested implementation of the recommendations from the recent "Texas A&M Health Administrative Organization Structure and Budget Assessment." I support this recommendation and others related to Texas A&M-Health.

The MGT Report proposed refocusing the College of Education and Human Development on the core mission of producing educators by moving the Department of Health and Kinesiology and the Technology Management Degree program to appropriate units within Texas A&M University. This recommendation requires modification to clarify the components of the department which requires realignment.

The Department of Health and Kinesiology has four divisions: Health Education, Kinesiology, Sport Management and Physical Education Activity Programs. Only one division has a health education mission. Three of the divisions will remain in

the current department; Kinesiology, Sport Management and Physical Education Activity Programs. However, to address duplication in programs, the health education division and all health education programs will move to the School of Public Health, including clinical research facilities associated with the division. Furthermore, the departmental name should be changed to the Department of Kinesiology and Sports Management to reflect this transfer and avoid confusion about our health programs in the future. The transfer process will be led by Jon Mogford and an implementation working group will be established to develop a plan of action.

I also support the recommendation to move the Technology Management Degree Program to the Department of Engineering Technology and Industrial Distribution. However, the program should be managed jointly with the College of Education and Human Development to ensure the multidisciplinary nature of the degree continues to be impactful.

To reduce redundancy and encourage additional collaboration between AgriLife and Veterinary Medicine, I support shifting the administrative management of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences research grants and facilities to AgriLife. However, determination of which facilities to be transferred will be made through working group discussions led by Jack Baldauf.

There is one additional change that I believe is necessary as we clarify our vision and administrative structure. That is the name of our administrative units. It has been noted for decades by both external and internal stakeholders that there is a great deal of confusion about the unit name of college or school. We currently have Schools of Law, Business, Public Health, and Government and Public Service that serve the same function as colleges. In fact, some of the current schools are significantly larger in students, faculty, facilities, and research productivity than existing colleges. Therefore, I believe it is time to appropriately modify our unit names with the understanding that no changes other than the name will be made in structure, funding, control, or academic offerings. Since the colleges of Architecture, Veterinary Medicine, Education, and all in the HSC (Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry and Pharmacy) are singularly focused on applied programs with a clearly defined mission and focus, I propose that the unit's name be changed to School and they become the Schools of Architecture, Veterinary Medicine, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, and Pharmacy. Since the new

College of Arts and Science will have a broad mission, and the Colleges of Engineering and Agriculture and Life Sciences are broadly engaged in both an academic mission and a state-wide focus through the state agencies, they would remain as Colleges. This proposal will be discussed with the impacted parties and accreditation organizations, and would be effective after appropriate approvals are granted.

Finally, although the organizational structure of the Galveston campus was not reviewed in this process, an internal review will commence soon to determine if administrative changes are needed at our remote locations to improve connectivity with the College Station academic units.

Student Affairs

Students are the heart of our university. Careful evaluation of our administrative operations is required to ensure that we are appropriately organized to maximize the education and experience we deliver to students.

The recommendation to expand High Impact Practices (HIP) through reorganization and alignment of functions and programming was favorably received across all stakeholders. Especially popular was the expansion and integration of Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) into Texas A&M Health. The holistic health of our students is critically important and I have already approved new investments to increase mental health resources on our campus. Planning is underway to implement these changes and others to improve access to health services across Texas A&M.

Another recommendation was to move the Public Policy Internship Program to Student Affairs. However, that program will move to the Office of Academic and Strategic Collaborations, allowing the university to capitalize on external engagement opportunities. The Money Education Center will be relocated to Student Affairs where it will be positioned to have even greater impact.

One issue that received significant input was the reassignment of the Veterans Services Office to Student Affairs. The name of this office may incorrectly describe

its function, which is to facilitate business processes related to financial aid. We will investigate the title of this office and carefully place these operations to ensure optimal effectiveness. Texas A&M continues to be a nationally-recognized campus for veteran-friendly support and offers many resources through the Knauss Veteran Resource and Support Center.

One area where the feedback was markedly split referenced the alignment of student organization management practices to ensure transparency and accountability. To summarize, many students were not supportive of increased oversight for recognized university student organizations whereas former students, faculty, and staff, while acknowledging the importance of learning by doing, felt the institution has a responsibility to ensure these high impact learning experiences align with the mission of the university.

I believe an important aspect of this recommendation is balance, clarity, consistency, and accountability in the operation of university-recognized student organizations, not control. We will proceed with the recommendation along with a review of the current requirements for the 1,200 campus organizations. This process will include significant dialogue with our students. Implementation of the recommendation and the review will be the responsibility of the interim vice president of student affairs along with a working group of students, faculty and staff to determine where improvements are needed.

Facilities, Finance/Business Administration, HR, IT, Marketing and Communications

As I reviewed every one of the over 3,000 comments, emails, and surveys submitted about the report, it became apparent that certain words were interpreted differently. It was clear that the term “centralization” has a variety of meanings across stakeholder groups. I would like to underscore that centralization of function does not necessarily require removing employees from current duties or locations. However, it should produce better professional alignment and oversight. Many staff members across campus have similar titles and duties but a limited career path, salary equity challenges, and lack mentorship opportunities. We have tremendous talent throughout our university,

but have not formalized professional development for succession, that is, growing leadership from within our ranks.

The report evaluated the broad areas of shared services: facilities, finance/business administration, HR, IT, and marketing and communications, and recommended a centralized structure. There are advantages and disadvantages in this model, but I believe centralizing functional lines while maintaining deployment of employees in the units is appropriate. Clear service expectations will need to be developed collaboratively. The key to the success of this new model will be communication, accountability, and a commitment to excellent customer service. As was noted in the report, it also will be critically important to include all university units in the centralization process, including Athletics.

Each of these service units will move to a centralized administrative structure. Each leader of these areas has past experience with centralization of large units and will ensure continuity and elevation of services in a spirit of collaboration and excellent customer service.

Next Steps

Every recommendation to be implemented will have an assigned working group to develop implementation strategies and plans. Working group leads are identified in the Report Summary of Actions on the following pages. A Strategic Implementation Oversight Committee will be established and chaired by Greg Hartman. The leader of each working group, along with the Speaker of the Faculty Senate, Student Body President, and Chair of the University Staff Council will serve as members of this committee. This group will ensure that the implementation of the accepted recommendations is done in an appropriate and transparent manner, and work through complexities and challenges identified by the working groups, which are inherent in any such large reorganizational effort.

If you have an interest in serving on any of the working groups, or know of someone who would be an excellent member, nominations will be accepted through January 7, 2022. Please go to president.tamu.edu to learn more about joining a group. In mid-January 2022, the membership of the working groups will be announced and groups will begin to develop implementation plans with a deadline of September 1, 2022 for full implementation.

For two decades, *Vision 2020* has guided strategic planning, budgeting, and administrative priorities of Texas A&M University. We pledge to continue to advance the university with closer adherence to efficient administrative operations and a renewed commitment to our purpose, without sacrifice of our unique core values, traditions and culture.