

# New College and Research Institute—Task Force Executive Summary

## Presented to Provost Carol Parker

### October 16, 2020

---

#### Background

On August 24, 2020, Provost Parker sent an email to the members of the NMSU community announcing the concept of creating a new college and research center at New Mexico State University with the overall intent of repositioning health, education, social services, and the social sciences for maximum impact and future growth. <https://provost.nmsu.edu/Communications/Memo-to-System-8.24.20.pdf>

On September 1, Provost Parker launched the New College and Research Institute Taskforce with the charge of designing and executing listening sessions, focus groups, and surveys in order for faculty and staff in the Colleges of Education, Health and Social Services, and Arts and Sciences to express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about the proposed concept: <https://provost.nmsu.edu/provost-office-projects/hes/index.html>

Prior to establishing the Taskforce, the Provost held virtual meetings with Health and Social Services and Education staff and faculty, and the Sociology Department faculty, and presented the concept at those meetings. Material presented at such meetings was also shared, via email, with faculty and staff in relevant departments in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Taskforce met after the charge was delivered by Provost Parker on September 18. At that meeting, the group selected the date of the first listening session and organized into subcommittees to determine the following: 1) structure and questions for the general listening sessions, 2) number and structure of the focus groups, and 3) design of a survey. Ultimately, the group decided to implement:

- Two general listening sessions: September 25 (96 participants) and September 30 (41 participants)
- Twelve focus groups: (Participants had the choice of signing up for the following topics, each offered on some or all of the dates below: 1) logistics of creating a new college 2) proposed research center 3) discussion of new college and research center 4) alternative visions for increasing collaborations and synergy across colleges.)
  - October 1 (18 participants)
  - October 2 (20 participants)
  - October 5 (22 participants)
  - October 6 (11 participants)

Additionally, a survey was designed and launched on October 6, to seek additional perspectives and opinions on the new college and research center concept. The survey closed on October 12. 184 participants completed the survey. The results of the survey are summarized with this report.

#### Summary

The entire taskforce met to discuss the summaries of the listening and focus group sessions. The meeting aimed at organizing the feedback received according to four categories:

1. *Potential* of the proposed concept;
2. *Opportunities* that may be realized by the proposed concept;
3. *Concerns* regarding the proposed concept; and
4. *Other Viable Options* that could revise or replace the proposed concept.

## Potential

In general, a new college and research institute has the potential for more collaborations when related disciplines are organized together and may provide a promising structure for interdisciplinary work. This re-organization could be designed with the intent to break any existing silos and encourage groups of similar interests to identify additional and more in-depth opportunities. A properly designed organizational structure that emphasizes new processes and resources could be more effective than existing organizations in recognizing and rewarding interdisciplinary work. There is a potential for more faculty involvement and the hiring of new faculty. Students could more clearly see how they are able to work across disciplinary divides. More faculty working together in an environment that magnifies and supports similar discipline subject areas, research interests, and specializations could lead to additional outreach.

The establishment of schools with a coherent underlying theme could consolidate disciplines that are currently fragmented across multiple smaller units, providing them with a stronger voice, a greater potential of having an influence on institution-wide priorities, and greater potential to secure resources (internally and externally). This could also improve visibility of work performed within such schools.

## Opportunities

The highlighted opportunities include meeting new people, administrative efficiency, ability to seek and participate in larger-scale grants, and an ability to accommodate large interdisciplinary teams. From a student's perspective, opportunities include the possibility of new interdisciplinary degree programs and a structure for students interested in a broad category (e.g., meta-majors) to explore more effectively diverse career options. There is an opportunity for new management and administration structures, procedures, and resource sharing. There are opportunities for curriculum re-design such as looking at similar courses offered and updating to a singular offering. Additionally, there are opportunities for new academic programs to be considered.

## Concerns

Listening, Focus Group, and Survey participants in general are leery of a new college. They are concerned about the process and timeline. They feel the purpose is not clear, and that there is a lack of information. Exploring this concept should actually be a university-wide exercise, inclusive of other colleges beyond those addressed in the proposal, with a greater faculty, staff, and student involvement in the design and planning process. Many feel we are already accomplishing some of the goals identified in the concept proposal, especially in terms of interdisciplinary research. A common opinion is that this action is primarily budget driven, and some expressed that they would like to look at the financial breakdown showing the real cost savings in creating a multi-tiered new college along with a research center, with budgetary needs for each. Participants wanted more information on how a multi-program school works. Some questioned GA allocation. Many cited accreditation concerns; those working in accredited programs listed distinct concerns from those not in accredited programs. There were concerns about physical space and who would move. Promotion and Tenure criteria and processes were questioned. Many expressed concerns that important efforts now working well could be devalued, if not obstructed. Some expressed concerns about maintaining their own research trajectories if required to move into a new college. Others expressed concerns about how this proposal overall is aimed at supporting student learning and majors within specific disciplines or fields. The timing of this sizable effort is contributing to interruptions already existing in adapting current teaching, research, and service in the midst of budget cut concerns and the pandemic, with all three being experienced by some as crises. We also heard concerns expressed by staff regarding potential layoffs and/or the assignment of more duties as people retire and staff positions are not potentially filled, and that the Task Force lacked a staff member. The lack of information and the fast timeline has created a lot of stress for staff

(and faculty) whose units may be most directly affected by this proposal.

### Other Viable Options

The participants offered several other options. One is the creation of a School of Social Sciences within the College of Arts and Sciences. Another option is to combine Health and Education at first and then phase in other relevant programs. Some participants mentioned the concept of dual appointments in order to maintain their current academic home while participating in the new project. Participants also expressed that the research institute should be a university wide research center with an eye to not duplicating work already occurring in the VPR offices. Some participants also recommended a review of existing research centers on campus to identify where we may already be doing some of the work envisioned by a new research center to ensure that we are building on existing resources and strengths. Some suggested that changing processes in existing colleges could achieve similar objectives as those proposed for a new college, by eliminating obstacles to and challenges of interdisciplinary efforts by implementing resources, changed procedures/policies, and reward structures.

~~~

The feedback indicates that a *phased* approach of the proposed concept may facilitate moving forward at this time. Based on what we heard from faculty, staff, and students, there was a majority opinion that it makes sense to structure the health-related programs together, especially to strengthen resources for the clinical health and education programs. Notably, not all targeted programs or departments in education or social sciences fit aims of health-related programs. It should be pointed out that there were some consistent dissenting views to this plan. The exploration and development of an organizational structure to address the governing principles of the proposed concept: *to build transformational processes at NMSU to address health equity, education equity, human rights, and justice in a concerted way to best impact student learning and community needs*, should be a process that continues with faculty, staff, students, community members, employers, and other key stakeholders. A phased approach to the research center, similar to that proposed for a new college, will allow important concepts to be implemented so we can see benefits sooner rather than later, while still allowing for thoughtful feedback and planning of the other important desired outcomes. This may include merging the existing research centers in the respective colleges and expanding thereafter as the college evolves.

Please let us know if you have questions or need further information.

- *Members of the Task Force*



## Office of the Provost

MSC 3445  
New Mexico State University  
P. O. Box 30001  
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001  
575-646-2594, fax: 575-646-6334  
provost@nmsu.edu

September 1, 2020

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Task Force Invitees  
FROM: Provost Carol Parker  
cc: President John Floros  
Faculty Senate Chair Julia Parra  
RE: Task Force to Gather Input to Assist in the Development of a Formal Faculty Senate Bill Proposing a New College and New Research Center

I write to invite you to serve on a Task Force to gather input from the NMSU Community regarding my proposal to administratively combine several academic units within the Social Sciences, Education, Health and Social Services, in order to create a new College and a new Research Center. Background materials are on my website. If you are unable to serve in this effort, please let me know as soon as possible; otherwise, the membership of the task force will be:

#### ***Co-Chairs***

Interim Dean Sonya Cooper, College of Health and Social Services

Interim Dean Henrietta Pichon, College of Education

Dean Enrico Pontelli, College of Arts and Sciences

#### ***Members***

Dr. Blanca Araujo, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education

Dr. Susan Brown, Senior Academic Administrator and former Interim Dean, College of Education

Dr. Hector Diaz, Professor and Director, School of Social Work, College of Health and Social Services

Dr. Sam Fernald, Director of New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute, Professor of Watershed Management, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Dr. Dennis Giever, Professor and Department Head of Criminal Justice, and Interim Department Head of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Natalie Goldberg, Professor and former Interim Department Head of Extension Plant Sciences, and former Interim Associate Dean of Research, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Dr. Neil Harvey, Professor and Department Head of Government College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Jagdish Khubchandani, Professor of Public Health, College of Health and Social Services

Dr. Phillip Post, Professor of Kinesiology, and Interim Associate Dean, College of Education

Dr. Mary Alice Scott, Associate Professor of Anthropology, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Linda Summers, Associate Professor of Nursing, College of Health and Social Services

Dr. Luis Vazquez, Regents Professor of Counseling and Educational Psychology, College of Education, and Associate Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies

Dr. Patti Wojahn, Professor of English and Interdisciplinary Studies Department Head, College of Arts and Sciences

### ***Charge and Timeline***

You are charged with collecting input from the NMSU Community with respect to the suggestion that NMSU administratively combine several academic units within the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Social Sciences division; Education; and Health and Social Services, in order to create a new College. I am interested in: (1) input on the opportunities and challenges the proposal presents; (2) potential names of the new college; and (3) ideas for how to improve upon the concept if possible. Feel free to use small working groups, listening sessions, surveys, etc.

**The input you collect should be organized and provided to the Provost's Office by October 16, 2020.** I will use it to prepare a formal Bill for submittal to the Faculty Senate seeking its review and recommendation, per APR 2.15. I must submit the Bill no later than October 27, 2020 for it to be introduced at the November 5, 2020 meeting.

Thank you!