

Report and Recommendations

**Administrative Infrastructure Planning
Committee**

October, 2004

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Executive Summary

In the first *Highest Order of Excellence* framework the overarching goals for a 21st century infrastructure addressed the construction of facilities, the deployment of cutting-edge information technologies, and the reengineering of management processes. Over the next six years, progress on new facilities, on the integration of electronic communication tools, and on the enhancement of capacities for advanced computing was relatively visible and gratifying. While progress on reducing administrative complexities and improving support services has been made and is continuing, it is clear that the pace of change is slower than faculty, students, and staff would like, and that considerably more remains to be done before Northwestern achieves its desired environment for education and research.

It is important to note that the faculty, students and staff at Northwestern recognize and admire the administration's willingness to be reflective and self-critical, as well as its effectiveness in getting things done once they receive a high priority. In conversations among committee members and in focus groups conducted as part of this committee's work, participants consistently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be heard and were optimistic that their concerns would be addressed.

Six major themes emerged from the many conversations:

1. Concern about ongoing planning for research growth and providing adequate administrative support
2. Recognition of the importance of integrated administrative management systems that would replace shadow systems and be web based
3. Positioning of staff as a capital asset
4. Need for strong leadership in developing an institution-wide culture of service and responsiveness
5. Desire for a greater sense of university-wide community
6. Desire for centralized, professional management of classroom resources, as well as the need for more technologically advanced classrooms, conference rooms and offices (including teleconferencing capabilities), and enhanced performance spaces.

The first two issues have been extensively discussed within the University with special consulting reports accomplished and resulting in detailed action plans and timelines along with added resources to ensure that these issues are addressed well. Work in these first

two areas is being guided by faculty and administrative advisory mechanisms as well. For these reasons, the committee acknowledged the very high priority of these efforts and also decided that further attention by the committee was not needed.

Subcommittees developed detailed recommendations in the next three areas (#3, 4 and 5), including, for example: funding support for community-building events; a series of pilots and experiments with alternative administrative support models (replacing the proliferation of small, self-contained academic units with inadequate staff support); recruitment, compensation, recognition and targeted development of high-potential administrative managers; and a multi-functional task force to conceptualize the program for a large social space such as Norris Center. The final area—classrooms, more performance spaces and more pervasive teleconferencing technology -- was touched on briefly and is noted at the end of this report.

These measures, along with others detailed below, will enhance Northwestern's ability to begin dramatically reorienting its administrative culture and functioning.

Committee Charge and Methodology

In October 2003, Provost Lawrence Dumas and Vice President for Administration and Planning Marilyn McCoy established a working group representing key administrative perspectives across the University. It was charged with assessing Northwestern's administrative infrastructure resources and prioritizing where investments can/should be made to best support the faculty and students in their educational and research missions.

The committee met six times as a whole between November and May, reviewed various background documents¹, and brainstormed a list of issues that it perceived to be major administrative concerns. It then tested those perceptions by meeting with various constituencies² and asking a set of open-ended questions³ about administrative infrastructure.

In general, the feedback from the focus groups confirmed committee members' assessment about which issues should receive priority attention in the next planning framework. Subcommittees then worked to develop detailed recommendations in the areas of: leadership and organizational culture, effectiveness of administrative support

¹ Including COFHE data on student satisfaction, University Benchmarks report, Huron reports regarding research infrastructure and research information technology, report of the HOE implementation subcommittee on "Reducing Administrative Complexities," data on staff salary comparisons and turnover, Advisory Committee on Space Planning draft principles, and others.

² Included deans, associate deans, business and financial managers, department chairs, the GFC, groups of junior faculty, NUSAC, undergraduate student leaders, graduate student leaders, groups of students from the medical, law and business schools, and a group of international students.

³ The questions, somewhat abbreviated here, were: What is working well? What things are key to having an exemplary experience as a [constituent type]? What do you think should work better, i.e., what two or three changes would make your experience as a [constituent type] more fulfilling? What do you think has improved since you arrived on campus?

staff, and overall sense of community. These recommendations, as well as others in additional areas, were discussed and refined in two additional meetings of the committee as a whole.

Major Issues and Recommendations

Positioning Staff as a Capital Asset

There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the level of administrative support being provided to faculty and others at Northwestern, and faculty are increasingly expressing the wish that the University regard administrative staffing as an asset that needs to be more closely studied, strengthened, and valued.

To date, the University has focused attention and resources on faculty and student quality but has not made *staff quality* a strategic differentiator. Because of the vital role that people in academic and institutional support positions play in today's competitive environment, we believe that a view of staff as a capital asset is correct and that development of that asset should be a strategic focus in the next planning framework. If we believe that *culture* is a competitive advantage on which the institution should build, then we should consider how not only faculty and students, but also staff contribute significantly to that organizational culture.

Because of the relatively small size of our departments and the increasing numbers of interdisciplinary centers and units, we have a relatively large number of units to support. The net result is that we are too often unable to afford the numbers and range of expertise these units require in an increasingly specialized administrative environment. This situation has left our faculty feeling under resourced as they carry out their university responsibilities.

This viewpoint has lead the committee to recommend that we revisit how we organize and support faculty in various sectors of the University, moving toward relying more on sharing high-level specialized functions, state of the art information technology, and strong systems of performance management by professional administrators, rather than tacitly expecting faculty to hire, train and supervise entry-level clerical and program assistant positions and/or do so much of their own administrative work. The committee calls for a willingness to look at management structures in a different way and to devote special attention to developing managerial excellence among high-potential staff.

Recommendations

1. Begin a **series of pilots and experiments with alternative administrative support models**. For example, by pooling the IT resources for four basic science departments in the Medical School, these units have been able to employ more skilled staff and achieve higher levels of service from existing resource levels. This kind of shared services model is starting to be implemented in several quarters of the University, namely in the Medical School and Weinberg College.

We should be able to achieve similar gains on a much more pervasive basis and should solicit volunteers and offer incentives rather than mandate any such system. At the same time, we need to work to develop clearer algorithms about what level of support is needed given the scale of different enterprises so that we bring expectations and resources into closer alignment. Currently we have been proliferating many small units, each with their own administrative structure. We ask that the Provost's Office oversee this restructuring, working with the Office of Change Management and the deans.

2. **Hiring and retaining the best people** at Northwestern is seen as critical to our success. This model is embraced on the faculty side but it is not seen as our modus operandi for staff. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the structure and operation of **compensation** for staff at Northwestern. Faculty express frustration that the classification of positions diminishes the likelihood of recruiting adequately skilled staff. This issue is related to the prior point about needing new models of administrative support that emphasize specialist skills and can only be supported financially across a broader number of units. Among staff at Northwestern there is the perception that there is insufficient differentiation in the remuneration for exceptional versus ordinary performance. The committee recommends that an external consultant be engaged to provide a holistic review of all our staffing practices from recruitment through retention. Then, under the joint leadership of the Provost and the Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, with the support of the Office of Change Management, compensation, position grading and reward structures should be updated, revamped and recalibrated to encourage excellence.
3. A strong orientation to excellent **customer service** and quality outcomes should be actively encouraged and rewarded (and a specific recommendation in this regard appears under the issue of "Leadership"). Orientation and training at the University should emphasize these values. At the same time it is important that our administrative staff be aware of **best practices** in their field and encouraged to bring such approaches to their work at Northwestern. To foster the development of such best practices, a fund to support site visits at peer institutions should be created along with a mechanism to select where such funds should be deployed.
4. Develop **new mechanisms to identify and reward our best performers**, differentiated by level in the organization.
 - a. This could include **annual awards** for exceptional performance. Currently, staff awards are almost exclusively focused on the non-exempt staff of the University.
 - b. It could also involve **special and visible professional development opportunities** using KSM for a rotating cohort (one to two years) of academic and administrative leaders interested in further professional development and selected based on nominations throughout the institution as well as self-nomination. They could involve a separate faculty cohort,

more senior staff with high potential, as well as a new manager cohort. This is currently being launched for new department chairs but this effort would expand the range of personnel included and would also focus on future leadership development within the University. These cohorts would also serve as bridge builders across the institution.

5. The Provost, with support from the office of Administration and Planning, should develop a process to solicit **feedback on an annual basis** from the deans, vice presidents and their staffs on the value and quality of services they are receiving from central administrative functions. This feedback should be used to decide on where investments and changes are needed.

Administrative Leadership and Organizational Culture

“SERVICE should be a mantra that is posted on every wall and door in the University” wrote the faculty authors of a November 2002 report on *Reducing Administrative Complexities*. “One perceived problem,” they continued, “is that many in the University (including deans, faculty, and staff) do not think of themselves as being in a service organization.” The subcommittee tackling this issue concluded that the roles, responsibilities, and relationships among faculty, administrators, and students are more complex than can be encompassed with a standard mantra of “the customer is king.” Expecting a simplistic concept of “customer service” to be readily adapted by members of a university community leaves too many questions unexamined and open to individual interpretation. We need to define more deliberately what “service” means here.

Similarly, there is a need to articulate more clearly the institution’s core values, strategic priorities, and expectations for performance. Moreover, as a means of disseminating and continually reinforcing that information, it must be embedded in all policies, procedures, and business practices encountered regularly by faculty and staff. While it may seem obvious to senior management what those things are or should be, we must remember how many factors – e.g. differing cultures of eleven separate academic units, divided loyalties, individual perspectives, interpretations and work styles, local politics, etc. -- work against faculty and staff keeping these broader ideas foremost in their thinking. A strong sense of mission/direction and clarity of message will be needed to energize the shift to more service orientation.

Recommendations

1. The vice-presidents and deans will be asked to embrace a set of **institutional expectations and values** for the recruitment, management and development of staff in their areas and will be held accountable for implementing these policies.

The expectation should be that it is not a time of business as usual but a new era in which staff are an integral part of making Northwestern ever stronger. This should include recognition of the importance of providing professional development and educational opportunities for staff. A preliminary list of “core values” articulated by the committee included:

- a) Service orientation and responsiveness
 - b) Innovation
 - c) Thoughtful stewardship of resources
 - d) Interdisciplinary and cross-functional thinking and teamwork
 - e) Distribution of responsibility and accountability
 - f) Respect for individuality and diversity
 - g) Civility and collegiality
 - h) Integrity
2. An appropriate work group should be appointed to further the work done by the **“Reducing Administrative Complexities” subcommittee** of the previous HOE effort. This group put in place some thoughtful guiding principles, but voluntary change has not necessarily followed. More needs to be done on figuring out how to operationalize these principles, and the effort needs a visible champion from senior management

Community

Like “service,” “sense of community” is an idea packed with numerous dimensions and interpreted in different ways. The one thing everyone seems to agree on is that more of it would be a beneficial thing. The key question for policy makers is “how is it created?” We found a Northwestern expert’s lecture addressing this question⁴ to be thought-provoking and useful in articulating how community is created through “voluntary associational life” rather than “institutional systems.” In that spirit, the committee concluded that the University should – as it has done – resist any pressure to create bureaucracy in order to manage the issue of “a sense of community.” Rather, it should recognize how many assets already exist here upon which community may be voluntarily built, make small investments supporting creativity in building upon them, and concentrate on eliminating barriers to community across the institution and campuses. Efforts should be made where appropriate to be more inclusive. This will necessarily be a series of small cumulative steps rather than a dramatic “fix.” Some of those steps have been suggested below:

Recommendations

1. A Task Force should be established that is broadly representative of the University to identify among existing activities a set that could be developed into a series of **quarterly events** that embraces both campuses and works to

⁴ Published online in the IPR Distinguished Public Policy Lecture Series as *Regenerating Community: The Recovery of a Space for Citizens* by John McKnight, May 2003.

bring the two campuses together. The objective in each case where an activity is expanded would be to develop mechanisms explicitly targeting and inviting each of the major segments of the University -- faculty, students, staff; all schools -- to participate. Such an approach would harken back to the Sesquicentennial events, which were very well received. The Martin Luther King Day events offer one such possibility. Another is the “First Friday” each quarter as suggested by the students. Mechanisms that can better highlight events that will be of more general interest is another suggestion that was made, the daily or weekly “critics pick.”

2. Continue to think creatively about building more **social space** at both campuses both indoor and outdoor. This involves the consideration of indoor atriums, town squares, cafes and other eating spaces, and cultural spaces. Outdoor benches, tables and other congregating areas should be thought through as well. Although clearly not a “small fix” in a University with many facility needs, the committee again and again confronted the need for larger gathering venues that can support large groups for admissions and financial aid, student affairs, alumni relations and large undergraduate and class educational gatherings as well as supporting conferences and visitors. Although the committee realizes that there is a long list of facility needs at the University, a **multi-use large scale facility** that can accommodate better the many needs of the campus should be on this list as well. Another related suggestion was to identify **work space** on each campus that could be used by faculty, students or staff when working on the other campus and thus facilitate cross unit interactions.
3. It is important that expanded sites and mechanisms using communication **technology** be developed to facilitate cross campus participation in various academic and other events. Kellogg has developed movable support that can be utilized in any site and this may be a viable approach to expand this form of interaction. Much of the technology to support such interaction is available but the community needs additional leadership and support to make its deployment more widespread and its use more commonplace.

Classrooms, Performance Spaces and Other Issues

In each of the areas in this section, the committee recognizes efforts under way and seeks to emphasize both the importance of expediting change and of subsequent and continuous monitoring of satisfaction with these key resources.

Though excellent work has been done by the Classroom Committee convened several years ago to address specific objectives in the original HOE framework, not all classroom-related issues were addressed. Pockets of acute problems in classroom renovation, upkeep, and scheduling policy remain, and there is growing sentiment that

management of classroom resources should be centralized. Currently, classrooms that are supervised by departments and schools are not renovated by the University at large, creating a two tier system in some areas. We believe the University needs to define a high standard for what the classroom experience at Northwestern should be and to align administrative practices with that vision. In addition, there are other models being explored within the University to enhance classroom technology and communication across sites. For example, KSM has defined a portable equipment module that can be moved from one space to another to support video conferencing.

In the performing arts, students complain about the lack of sufficient practice space and this issue should be addressed on both an interim and ultimately permanent basis.

Efforts have been made to report to the community about progress on new systems development for research administration, but few people in the community have a sense of progress on data warehousing or replacement of the financial system. Continual communication of status and progress on administrative systems is imperative.

Finally, the dissemination of the Huron Report, the reorganization of the Office of Research Administration and the implementation of other Huron recommendations has made executive attention to the research infrastructure highly visible. Specific areas where the community would like senior management to consider intensifying attention are existing animal care facilities, including appropriate staffing, and long-range facilities planning for future research programs.

Concluding Comment

There is a great sense of ambition and pride expressed by the many faculty, staff and students of Northwestern. We believe attention to the agendas outlined above, we believe will be integral to establishing the enabling infrastructure at the University.

HOEII Committee on Administration Infrastructure Planning

- Marilyn McCoy, *vice president for administration & planning and chair*
- Jan Allen, *associate dean, The Graduate School*
- Theresa Cropper, *assistant dean of students and director of minority affairs, Law School*
- Mary Desler, *associate vice president for student affairs*
- Cathy Grimsted, *associate dean for finance and technology, Kellogg School*
- Jake Julia, *assistant vice president for change management*
- Todd Leasia, *director, Office of Research Safety*
- Carolyn Lindley, *university director of financial aid*
- Nancy Lyons, *associate athletic director of intercollegiate services*
- Rene Machado, *associate dean for administration & finance, School of Music*
- Jeff Miller, *senior executive associate dean and chief operating officer, Feinberg School*
- Ron Nayler, *associate vice president for facilities management*
- Mai Lin Noffke, *director of program review*
- Vera Potapenko, *director of human resources consulting and staffing*
- Lisa Swanson, *director of planning and special projects*
- Matt TerMolen, *associate vice president for alumni relations and development*
- Patricia Todus, *associate vice president and deputy chief information officer*
- Mary Jane Twohey, *director of broadcast relations*
- Eric Wachtel, *assistant director, Office of Budget Planning*