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UA moves ahead with 20 ideas to regroup; mergers likely

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By next semester, a handful of departments at the University of Arizona may be well on their way to merging with each other.

Twenty of 80 draft proposals presented to a UA subcommittee last month have been given approval to move forward and be developed into full proposals as part of UA's reorganization.

About half of those 20 consist of merging departments, said Miranda Joseph, who chairs the Strategic Planning and Budget Advisory Committee spearheading the review of the 80 white papers presented to Provost Meredith Hay Oct. 13.

None of green-lighted proposals involves merging colleges, said Joseph, who declined to provide details on the proposals.

University President Robert N. Shelton announced in mid-September that UA needed to consider a massive reorganization to strengthen and protect it from "wild fluctuations" in state funding. He asked academic units to develop white papers suggesting ways to streamline UA.

Hay told UA's Faculty Senate Monday that the 20 white papers moving to the full-proposal stage will be posted on the provost's Transformation Plan Web site by Wednesday afternoon.

"We will have the regular timeline for those going forward, then a longer timeline for those more complicated (proposals)," Hay said.

The longer timeline - possibly lasting through the spring semester, Hay said - is necessary for many of the proposals because of conflicting ideas regarding the college or departmental mergers or eliminations suggested in them. The extended timeline will be posted on Hay's Web site by next week, and groups affected by the proposals will be told how to proceed.

About 10 of the white papers received a "take no further action" recommendation from Joseph's subcommittee, which was tasked with recommending to Hay which proposals to pursue.

Half got that recommendation because they weren't practical and half because "the proposal was to do nothing," Joseph said after the Senate meeting.

Faculty senator Bobbi McKean, an associate professor of theater arts, asked Hay how much of the proposed regrouping was because of budget cuts and how much was a strive for excellence. Hay said the original impetus was to make UA more stellar, but "the budget (problem) is now commingled with the Transformation Plan."

"Some have said put the Transformation aside and come up with a recession plan, but I reject that idea," she

said. "Will the Transformation Plan yield enough money to cover the budget shortfall? Probably not. . . . Our responsibility is to stop spending, as much as we can, stop spending, and then carefully move forward."

In other business, UA Student Body President Tommy Bruce told the Senate he was "extremely concerned" about reports from students about UA's reorganization. "It is becoming increasingly disheartening to hear students tell me their professors have told them their program is going to shut down, their major is going away, or that the UA is crumbling quickly and they should get out as soon as possible," Bruce said.

"I have a favor: Can we build some positivity into this process?" he asked. "I know it's uncertain and I know it's not the happiest possible time, but can we work together?"

Stephen Bieda, president of the Graduate and Professional Student Council, said, "The graduate students are having a very difficult time and are extremely concerned about what is going to happen to them beyond the spring '09 decision-making process."

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