October 29, 2020

Dear CACP and COE faculty and staff,

Thank you for providing your input and sharing your perspectives throughout Phases I and II of the Integrated Design Initiative. I am thrilled by the robust and candid participation of all of our constituents throughout the process, which signifies great interest for future collaborations across all units and communities with the new college. This memo provides an update of our work and future directions, but first, please allow me to recap the progress to date.

## Process

As you know, the Advisory Task Force was composed of 32 members, including 28 UTSA faculty across 15 departments and six colleges, as well as representatives from our Student Government Association, Department Chairs Council, Faculty Senate, Graduate School, Global Initiatives, Development, and the School for Data Science. The Task Force first convened on April 9, 2020, and received their charge to 1) Consider the landscape of UTSA student interests, regional workforce needs and partnering opportunities, key stakeholders, and multidisciplinary research opportunities related to Architecture, Construction and Planning, and 2) Propose multiple notional organizational structures in alignment of the disciplines of CACP within COE, along with considerations of infrastructure, identity and reputation, to be considered and discussed broadly by CACP and COE faculty, staff, students, and UTSA leadership in consultation with key community stakeholders. This charge was to encompass the first two phases of the Initiative: a "research" phase and "notional model" phase.

The Task Force completed its work for the first two phases of the Initiative on September 29, 2020. I am grateful to their intensive efforts and thoughtful deliberation, and want to thank Dean Browning for her expert work guiding the Task Force. The wealth of internal data gathered, external peers compared, and partners surveyed is available in their Phase I report, and the resulting notional designs for the new college administrative structures from Phase II have been widely distributed and discussed.

Since sharing the notional designs, meetings with all six departments of CACP and COE have been held during the last three weeks, to gain the collective input on the advantages and disadvantages for their units and others among the notional designs for a new college administrative structure; the individual perspectives of each departmental meeting participant also was canvassed. A Virtual Town Hall was held on October 9, 2020, and the Student Government Association, Department Chairs Council, Faculty Senate, and Program Advisory Councils also were provided opportunities to share their perspectives. Throughout the process, Academic Affairs and the Task Force also received individual input from members of the campus and broader San Antonio community as a result of updates that were sent out and posted on the initiative website as well as numerous individual and group meetings with interested constituents.

## Findings

The research phase, or Phase I, of the Initiative provided the opportunity for the Task Force to discover, document, and ideate around the great strengths in our existing programs as well as the opportunities that could be realized in the new College. The Task Force worked within three subcommittees: one focused on our current identity, one on the landscape of our broader community and how we intersect with their needs, and one that looked to other programs to provide a benchmark for possible opportunities in the future college. A variety of data collection techniques were employed, including a community Charrette, survey, Knowledge Cafes, and data mining of UTSA and external programs from around the world. The Phase I report documents the data collected and points of emphasis from the Task Force, including the following ideas:

- The connection to the San Antonio community is strong and highly valued by UTSA faculty as well as our community partners,
- Emphasis on marketable skills as well as emerging technical skills should be included,
- Internships and connections to networking opportunities for our students are important,
- International programs and study abroad provide tremendous growth opportunities for our students,
- Employers value future workers who have experience working in interdisciplinary teams that reflect the integrated AEC environment,
- Students need and value interdisciplinary training through integrated curricular and research content to be leaders in their domains,
- Future opportunities for the new college could be built around excellence and innovation; leadership and collaboration; and integrity, inclusiveness, and respect,
- Enhanced relationships and partnerships with industry partners and the private sector should be explored,
- Data analytics and technologies should be employed to enhance public understanding and find new knowledge in our fields,
- The programs within these two colleges exist together at other institutions through a combination of Departments, Schools, and Research Institutes.

In Phase II, several themes emerged from the extensive input we received on the seven Notional Models during the outreach performed over the last three weeks.

First, from the onset of the Integrated Design Initiative, strong opinions were expressed across the board that although the intersections of the disciplines were exciting and meaningful, ***preserving identity of degree programs*** that are transparent to our students and aligned with professional practice and community needs was important. Faculty and employers voiced the importance of continuing to feature and recognize individually each of the degree programs administered under the new college, while realizing these synergies. Relatedly, strong degree program identity is important for external accreditations — which currently are provided through several different accrediting bodies — that require careful attention to varying professional standards.

At the same time, there was overwhelming support for the new college to foster ***transdisciplinary "convergent" research themes and community engagement opportunities***. Many noted that transdisciplinary efforts can be facilitated through organizational structures that need not, necessarily, be the same as the department home that administers professional degree programs. Several of the notional models introduce the idea of dual structures to organize centers & institutes around the themes of 1) transdisciplinary "grand challenge" research, and/or 2) community engagement to address societal needs. These structures were widely praised and could be led, for example, by carefully selected faculty fellows within the new college. Many expressed support for the flexibility and intentional development of new research collaborations that was illustrated through the "Multi-scale Intersection" concept shown in the "spine" of Model C (also below in Fig. 1). Some faculty, though, noted that the Human/Biological elements reflected in the College's faculty work and expertise needs to be incorporated into this multiscale "spine" concept, where others questioned whether "Sustainable" is the best element around which to center the multiscale concept. Similarly, faculty also recognized the "design" thread that interweaves through this multiscale concept, and expressed interest in broad application to community engagement efforts through the "praxis" idea in Models A and B. These distinctions and particulars are matters that can be productively addressed in Phase III, given the widespread excitement about developing a common "grand challenge" theme for faculty research efforts in the new college. Finally, many endorsed the idea that these transdisciplinary mechanisms can also spawn and facilitate the creation of new certificates, academic concentrations, degree programs, service-learning projects, and professional training workshops, especially as these new collaborations intersect with the needs of our San Antonio community.

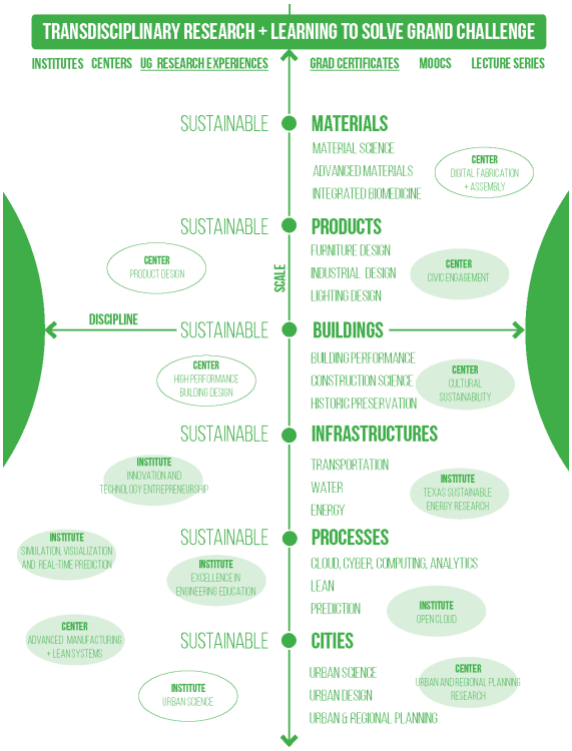


Fig. 1 Proposed Spine of Interdisciplinary Collaboration Across Multiscales of Discovery from Model C

Many mentioned the need to continue to ***put student perspectives, success and needs at the forefront*** of our new college to support achievement of their professional goals and smooth degree attainment. In the context of the student experience, it is critical that our future students recognize the career and personal growth opportunities within the context of readily identifiable programs that enable future work in a field, while still opening the door for alterations in their academic path as they learn more about the inter-connected programs. In like fashion, many faculty expressed a preference for simplicity in the new college's organizational structure for its administrative units, while also valuing the expression of the interdisciplinary nature of our research work through visualizations of how it *feels* to be a part of our college academic community. These faculty noted that starting with simpler administrative structures would be less disruptive at first launch of the new college, and also allows for the flexibility to expand or adjust in the future with a solid foundation built on a history of collaboration and identity. There was support for introducing a multi-school model in the new college, and at the same time concerns were expressed by many regarding the size of some proposed units (i.e., Civil & Environmental Engineering combined with Mechanical Engineering in Model E). There were also concerns that the level of administrative load and cost burden may not warrant the implementation of multiple schools uniformly across the new College given its overall size at this time. All constituents noted the desire to maintain high standards for academic and research rigor in the classroom and extracurricular environments, and simple, transparent administrative structures housing our professional degree programs would support those efforts.

Finally, there was widespread enthusiasm reflected in all models and comments to ***leverage the strong common administrative services*** provided by the Student Success Center, Business Service Center, Academic Advising, Research Service Centers, and strategic leadership from Associate and Assistant Deans. Some commented that the pandemic has reminded everyone of how technology platforms and information systems can be used effectively and innovatively to provide many services "on demand" and independent of any individual's particular location. Discussions around the downtown and main campus venues have supported mainly remaining in current locations while interacting more broadly with these services, sharing common facilities for curricular and student project needs, and strongly aligning with the downtown expansion around the School for Data Science. Regarding the location of the faculty offices, and research and teaching labs, faculty expressed a desire to have individual preferences considered and accommodated where possible. Furthermore, many suggested utilizing joint and cross appointments more frequently to enable multiple degree program affiliation where appropriate to reflect the cross-cutting interests and expertise of individual faculty that may span more than one administrative unit.

With these overarching themes and current context in mind, it is notable that all seven notional designs include a School to house the degree programs and certificate offerings of Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning, Interior Design, and Historic Preservation. This School concept and structure has particular, disciplinary-specific relevance and field-specific connotations, and received widespread support from faculty, students, and community members. Regarding the Urban Planning degree program specifically, there was broad interest expressed by several faculty, employers and alumni for this strong yet relatively small program to proceed on a path towards growth and future accreditation, with program leadership reporting to a School director to best support its ongoing development.

Generally, faculty in the Departments of Biomedical & Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical & Computer Engineering stated a strong preference to maintain their current departmental structure. These units are relatively large and have well-established degree programs; their curricula are intertwined within each department and benefit from common approaches to outcomes development and measures; and nationally these degree programs are commonly recognized within similar departmental structures. At this time, they did not see any benefit of adding an additional administrative school structure.

More varying opinions were expressed by the faculty currently affiliated with the Civil Engineering, Environmental Engineering, and Construction Science & Management (CSM) degree programs. Many described the degree to which groups of faculty already work together, be it between the various Civil Engineering areas of water resources, geotechnical, transportation, and structures, Civil Engineering and Environmental Engineering, or Civil Engineering and Construction Science. Others talked about the opportunity to facilitate students taking electives across the various programs, to leverage existing communalities among currently distinct courses, to more easily enable faculty to share teaching and research prowess or research facilities, and to support the development of new degree programs at the intersection of these disciplines (e.g., BS in Environmental Engineering, Construction Engineering, Engineering Management, etc.). External supporters of the Construction Science program stressed the importance of continued separate accreditation and preserving program identity, particularly in unit naming, as well as avoiding any misconceptions of the program being absorbed into engineering programs. Although some faculty conveyed an interest in remaining in their current structure, many also saw benefit to working together by housing these degree programs and their faculty together in a single administrative unit. Furthermore, the majority of faculty in the Construction Science department have one or more engineering degrees, making this area ripe for increased collaboration to tackle national and global challenges related to the built environment, while continuing the distinctiveness of the program. Although there was a fair degree of alignment noted by the Environmental Engineering faculty with interests of the faculty associated with the Chemical Engineering program; however, those same synergies were not also shared with those of the faculty with the larger Biomedical Engineering program. Finally, some preferred the single administrative unit to be called a *School*, reflecting the broader range of degree programs housed in the unit, where others preferred the *Department* nomenclature.

## Next Steps

With the groundwork that was laid by the Task Force followed by the campus-wide input received during the outreach phase to guide us — and in recognition that the resulting structure is a *waypoint* in our continued evolution responsive to changes in our students, faculty expertise, and professional workforce needs, we will proceed with the next steps towards planning a new college administrative structure led by Dean Browning that recognizes: 1) the unique degree and program offerings amongst Architecture, Urban & Regional Planning, Interior Design and Historic Preservation in a single administrative unit; 2) the opportunity to gain new synergies in curricula, experiential and service learning, research and community engagement through a single unit housing faculty with interests in Civil Engineering, Environmental Engineering and Construction Science and Management and the degrees programs they serve; and 3) the scale of the existing degree programs housed currently in the three separate departments of Electrical and

Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Biomedical and Chemical Engineering. Furthermore, the newly identified, overarching concepts that are shared across these units that house all of these degree programs include integrated design and project delivery, data-infused planning, sustainability and urban science, which will be further developed through transdisciplinary research thrusts, service-learning, and community engagement.

Using the *School* concept to signify the diversity of degrees and programming within the administrative unit — while simultaneously maintaining the distinctiveness of the individual degree programs, we will include in our planning two Schools to be created within the new college. One School (to be named in Phase III) will foster the vibrancy and growth of the degree programs of Architecture, Urban & Regional Planning, and Interior Design; the second (also to be named in Phase III) will administer the degree programs of Construction Science & Management, Civil and Environmental Engineering, and Facility Management. Each School will be led by a Director reporting to the Dean, responsible for advancing its diverse academic programs and related activities of the School in a manner most comparable to a Chair. Each of the aforementioned programs will have a program coordinator tasked to focus on the particular matters regarding professional program accreditation and will report to the respective school director who is responsible for the strength and synergies of the unit as a whole.

Departments, with chairs that report to the Dean, will include Biomedical Engineering & Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical & Computer Engineering, the names of which may be reconsidered during the next phase of work. This structure allows for the flexibility to expand or adjust in the future with a solid foundation built on an accrued history of college collaboration and program identity.

To support the development of interdisciplinary programs and transdisciplinary research thrusts, two umbrella "institute-type" efforts are included in our planning framework: one that brings together the Institute and Center Directors to plan synergistic research initiatives along the multiscale dimension, and the other inspired by the community-focused "Design Praxis" model introduced in the notional designs. These new efforts will be led by Associate Deans for Research and for Community Engagement & Inclusion, respectively, and will also be supported by Dean's Faculty Fellows to help coordinate these activities.

Finally, the Dean will invite faculty whose academic interests and/or expertise spans more than one program or unit to consider joint and cross appointments that enable multiple degree program affiliation in order to foster collaboration, spur interdisciplinary programs, and benefit program capacity.

Phase III of the Integrated Design Initiative — *deliberative planning* — now will commence. A new "Visioning Team" has been organized based on recommendation from unit leaders to include the members of the Task Force from the Colleges of Engineering and Architecture, Construction & Planning, the Chairs and Associate Deans for all units, representative faculty from areas not previously held in the Task Force, and student representation from across the new college. The Visioning Team will now begin meeting to develop a common College identity, brand and marketing tactics, new College by-laws and other elements that are needed to ensure a smooth transition for the launch of the College in Fall 2021. As with the previous phases of the

Initiative work, broad feedback on all stages of work will be solicited from the college constituents and full transparency in all work will be promoted through unit meetings and the Integrated Design Initiative website.

With regards to naming, as we discussed in the departmental meetings, the name selected for the component units and for the new college are quite important. A name should reflect the core and thrust of the work of the faculty, the degree programs offered, and the collective identity — and at the same time, it cannot be too long as to be a laundry list, but also not so pithy as to leave out important elements of the common essence. There will be opportunities in the Phase III process for the entire college and for relevant unit faculty to provide direct input in the respective names. Finally, in addition to the ongoing communication by my office with University of Texas System staff regarding the progress of our initiative, once the names are selected, formal paperwork will be submitted prior to official new College launch in Fall 2021.

Thank you for your participation in this important process. I am grateful for your ongoing thoughtful input, robust participation and substantial efforts that have advanced our work and impact of UTSA — for our students, faculty, and staff — and our communities, region and state. I look forward to the launch of this next phase and the continued evolution of this initiative.

With warm regards,

**Kimberly Andrews Espy, Ph.D.**
*Peter T. Flawn Distinguished Professor*
*Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs*