

DRAFT INITIATIVE BRIEF: EXPLORATORY SCHOOL DISCUSSION

Background:

This initiative will create a process for faculty, staff, students and community partners to develop a vision for coordination and collaboration between the Anthropology, Biology, Environmental Science & Management, Geography, Geology, and Systems Science departments and programs. The initiative will ask how collaboration among these units can:

- Improve and foster new interdisciplinary academic programming,
- Enhance student outcomes and opportunities,
- Make more effective use of staff resources,
- Maintain and elevate high quality research,
- Support fundraising, and
- Explore connections to faculty in other units.

The outcome of this initiative will be the development of a vision and model for collaboration that differentiates PSU programs from more traditional disciplinary offerings at the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and other institutions across the Pacific Northwest. The interdisciplinary initiative will support curricula, research, and other activities that address the lived experiences of students in order to attract and retain PSU's diverse and first-generation student body. Collaboration will be pursued while maintaining disciplinary identity. Potential adaptations that a school could support include ideas such as:

- Lower division courses that highlight different major pathways allowing students to make better informed decisions about academic programming.
- Shared degree programs or course offerings that reduce artificial boundaries currently imposed on students by our existing degree pathways.
- Student access to expertise in specific areas like equity and justice, adaptation to climate change, indigenous traditional ecological and cultural knowledge, complex systems modeling, and other specializations that are currently siloed in units based on past hiring opportunities.
- Streamlining and coordinating our curricular offerings to reduce relatively high teaching loads and incentivize interdisciplinary team teaching and community engagement.
- Leveraging the integration of our knowledge and problem-solving approaches for local partnerships with government, non-profit, and private sector enterprises whose realities transcend our disciplinary boundaries.
- Highlighting future areas for transdisciplinary growth (e.g., faculty hires, new staff positions, collocation space, etc.) aimed at improving student access and success by integrating work in areas such as climate change and adaptation, environmental and climate justice, applied conservation, human health and cultural diversity, impacts of pollution and natural hazards, and complex systems and resilience thinking.

With support from the Provost's ReImagine Initiative, this initiative has fostered opportunities for faculty and staff in our units to know each other better, and is poised to elevate the voices of our

faculty, staff, students, and community partners in developing a potential vision, key principles for our collaboration, and a conceptual model for a new school. This process is designed to harness faculty, staff, student, and community partner voices. Between June of 2022 and January of 2023, our six units all voted overwhelmingly (54-3) to continue the discussion and develop a proposal for a new school.

Initiative:

The chairs of Anthropology, Biology, Geography, Geology, Environmental Science and Management, and Systems Science invite you to participate in an Exploratory School Discussion, to help conceptualize a new school at the nexus of these disciplines. Strategic Planning Consultant Shannon Heuberger will assist us in facilitating a faculty-led workgroup process, to design a model based on broadly gathered input from faculty, staff, students, and community members.

For this process to succeed, transparency, inclusivity, and creativity are paramount. Developing an ideal model will require *everyone's* input, and faculty, staff and students in the participating departments are requested to share input with their department chairs or the workgroup as frequently as possible throughout the process. In return, the department chairs and workgroup commit to using multiple communication tools to send and receive messages, as described in detail below.

Workgroup:

After holding an initial engagement session to gather process-related input from faculty and staff, chairs from the participating departments worked together to assemble a 17-member workgroup representing all participating departments, including faculty (junior and senior; T, TT, NTT) and staff. To form as diverse a workgroup as possible while keeping the size manageable for facilitation purposes, some departments are represented by chairs, while others are represented by a junior faculty member and a staff member and so on. The workgroup will also include some "Resource Members" in attendance, who are there to provide information as-needed by the committee, but are not there to influence the work product.

The most fundamental responsibility of workgroup members is to continuously outreach to their departments and networks.

Workgroup Objectives:

1. Conduct outreach to identify student interests, community needs and partnership opportunities, strength areas and areas ripe for collaboration, peer models, and leadership and governance practices and needs,
2. Use input from outreach to develop a draft vision and key principles, and
3. Develop a model for a School that would fully leverage the expertise of the included disciplines in a way that brings value to students, faculty, staff and community.

Information Gathering Phase: Thoughtful planning must be informed by data, dialogue, and participation. Thus the first six weeks of the workgroup process will focus on:

- Information gathering, via outreach to faculty, staff, students and community members,

- Examining peer models, and
- Reviewing institutional data.

The scope and methods of information gathering will be defined by the workgroup during the first two meetings of this phase. At the conclusion of this phase, an Informational Report will be produced and shared for feedback at a Town Hall meeting.

Design Phase: The workgroup will develop an illustrated and annotated model during May and June that will describe the structure of the proposed school and how it addresses each of the Process Parameters (see below). The design phase will:

- Share the informational report with departments for input,
- Translate the informational report and feedback into a proposed model, and
- Make iterative improvement to the model during late May and early June.

Outreach: The workgroup process relies on continuous feedback. At a minimum, outreach methods will include the following:

- Regular updates to department meetings.
- Information gathering workgroup phase, to include surveys and/or focus groups of faculty, staff, students and community members
- Townhall meetings to discuss findings at the conclusion of the Information Gathering Phase and the Design Phase
- Input received via the initiative inbox (NewSchool@pdx.edu) or anonymous Google Form (<https://forms.gle/2miRgM7KH7rJkqV99>)
- Meeting minutes forwarded by Department Chairs and routine discussions between faculty and their Chairs
- Informal “open house” style engagement sessions
- “Input received” standing item on every workgroup meeting agenda, to share input gathered from informal conversation and the initiative inboxes
- Initiative website with contact links

Timeline

The workgroup will meet approximately once per week between March 23 to May 19. Key workgroup milestones will include the following (*dates approximate*).

Workgroup Information Gathering Phase (*Approximate dates; specific schedule TBD*)

March 23 Workgroup launch

~Apr 7 Workgroup plan finalized

~Apr 10-21 Formal outreach and information gathering phase for the Informational Report

~May 1-5 Informational Report released and Town Hall to discuss report

Workgroup Design Phase

~**May 8** Launch workgroup “Design Phase”

~**May 19** Workgroup to share preliminary Model with departments; departments to provide feedback.

~**May 26 - June 2** Revise Model and continue to iterate with departments

Faculty Senate Education Policy Committee Proposal

A yet to be determined group will draft a Faculty Senate Education Policy Committee proposal for departments to review in the fall.

~**September** Townhall review of EPC proposal

~**Fall** Departmental reviews and refining of EPC proposal

Process Parameters:

The proposed School Model must have the following characteristics:

- Includes all of the academic programming, research and other programs of the departments and programs that voted to join the conversation. Includes and leverages the diverse work and talents of faculty and staff from these departments.
- Recognizes that the school will house and welcome faculty and staff from a diverse range of disciplines and departments.
- Preserves all existing majors and minors.
- Articulates a clear vision for the School, including:
 - Rationale for reorganization - why are we doing this?
 - Objectives and planned outcomes for the new School.
 - How the unit helps PSU achieve its goals (e.g. pedagogy, research, community service, diversity and inclusion).
- Increases student success by enabling new learning opportunities and increasing career readiness.
 - Clearly states the benefits to students.
 - Impact on current students (UG and GR).
- Describes and illustrates an effective school leadership and school staffing structure.
- Serves as a “hub” for cross-campus collaboration for the vision of the school.
- Enhances visibility and partnership opportunities in Portland and beyond.
- Elevates and preserves faculty shared governance and improves faculty workload and development, at a minimum through:
 - Defining a governance structure that is fair to all the component disciplines.
 - Distributing Service/Committee workload: Possible sharing service and committee

requirements by having one school-wide P&T committee, one school-wide curriculum committee, etc.

- P&T/Faculty Reviews: fair and simple procedure for P&T during transition.
- Increases staff opportunities for specialization and professional development and leverages the collective staff positions to support the needs of the school (i.e., to provide opportunities for all current staff, although the workgroup will not assign individuals to the positions).
- Increases research impact, via enhanced interdisciplinary research collaboration and funding opportunities.
- Negotiates an agreement with PSU administration for new investments in TT, NTF, and staff positions that are critical to support implementation of the New School model.
- Establishes an equitable approach for establishing teaching, advising, research loads, and common standards for graduate assistant pay across units.
- Develops an organizational chart showing administrative and staffing positions needed.
- This process is not program reduction or intended specifically to reduce budgets.
- This process is not intended to remove positions.

Workgroup Roster available at: <https://www.pdx.edu/liberal-arts-sciences/exploratory-school-initiative#workgroup>