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College Reconfiguration: Building Faculty Support

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College Reconfiguration: Building Faculty Support

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Internal and external factors drove the leadership team in the College of Education and Human Development (EDHD) at Bowling Green State University to propose a college reconfiguration from five schools and one department to three schools. (The college has 118 full-time faculty, 26 staff, and 9 faculty administrators.) One recommendation from the College Futures Committee in 2020 was to bring all of the teacher licensure programs – currently housed across three different schools – into one school. That recommendation then prompted questions about the best configuration for the remaining programs. Other internal factors included duplicative courses across the college and faculty and staff retirements and resignations. External factors included the need to align to the university’s strategic plan including aligning “processes, organizational structures and financial budgets to minimize administrative costs.” State and national trends also influenced our desire to undertake this process without it being forced upon us.

To consider college-wide reconfiguration, we designed a process that was collaborative, transparent, and driven by multiple perspectives throughout the College. During our opening day college meeting in August 2021, we presented the rationale for considering a reconfiguration and asked faculty and staff to generate possibilities for more efficient and effective college structures, including creating new schools to replace the current structures. From this process, more than 20 proposed configurations were collected. Although some differences emerged across the various possibilities, considerable convergence around several models was evident.

Operating parameters framed our discussions. Reconfiguration should:

- provide more flexibility and increased capacity to respond to current and future challenges
- streamline processes and communication
- distribute work and responsibilities equitably and transparently across all units
- create opportunities for faculty leadership
- include a reallocation of resources based on clearly identified and widely shared metrics
- align with the strategic plan, accrediting bodies, and program review
- not increase operational or personnel costs.

Follow-up surveys, school and committee meetings, and open office hours, provided many opportunities for input and refinement of the proposal. The dean also solicited volunteers to serve on “advance teams.” Those teams were asked to facilitate discussions about the reconfiguration within their existing and proposed new units and take the lead on revising policies and procedures. In addition to self-nominated individuals, units had the option of electing others to the advance teams to ensure representation across ranks and existing units.

In March 2022, a vote was launched on the final proposal for reconfiguration to create three schools. We had strong participation in the vote—75% of all eligible voters participated (66% of staff and 78% of faculty). Of those who voted, 86% voted in favor of the proposal to reconfigure EDHD into three schools (82% of faculty and 100% of staff).

Throughout the Fall 2022 semester, the proposal was presented to and approved by Finance and Administration, Faculty Senate Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, Undergraduate Council, Graduate Council, Faculty Senate, and the Board of Trustees. We began the Spring 2023 semester in the new school configuration.

The new configuration is yielding positive outcomes. We are growing the leadership pipeline, fostering new academic collaborations, streamlining decision-making processes, and better distributing tasks among all faculty. There are challenges as well, of course. Creating new school cultures from diverse prior cultures is a complex process that affects the timely development of new governance, merit, and promotion and tenure documents. Many faculty members are adjusting to the style of a new school director—and directors to new faculty.

We are learning a great deal along the way. It was important to us to get ahead of inevitable change and better control our own destiny. Managing both internal and external communication and providing ample opportunity for input has been critical. Change is difficult and frightening for many, perhaps most for those for whom the current systems worked best. Managing the pace of change is a delicate balance; we moved too quickly for some and too slowly for others.

Although we are now early in the transition, we are very encouraged with the progress thus far. The reconfiguration has yielded some unexpected and encouraging conversations among many who had little interaction in prior years. New and emerging faculty leaders and allies have fostered new energy and ideas toward a bright future for the college.