Navigating Northwestern’s Decentralized Structure
AHEAD Discussion

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Discussion Outline

- Defining Decentralization
- Perceived Challenges with Decentralization
- Potential Opportunities with Decentralization
- Successfully Navigating Decentralization
- Questions?
Defining Decentralization

“We need to adapt to the new developments while also capitalizing on the synergies wrought by cross-campus developments which make students truly feel like they are attending a comprehensive university – Northwestern University – and not merely becoming credentialed by a prestigious, stand-alone law school in downtown Chicago.”

Daniel Rodriguez
Dean
Northwestern School of Law
October 15, 2013
Defining Decentralization

- Evolution to a school-based university structure
- Loosely coupled systems (Weick)
- Degrees of decentralization
- Types of Decentralization
  - Structural
  - Operational
  - Financial
  - Branding
- Faculty focus on their discipline
Defining Decentralization

Central Administration

- Affiliates
- School
- School
- School
- Institute
- Center
- School
- School
- School
- School
- Consortiums
- "Partners"
Challenges with Decentralization

- Control/accountability
- Cultural/mission differences among units
- Perceived layers of bureaucracy
  - “Getting stuff done”
  - “Getting a decision made”
- Data access and integration - “Dueling data”
- Brand identity/marketing/communications
- Institutional versus school/unit strategic priorities
Challenges with Decentralization

- Competition for resources
  - Financial
  - Space
  - Faculty
  - Students
  - Staff
  - Others?
- Information technology
- Consistency of policies/processes/compliance
- Managing career opportunities
- Others?
Advantages of Decentralization

• Optimizing operational functions
  – Economies of Scale/Efficiencies (Centralized)
  – Local expertise/effectiveness (Decentralized)
• Organizational nimbleness and flexibility
• Opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurialism
• Ability to focus on areas of specialization
• Intellectual synergies across schools
• Schools embedded within a comprehensive University
Advantages of Decentralization

• Diversity of perspectives
• More effective targeting of resources
• Partnerships with other institutions sometimes easier
• Diverse opportunities for faculty, students, and staff
• Others?
Successfully Navigating Decentralization

• Understand your role within a decentralized University
• Understand how your daily work may have impacts beyond your unit
• Effectively utilize personal/professional networks
• Participate on University committees/task forces/work groups when possible
• Learn new processes/systems as necessary
• Understand functions of those in central offices and schools
Successfully Navigating Decentralization

- Communicate ideas for “making things work better”
- Consider potential professional development opportunities
  - Optimally matching your career interests/aspirations
  - Don’t close any career options prematurely
- Be open to multiple career options within the University
- Understand the organizational/cultural differences and similarities
Questions?