

College Mergers Guidance 4/11/2022

The Phase II Working Group on Unit Mergers recommends that NDSU should not consider mergers of colleges during this cycle of budget talks. The reasons for this recommendation are that such a move would be enormously complex and would create considerable cultural upheaval. This upheaval cannot be justified by the relatively small potential cost savings that would result. This is not to say that some rearrangement of college structure should never be considered. However, such an action would require far more time and input from those who would be involved than is possible at this time.

When NDSU became a university in 1960, it was composed of several “Schools” which became the “Colleges”. The academic colleges (Agriculture, Arts and Sciences, Chemistry, Engineering, Home Economics, and Pharmacy) are reflected in the Seal of the University. There have been three substantial rearrangements which have led to the current college structure. The departments in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Chemistry were rearranged to form the current College of Arts, Humanities, and Social sciences as well as the College of Science and Math. The College of Human Sciences and Education was formed from departments in the former College of Home Economics as well as what was the Department of Education. Additionally, a College of Business was formed as growth in areas such as Accounting, Finance, Management, and Marketing developed.

During the subsequent years, each of the academic colleges has been able to grow and to develop their own structures for accomplishing their various tasks. There have been several mergers and rearrangements of departments within the colleges and, in a few instances, movement of a department from one college to another. Traditionally, the colleges have relatively similar numbers of students except for Engineering, which has generally had more. The research and outreach efforts of the different colleges are quite different from one another which reflects the very different nature of the disciplines in the various units. Administrative structures have been built to support the students but also these differences in the nature of research and outreach. In the case of one college (Agriculture, Food Systems and Natural Resources) and parts of another college (Human Sciences and Education) the research and outreach performed by the faculty are administered through separate state budget agencies (North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension) which also include statewide efforts at Research-Extension Centers and County Extension offices).

There have been two substantial recent reviews concerning possible mergers which involved colleges. A task force was appointed in 2016 to consider the merger of the College of Engineering with the College of Science and Math. The conclusion was that such a merger would be a massive undertaking with almost no cost savings at all. The resulting college would be very large and the savings associated with having a single Dean would be offset by the need to have additional Associate Deans and other staff members to manage the day-to-day operation of such a large unit. There are other universities which have a college that includes both Engineering and Science but those universities are generally institutions that are smaller than NDSU and do not have a research portfolio which is as large as NDSU's. The other recent task force concerning a possible merger involved the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies with the Office of Research and Creative Activity. Again, the result of the consideration was that a merger was not justified. This Working Group is not the place to rehash all of the details of these two excellent reports. They both represent a considerable amount of work and contain very large amounts of useful information for the future of NDSU. They also suggest the following thoughts concerning the combining of colleges:

1. Combining colleges would require a very large effort with input from a wide variety of stakeholders from both within and outside of NDSU
2. The cost-savings from mergers of colleges may be relatively slight.
3. A merger of colleges could cause a substantial need to reorganize the culture of the merged colleges and these cultural concerns are not trivial.

4. College mergers should be only considered if there is an apparent gain in functionality from combining groups with potentially overlapping responsibilities.