Throughout its long history, Truman State University has anticipated change to maintain its standard of excellence. This year marks another important milestone when, after two years of collaboration and intensive study, the University has unveiled a new academic structure within Academic Affairs effective July 1. The new structure replaces the eight academic divisions with a College of Arts and Sciences, a School of Health Sciences and Education and a School of Business and establishes 23 departments within the three units, each with a department chair.

“This organizational structure clearly identifies the liberal arts and sciences as the core of the mission but also recognizes the importance of our responsibilities to the state to provide some professional and master’s programs that one might not find at private liberal arts colleges,” said University President Barbara Dixon. “Over time, this new structure will empower the faculty, facilitate communication, increase accountability for effective teaching and research, and enhance the student experience.”

“At the heart of this model is the distribution of leadership responsibility throughout the organization to the flattest level possible and close to the students,” said Dixon. “The department chair position is designed to facilitate the efforts of the faculty in providing a first-rate liberal arts and sciences education to the students. Department chairs will be the college leaders closest to where the instructional and scholarly mission of the University is carried out, and therefore, closest to the students.”

The former divisional-type structure, estimated to be in place since the 1920s, had served the University well as the school evolved from a teachers college to a comprehensive regional university to its current mission as a statewide liberal arts and sciences institution. However, as a result of the University’s mission change in 1985, some of the divisions had grown very large, and in some cases, the size of a division’s faculty and programs had become a challenge for one person—the dean (formerly known as division head)—to manage.

Consideration of reorganizing the academic structure was not a new topic of conversation on the Truman campus, and Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and a member of Truman’s Board of Governors, recalled how the faculty wrestled with the idea when the new mission was adopted more than two decades ago. “I remember a conversation with President Charles McClain and Dean Krueger about reorganization at that particular time,” said Ewell. “The decision at the time was to say there is just too much change going on around here and maybe we shouldn’t address that one right now.”

A report issued by the Higher Learning Commission accreditation team in 2005 brought the question of an academic reorganization to the forefront once again. After the Higher Learning Commission team had conducted its latest review of the Truman campus, the commission’s final report indicated that one of the major issues that arose from the faculty forums the team conducted was a disparity in the hiring, promotion and tenure processes and work loads for faculty across the divisions; the report strongly suggested that the University review the structure of its academic divisions.

President Dixon then initiated a consultation process, and an Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Reorganization was established to examine the issue more closely and offer recommendations. The committee spent considerable time and effort working with the University community, conducting surveys, holding forums with faculty and staff, and reviewing academic models before finally issuing a report to President Dixon. The new academic structure accomplishes the goals set forth by the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Reorganization and also addresses the concerns highlighted by the Higher Learning Commission.

Under the new plan, the title of the Vice President for Academic Affairs has been changed to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, a change that clearly designates the Provost as the senior vice president of the University. The Provost oversees the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business, and the School of Health and Science.
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Sciences and Education. In addition, the School of Business has one associate dean, and the College of Arts and Sciences has two associate deans who are responsible for providing strategic and functional support for their respective school or college.

According to Garry Gordon, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, it is anticipated that the role of the deans will change as more day-to-day management matters are handled at the department level. “The deans will have more time to engage in the kinds of work that will help to create and support a strong vision for the future, not only for their respective schools and college, but for the University generally,” said Gordon.

“This new structure strongly reflects Truman’s mission to offer...undergraduate studies in the traditional arts and sciences as well as pre-professional, professional and master’s level programs,” said Gordon. “It will also place greater leadership responsibility among the faculty and in doing so will provide increased leadership development opportunities for Truman’s faculty. Departmental decision-making will occur in ways that should give greater ownership of those decisions to the faculty.”

Douglas Davenport, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, sees students benefiting from the academic reorganization in several ways, both directly and indirectly. “Most importantly, students will have increased access to the individuals making many of the routine decisions regarding academic matters—the department chairs,” said Davenport.

“Because so many decisions are related to our academic programs, these individuals are in the best position to make them.”

Additionally, reorganization provided an excellent opportunity for the University to reexamine the processes and policies related to a wide variety of forms that students complete in Academic Affairs, and as a result, those processes have been simplified and better coordinated.

“Finally, the creation of academic departments will enhance the strong relationships within our disciplines that students share with the faculty and with each other in their respective majors,” said Davenport.

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