Exploratory School Update from the Department Chairs

Based on feedback gathered from our departments following the Exploratory School Discussion Workgroup's release of their conceptual school model, we will be forming a Summer Workgroup of five department chairs, three faculty, and two staff to meet twice monthly over the summer. Chairs will extend invitations to individuals this week, and then we will provide an update on the final roster.

The goal of the Summer Workgroup is to build on the work of the Exploratory School Discussion Workgroup and the input received on their conceptual school model. Over the summer, the Summer Workgroup will develop alternative ways to address key concerns and make recommendations, including on the topics listed below, to be considered more broadly by our departments in the fall. The workgroup will hold hour-long meetings, with a "divide-and-conquer" approach for developing ideas between meetings. We will also have change management experts visit select meetings to help inform our detailed models of governance.

We thank the Exploratory School Discussion Workgroup for their hard work last spring to get us to this point! Please be on the lookout for further updates on the soon-to-launch Summer Workgroup and for details on a fall retreat that we will be planning.

From departmental conversations held during the "iterative phase" (i.e., May 30 - present)

- **Leadership and Governance**
    - What decisions lie with the programs versus with the director?
    - How is the school considered relative to other departments in CLAS?
    - How do we govern within the school, considering the various sizes of the six programs?
- **Academic Programming**
    - How can we ensure that we maintain existing programs while adding interdisciplinary options?
    - What do we need to teach to maintain our existing majors? How can course sharing help us fill gaps?
- **Building Community in the School**
    - How do we ensure that faculty and staff who do not work on "earth, environment, and society" feel like an important part of the school?
    - How can we involve students in our model?
- **Partnerships**
    - How can we maintain our existing close collaborations with other units?
    - How can we create flexible strategies for how people outside the 6 units can connect with the school
    - Shall we add a community outreach committee with student and community partner representation?

From the June 1 Town Hall Discussion

- **Leadership and Governance**
  - Further refine the program lead role (i.e., must have less responsibility than a chair)
  - Define a conflict resolution system
  - How can we develop efficiencies for updates to P&T and bylaws?
- **Building Community**
  - Shall we create a school climate or a community and culture committee (i.e., that organizes interdisciplinary talks and themed get-togethers)?
  - Shall we gradually work towards co-location? In the meantime, how can we create gathering spaces that build community?

From [Report](#) "Next Steps" (see p. 16 of the report)

- **Budget**
  - Is the budget combined for the school, as was the case in most of the peer models examined? (See [Report](#) p.19)
  - How are decisions made on discretionary funds (e.g., S&S, Foundation Accounts)?
  - How will differences among pay and position allocations be reconciled, including for TAs? (See p. 17 and Appendix IIC of [Report](#))
- **Partnerships**
  - How will we serve as a hub for cross-campus and community collaboration?
  - How will we increase our visibility in the community, nationally, and globally?
  - How can we develop a coordinated external fundraising strategy?
- **Faculty**
  - How will we negotiate an agreement with PSU administration for new investments in TT, NTTF, and staff positions that are critical to support implementation of the school model?
  - How can we establish an equitable approach for teaching, advising, research loads, and common standards for graduate assistant pay across units?
- **Staffing Model**
  - This was noted as a next-step in the [Report](#) (see pp.7-9 and the goals for staff wellbeing noted on p.13) and will involve significant staff input and complement ongoing conversations around staffing models.