

Response to Review Team Recommendations

Overall Department

Examine alternatives for restructuring the department to create an organization that will facilitate communication to more seamlessly repurpose information.

The suggestion seems to link the structure with an outcome that would not necessarily follow a structural change. While a review of departmental structure might be a worthwhile consideration, it doesn't automatically streamline repurposing of information. Instead, perhaps the focus should be on improving collaborative communications and instituting a project management system.

Collaboration and communication could improve by training staff to be more comfortable with serving as communications consultants who discuss departmental services with clients. Staff could assist clients in choosing the best options and contact colleagues to collaborate on the client's communications project.

The suggestion of combining news media and marketing services with publishing and the bookstore/mail center with one unit leader would result in a very large staff whose variety of functions would make performance management ineffective or impossible. Publishing and the former production/distribution units were combined in the past and were separated because the functions were too different and performance could not be managed effectively.

The review team did not seem to understand the way departmental units function with unit leadership. The department, with its combined service and academic functions, is unique and complex to comprehend within the bounds of an external review.

A suggestion has been made that a service manager position be considered to coordinate leadership of the nonacademic units. This option would address the review team's concerns about leadership sustainability. In addition, a position that would coordinate departmental service and technology functions would enable the department head to interact more robustly with both the academic unit and external stakeholders.

Develop a rubric (evaluation tool) to assess the fit and sustainability of program expansion opportunities prior to creating/transferring them into the department.

The process used has included discussions and reviews by interdisciplinary teams and has worked well in the past. The department will continue to utilize interdisciplinary faculty teams to examine advantages and disadvantages before pursuing future expansion opportunities.

As a result of expansion, one challenge the department continues to face is that adequate support resources were not provided or included with acquisitions. In recent years — to avoid losing additional operating dollars or occupied positions — budget cuts resulted in the loss of several vacant support FTE. Flat and reduced budgets have made it impossible to provide adequate support for the expanded departmental services and programs. Growth areas include the academic program (new graduate degree, additional instructor position, addition of Agricultural Education), Kansas Environmental Leadership Program (KELP), National Agriculture and Veterinary Online Training Center, and University Printing. This has also resulted in some extension-funded positions not receiving operating support that aligns with position funding.

Move toward department-wide adoption of an online calendar system.

This has been done, and nearly everyone in the department uses it. We continue to train and encourage full use.

Teaching

Pursue a more collegial working relationship with the new director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

This recommendation and the rationale don't seem to match. We share the reviewers' concern about the students' reports of feeling demeaned and ridiculed in JMC, but we believe recent turnover of support staff and the director position there will change the students' experience there.

The interim director is very open to building a better relationship with our program and staff. We continue to work toward establishing better working relationships.

Review the limitations that have been placed on enrollment in Journalism and Mass Communications courses by students outside JMC (i.e., currently limited to 15 percent of enrollment).

An increase in the current enrollment limit for students outside the JMC major can be explored when the new director is in place.

Explore an alternative specialization/option (non-teaching) in the B.S. program in Agricultural Education.

University funding model parameters provide little incentive — in the form of increased departmental operating funds — to create new specializations that would generate more student credit hours. However, we recognize the demand for a more general degree option. With additional FTE and support resources, we could create a viable alternative. A secondary major is being evaluated: It would merge agricultural education and leadership and communications.

Research

Examine alignment of departmental faculty research with K-State's Vision 2025 plan.

A social science element in this effort has not yet been identified. Collaborative research with members of bench science departments is ongoing and supports priority areas identified in 2025 goals. Additional ideas are being evaluated while we share our expertise by collaborating with other departments.

Communicate Kansas State Research and Extension (KSRE) research in the context of the Vision 2025 goals.

Agreed. News releases tie research efforts to 2025 and effectively disseminate that information. The department will continue to work with the Division of Communications and Marketing to develop a strategic plan for 2025, in addition to our own for the department and College of Agriculture. The department remains committed to creating and disseminating clear research messages.

Request principal investigator (PI) status for staff to enable them to co-author externally funded grants.

The department supports this recommendation but is currently constrained by university guidelines. The department will work with faculty senate to explore a policy revision. We suggest the policy for PI status be changed to include all professional unclassified staff. While exceptions are occasionally granted, they are often difficult to obtain within the time constraints of grant scheduling.

Training

Utilize and share training opportunities available through eXtension.

Information about eXtension webinars and offerings will be shared department-wide so those who are not registered with eXtension can attend sessions. Registration information will be provided so department members can register themselves.

Share the training Communications and Agricultural Education faculty and staff now carry out through eXtension, the four-state collaboration, ACE and other avenues.

The department will explore the idea of sharing K-State Research and Extension training via eXtension. The weekly Comm Tips session has been suggested as a possibility for expansion. In addition, training sessions related to news media relations and pedagogy can be recorded and shared via eXtension when appropriate.

Conduct more training in communications, technology and education skills for KSRE faculty and staff.

We agree that additional development is a great idea, and we look for opportunities to provide more communications training for clients. We can consider additional recording of one-and-done meetings so they are posted and available for those who couldn't attend. Efforts could be made to resurrect a biannual meeting with Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, and other communications colleagues whose funding may now allow out-of-state travel.

Outreach

Have a department representative on each Extension program focus team.

CAE professional staff are being identified to participate with Program Focus Teams. Department faculty and staff will receive strategic communications training before joining PFTs in order to be best prepared to accurately represent departmental capabilities to team members.

Social media

A committee already formed is working to better promote social guidelines already defined by the university. Some activities are already under way, including a presentation at the 2012 KSRE Annual Conference.

Repurpose content

Since the consolidation of the news, video, and broadcast groups several years ago, we have seen growth in media convergence. Coverage needs to be more timely, with a balance between quality and timeliness. There is a need for departmental staff to be aware of emerging issues and take action when appropriate. This skill set will be a priority with future hires.

We are also considering ways to recreate existing printed publications and offer alternative formats including ebooks and other electronic media for use on tablets and smartphones.

Printing

Be proactive to develop a shared culture for University Printing staff

A shared culture is emerging as the physical relocation of University Printing staff has been completed. Department leadership understands that change is difficult and requires a level of sensitivity. When appropriate, staff members are offered a seat at the table when decisions are made, but they are not required to accept it.

Help other CAE staff develop relationships with University Printing staff.

With the exception of the external review team preliminary report, meetings with University Printing staff were never held in Umberger Hall. All meetings were held at the airport facility or Pottorf Hall. All staff members are included in departmental social events, and planning committees are made up of staff from each unit.

New traditions are forming with the physical relocation of University Printing staff and positive interactions among all departmental members are occurring.

Procedures

Review various accounting systems to look for possible efficiencies in workflow and automation.

A team has been formed to review current budgeting and accounting practices and tools/software being used. External consultants will be used to identify a software solution to effectively manage centralized review and reporting while also providing distributed management of unit funds and resources.

Move the project intake information to an online form accessible to all staff.

A team has been formed to identify or create an effective and useful project management solution to replace the original form.

Centralization

The News Media and Marketing Services unit must communicate regularly with the KSU Division of Communications and Marketing.

The news media and marketing services unit leader regularly participates in meetings with the Division of Communications and Marketing to discuss university news coverage, particularly communicating and explaining the importance of the university's research efforts. In addition, that unit staff — along with staff from publishing and some other departmental units — will meet with DCM staff members in 2013 to discuss workflow, collaboration, and ways to share or divide duties for providing communications services for Kansas State University and K-State Research and Extension.

Information Technology

Partner with central IT and take advantage of as many resources as possible.

We have been and are pursuing all options that allow us to work with central ITS. A process has begun to merge our domain with campus, and we are working out details on how to leverage the KSU Cloud for future server and data storage issues. There is a need to balance this with expenditures already made for servers and data center space and to collaborate on using this data center space for disaster recovery and load balancing of their and our critical systems.

Develop minimum standards for IT infrastructure in county offices.

A set of recommended specifications for hardware and software is being developed. Over time we hope to implement a computer replacement plan that will allow local offices across the state to contribute to a central fund with the goal of replacing each office's computers and storage devices or file servers every 4 to 5 years through a

centralized purchase. This will reduce tech support/client time on support issues, standardize software and office storage configurations, speed setup and repair of hardware, and reduce issues related to technology “haves and have-nots” in an office. It will also eliminate setup time of hand-me-down computers by handing down slightly newer computers from one employee to another in the office.

We will also try to implement VPN routing in local offices to allow them to connect to the campus domain. Connecting to the domain will enhance management and security of computers via group policies and allow the offices to use their EIDs for logon to their computers. The plan will require buy-in at all levels of K-State Research and Extension from administration out to local boards.

Create a change management model for fully testing and communicating changes in the IT infrastructure.

We will increase communications across K-State Research and Extension about server updates and moves that may affect users, as well as increase communications about critical updates of standard software on client computers. As we attempt to move all offices into the K-State domain, we will be able to control how updates are applied to computers across the organization via group policy.

Review cloud, open source, and commercial software options so programmers can focus on newer technologies and local needs.

Central IT is currently in negotiations with Google to allow Google Apps for Education to be used on campus. Other cloud-based technologies will have to be studied for security issues, as well as the legal issues of signing end-user agreements. Currently central ITS is not supporting the use of cloud-based technologies — particularly for data storage — due to the confidential and sensitive nature of student and research data.

We are aware that cloud-based technologies are in use with our faculty and staff, and we are providing assistance and education to help make sure sensitive data are not stored in the cloud.

We are using and evaluating open-source applications where possible. While we agree that upfront and maintenance costs of homegrown applications are high, it is also true that the setup and configuration of commercial and open-source applications can be high when customization must be done to make it work in an educational\ research\outreach environment. The department will always attempt to consider the long-term cost of any product or service with the recommendations given by the review committee.

Partner with campus IT to utilize online credit card transactions.

All sites are 99 percent compliant. We are awaiting completion of the network wiring and installation of managed switches in Umberger Hall to make all of our sites 100 percent PCI DSS compliant.

Investigate and plan for the use of mobile technologies.

A committee on digital delivery has been formed to address the issues of delivering information via new technologies, such as mobile. Development of mobile web apps is under way, and we developed our first mobile web app for the 2012 Kansas State Fair.

The campus content management service automatically converts websites to a mobile-friendly format. As we develop new sites and information, we need to be conscious of developing sites in mobile-first context.

As we move forward with mobile app development, we will need to work closely with central ITS and the university attorney in dealing with the legal ramifications before signing contracts that will bind the entire organization.

Summary Response

The department appreciates the time and effort of review team members. Overall, the recommendations made by the review team confirmed the direction the department has set for itself.

Succession planning and leadership sustainability are on the forefront as we review our strategic plan and align it with KSU Vision 2025.