

## **Collaboration at Tufts Spring 2011**

Tufts University's unique combination of schools and colleges conveys special strategic advantages to our institution. Even in the highly competitive and diverse niche of research institutions where it resides, Tufts stands out for its complementary ensemble of academic programs that positions it to be a global leader in higher education. But this potential will only be fully realized if we can leverage the tremendous possibilities for cross-school academic collaboration that the University's constituent programs offer. Within 21<sup>st</sup> century communities of higher learning, the discovery, creation, and transmission of new knowledge, ideas, and tools increasingly depend on collaborative relationships formed among faculty, staff, and students working across institutional boundaries. These boundaries by and large still conform to 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual hierarchies that remain nested in our organizational structure of schools and discipline-specific departments. Recognizing that this structure should not constrain how we plan for the future, we must take steps to lower the barriers to collaboration and provide positive incentives to innovative collaborative work. In some fields, external funders now require multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary collaboration. Increasingly, recruitment of top faculty and students similarly requires an environment and structure that offer access to collaborative partnerships throughout the University.

Fortunately for Tufts, our schools already engage in significant and productive collaborations. The University's identity is marked by a collegial culture. We have a number of successful interdisciplinary centers and institutes that serve the entire institution. The central administration has devised many programs and policies to support interfaculty collaboration, interdisciplinary teaching and research, and academic partnerships with other institutions. Nevertheless, the University as a whole could do much more to encourage cross-school collaboration that is either multi-disciplinary or encompassed by a single discipline represented in the activities of more than one school. In November 2010, Provost Bharucha hosted a retreat for the school deans to initiate a discussion of solution frameworks that would enable broad-based institutional reforms. At this retreat, the deans endorsed the overall goal of finding solutions to real and perceived barriers to collaboration, and agreed to continue working together towards that end.

In advance of the arrival of a new president and a new provost at Tufts, numerous changes should be discussed and initiated in the short term. Many of these changes will provide immediate benefits, and will facilitate the large-scale strategic planning effort that the next administration will undertake with the schools. In some instances, these changes must be first implemented for this planning to be successful. To this end, an institution-wide response is needed to ensure that Tufts is in the best position to increase productive cross-school collaboration and to meet the demands and expectations of all stakeholders. What follows are a set of principles and recommendations that were derived from the November retreat and that pertain to all the schools of the University.

## **I. Leadership**

The University's academic leaders can take immediate steps to enhance collaboration across institutional boundaries. Increased communication and information sharing are essential prerequisites for a culture of leadership that embraces the strategic benefits of collaboration and a University-wide perspective. To this end, leaders at all levels should keep themselves informed about the initiatives and successes of their own units and those of other units that share intellectual interests. In addition, leaders should consistently and regularly communicate that interdisciplinary and cross-school work are to be valued and appropriately considered in critical decisions involving faculty hiring and promotion, course offerings, capital investments, fundraising, and the establishment of new academic initiatives. Specific mechanisms to enhance information sharing include:

- Use dedicated time at all appropriate meetings to describe or give updates on existing multi-disciplinary initiatives as well as local developments that hold potential for cross-school engagement. For example, Provost Council meetings should devote time to discuss horizontal dovetailing of strategic plans.
- Use time during faculty meetings for presentations (appropriate for a general academic audience) on new faculty work. In conjunction with this peer-to-peer exchange, unit leaders should find incentives and develop structures that complement faculty-initiated efforts to collaborate.
- Enhance the University's capacity for collaborative research matchmaking using such strategies as targeted meetings, multi-school services and facilities, and shared information resources that catalogue faculty expertise and interests. A University-wide faculty information system should be considered.
- Adjust the review process for academic units and leaders to include evaluation of interdisciplinary engagement, cross-school engagement, and/or effectiveness in sharing information with units.
- In all strategic planning exercises, include membership and input from outside the local unit. Executive summaries of school strategic plans should be made available online and updated routinely so that the University community can refer to them at any time.
- Develop cross-school communication strategies along common thematic and programmatic areas, and integrate online presences to enable intuitive navigation of dispersed sites and user-friendly access to news and information of mutual interest.
- Use the wide array of communication technologies, including video conferencing, to bring together faculty and deans from across the various campuses.
- The incoming Provost should consider convening an interfaculty group of broadband thinkers charged with providing on an ongoing basis strategic guidance on collaboration.

## II. Centers and Institutes

Non-departmental units such as centers and institutes can be loci of interdisciplinary or cross-school engagement and a source of groundbreaking collaborations. By definition these units are composed of and dedicated to research and/or teaching involving more than two principal faculty members and requiring a school or the central administration to invest in physical and/or administrative infrastructure. (The Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging is for the purposes of this white paper considered to function organizationally like a school and is therefore not encompassed by the term “center” used in this section.) Unlike departments, centers and institutes may be less encumbered by some organizational obstacles, and better positioned to use and reallocate resources in pursuit of emerging lines of inquiry. To provide greater clarity to all stakeholders about the role of non-departmental units at Tufts, and to ensure that good governance practices are properly applied to them, the University should develop and publish a set of guidelines that pertain to all centers, whether located within a single school or shared across multiple schools. Some of the principles that might shape or be incorporated into these guidelines include:

- All organizational units—schools, departments, centers, etc.—exist to serve a defining purpose that supports the mission of the University.
- Centers and institutes should be created and/or supported according to a compelling rationale to add value to the University as well as defined expectations for a sustainable funding base. As appropriate, this rationale should involve a clear strategy and realistic prospect for securing grant funding in the fields involved.
- Centers and institutes that only involve departments within a school should report to the school’s dean. Centers and institutes that cross school lines will report to the most appropriate dean or to the Provost’s Office. This decision should be based on discussion between the relevant deans and the Provost’s Office.
- Centers and institutes should be reviewed at intervals not to exceed five years. When creating a new unit, the relevant internal sponsors (schools and/or Provost’s Office) should establish criteria for benchmarks of success for the first and subsequent external reviews. Discontinuation of the University’s commitment to the center or institute may follow from an external review that finds substantial reason to recommend non-renewal. The Provost’s Office will produce guidelines on the review schedule and process.
- Center proposals and reviews should address levels and duration of resources from the schools and/or central administration, and should avoid assumptions for open-ended resource growth.
- Directors of centers, and institutes should be appointed for terms of no longer than five years, though schools may set shorter term limits. These appointments may be renewed following a comprehensive review and the mutual agreement of the relevant deans and the Provost. The reviews should be conducted along the lines of the deans’ five-year reviews.

- The authority of center directors with respect to faculty commitments ordinarily overseen by department chairs and academic deans needs further definition and careful management.
- Incentives for individual faculty members to contribute to the activities of a center need to be aligned with the department, school, or University's priorities to ensure that conflicts of commitment are not inadvertently created.

### **III. Faculty Appointments**

The process of faculty appointments presents special challenges for the advancement of a new culture of collaboration at Tufts. Institutional and faculty traditions of governance strongly determine how and where new faculty are hired and evaluated, and these practices are not readily adaptable to the innovations and organizational changes that interdisciplinary or cross-school collaboration require. Curricular needs and development may also play a fundamental role in determining what kinds of faculty are recruited and retained. It will be essential, therefore, that the school faculties are involved in formulating carefully devised policies that will maintain academic excellence yet break down unnecessary barriers to more interdisciplinary and collaborative teaching and research. The following recommendations provide a starting point for this process.

- Faculty searches in all areas should be framed and conducted with the collaborative involvement of deans, chairs, center directors, and faculty members in related disciplines. Search committees should include members from more than one school and/or department when there are common strategic interests.
- Formal mechanisms should be put in place to foster communication and dialogue among schools in order to ensure that all schools are aware of upcoming faculty searches, especially before and during the faculty position description development phase.
- The University should experiment with organizational growth models such as cluster hires based on strategic priorities. Successful implementation will require careful planning of facilities to ensure that faculty members hired in clusters are able to work in proximity to each other.
- New professorships intended to attract interdisciplinary scholars and researchers should be created and allocated according to criteria that are suitable to broadband faculty and that facilitate the creation of broadband platforms for such faculty to be successful at Tufts.
- Secondary, adjunct, and courtesy appointments are a valuable means for increasing interdepartmental or cross-school linkages, but they are insufficient in themselves for accomplishing the University's goal of attracting faculty that work in trans-disciplinary areas. True joint appointments should be devised in ways that 1) provide faculty with more access to a larger spectrum of students; 2) provide greater ability to focus on trans-

disciplinary or interdisciplinary research and teaching; 3) encourage creativity; and 4) signal their desirability and high value at Tufts. As such, joint appointments should be used strategically, especially in the senior ranks.

- The University should institutionalize the effort to define metrics and rigorous standards to be used in hiring and promotion decisions involving interdisciplinary and/or collaborative work. Current approaches typically focus narrowly on individual accomplishments, and do not weigh collaborative work as heavily. To facilitate changes in this process, the Provost should lead discussions with stakeholders throughout the University, including tenure and promotion committees. The Provost should also work closely with school committees to consider appropriate bylaw revisions to propose to the Trustees.
- Faculty should be encouraged with appropriate incentives or the removal of unnecessary disincentives to participate in the activities of interdisciplinary centers and institutes.
- Interdisciplinary aspirations of junior faculty should be handled with care, and leaders should be mindful of career pitfalls while also encouraging important cross-disciplinary work even at earlier career stages. The key criterion should be the quality of the work. A joint tenure and promotion committee should be set up as appropriate.

#### **IV. Education**

As cross-school collaboration becomes easier and more common at Tufts, changes need to be considered that will facilitate student access to the wide range of research and learning opportunities found throughout the University. The following recommendations focus on graduate and professional education in particular because every Tufts school enrolls students at this level. It should be recognized, however, that students and trainees at all levels, including post-doctoral fellows, have much to gain from cross-school exchange in the classroom, auditorium, and laboratory. The University should pursue appropriate vertical as well as horizontal integration of its academic programs to ensure that undergraduates also benefit from organizational reforms and innovations. Some specific actions in this regard include:

##### **Degree Programs**

- Wherever feasible, reduce and remove limitations on doctoral thesis supervision by prospectively qualifying relevant faculty from other Tufts schools.
- Wherever feasible, encourage thesis committees to include members from outside departments/schools and provide mechanisms for them to make ongoing contributions.
- Stimulate development of processes for school-wide and cross-school graduate and professional programs in emerging areas.

##### **Research Projects**

- Institute clear financial agreements, negotiated in advance, between schools for funding graduate students working across school lines.

- Provide incentive stipend support for projects involving multi-school graduate student teams.

#### Activities & Organization

- Combine numerous stand-alone school-based graduate research symposia into a unified annual event organized thematically, coordinated by the Provost's Office, and hosted at different campuses on a rotating basis.
- The new Provost should consider establishing a Council of Graduate Deans, similar to Provost Council, with focus on new programs, initiatives and common best practices.
- Career development opportunities, activities, and resources should be shared widely across school and departmental lines, and should be accessible to post-doctoral fellows as appropriate.

### **V. Financial and Administrative Infrastructure and Support**

The central administration leadership and the senior staff of the schools will need to work closely with each other and with the deans and faculty to coordinate organizational changes and to devise innovative business and administrative solutions that support cross-school sharing and exchange of resources. A comprehensive and evolving set of recommendations for administrative change will require input from a wide range of managers to ensure that sound and efficient policies and procedures are put in place. The following principles will guide the preliminary planning steps in this direction.

- The Provost should affirm the central administration's role in funding/supporting financial innovations as well as comprehensive research databases and other information technologies that are necessary for cross-school work.
- Centers and institutes must have access to resources that allow them to function in proportion to their success in achieving their strategic goals, such as sharing in the ICR on grants and direct income from other activities.
- Advancement personnel should be appropriately allocated and trained, and advancement operations correspondingly adjusted, to support the acquisition of funds for cross-school initiatives and non-departmental units such as interdisciplinary centers.
- The allocation of direct and indirect costs in multi-unit grants must be transparent and optimized for the strategic goals of the programs in question. Prior to setting up award accounts, collaborating parties and their home departments or schools should establish an agreement for the general allocation of direct cost money, such as salary support for participating faculty and staff, management and location of any equipment to be purchased, the hiring department for any anticipated new hires, cost sharing, if any, and administrative management issues. Direct costs will continue to follow the efforts of the

appropriate personnel and the agreed-upon program. Indirect cost allocations will follow the direct costs to the school at which the direct cost money is spent. If needed, the Office of the Vice Provost will assist in the development of an agreement to cover these issues.

- For interschool programs or grants, one school will serve as the lead administrative unit. In grants or programs where substantial and disproportionate administrative effort might be required of the lead school, an adjustment in the distribution of indirect cost recovery funds may be made to compensate the lead unit. This adjustment will be based on a negotiated percentage of the modified total direct costs.
- Scope accounts may be used to facilitate the management of cross-school funded programs.
- Core equipment and facilities should be purchased, maintained and shared across departments and schools whenever possible. The Office of the Vice Provost, which has a University-wide perspective on such facilities, should facilitate these arrangements.