

Strategic Plan for the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

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I. INTRODUCTION

The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) is one of the leading pillars of the University of Houston. Our goal over the next five years is to build on our achievements to become a leading beacon for social and behavioral sciences, humanities, and health in Texas. CLASS can be the leader in Texas because relative to the other colleges at UH, CLASS is closest in rank to our aspirational peers (data in last year's report). What this means is that a solid foundation has been built, and marginal investments will have large pay-offs for students, for Houston, and for our academic reputation. STEM education is the public focus of the moment, and it is completely appropriate for some students to learn how to utilize the available technologies to better human life on this planet. While we certainly have physical and engineering problems, nonetheless the most important issues reflect our complex social institutions, and irrespective of the source all of our problems are generated by and impact people. Thus learning how to build a global society that can enjoy peace and unprecedented prosperity is the single most difficult task facing the world, and CLASS at UH is already one of the leading institutions providing research and learning for these difficult skills. Our strategic plan is to continue to develop on our leading expertise in three key dimensions.

CLASS has made tremendous strides for creating a budgetary foundation that can serve as a basis for rapid future growth. Our departments now understand their budget constraints, which allows them to make excellent strategic choices. Further, coupled with their individual strategic plans, the budgetary requirements for growth and success are apparent. The completion of this process is occurring this year, with the implication that we are starting this five year plan with virtually no internal resources to implement growth. Our success, however, is illustrated by the creation ahead of schedule of the College of the Arts.

The top growth priority for the College over the next five years is to insure that every department in CLASS teaches an executive skill utilizing new technology. New technology skills will strengthen our students' valuable professional skills in our traditional strengths of critical thinking and communication, consistent with an analysis of culture and human interaction. Examples of such skills include statistical analysis and interpretation, digital mapping, computerized textual analysis, understanding of visual media, and logic.

The second pillar of our strategic plan is to develop our health offerings. As the provision of health evolves in our country away from simply doctors, CLASS is perfectly poised to expand its professional training in four dimensions. The Psychology Department, while constituting an important research intensive department in more basic behavioral sciences, is also a major research center for psychological health. With the hire of Elena Grigorenko from a tenured position at Yale, our linkages with the Texas Medical Center are even stronger, and Psychology has many TMC relationships that are profitable to the University. The Department of Health and Human Performance also has an outstanding hire, Marc Hamilton from the Pennington Health Center, who is the new leader of the Texas Obesity Research Center (TORC). Again, we need to further

strengthen the many opportunities being created by TORC, a University Research Center. Further, University investments in the department of Communication Sciences and Disorders are now maturing. We need to finish this very successful project by completing the development of its Ph.D. program. Finally, there is a desire to develop a new program in Physical Therapy. Building a strong Physical Therapy program is the logical next step to follow the model of the successful development of the department of Communications Science and Disorders.

The third element of institutional growth is that UH generally, and CLASS in particular, will benefit from developing stronger contacts with our community. Because we are a public Texas university, our constituents comprise people (voters) of the entire state. Further, it is socially important to grow the learning and thinking at UH so it is part of the equation in leading society. Thus we plan to further expand our already robust public outreach efforts. The natural places for development are the fabulous set of Cultural Studies Centers in CLASS. Using these Centers as catalysts, we are building opportunities to have our faculty interact with the public to establish CLASS as an important source of information pertinent to the central questions facing society.

II. NEW TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

CLASS is already an important source of many professional skills. We have not been explicit in our discussions of our assets, however, nor have we fully developed our skill offerings with this perspective. Further, the impact of the new professional technology skills has broadened to include all of the humanities as well as social science disciplines. Our new technology skill targets by departments are still evolving, but are as follows:

*Statistical Analysis and interpretation: This includes handling big and small data, and developing analysis skills on a basic level (Excel), and advanced statistical levels (STATA, R, other specialized). Further, we are widely teaching excellent statistical interpretation skills, primarily in the social sciences.

*Digital Mapping (GIS): Unlike in NSM, the primary use of computerized mapping in CLASS is “horizontal,” so it involves the relationship between places on a wide variety of dimensions. We have arranged important support from the Library, and other units are developing this expertise.

*Computerized Text Analysis: This skill involves using computers to analyze qualitative information. Depending on the context, the textual results then interact with statistical skills to develop a research answer. The initial phases of developing this skill have been in the humanities, but the social science disciplines are also finding these skills to be quite valuable.

*Video Media: Digital visual media is becoming an essential communication tool to impart as well as absorb information. This expertise is spread widely across the College. At this point we are assessing the extent of our aggregate skills, and

developing interdisciplinary programs to exploit them. We expect this area to be an important source of growth in future years.

*Logic: Formalized logic training, a central mathematical tool, is part of the fundamental background for any decision process. The utilization of this tool is especially prevalent in Philosophy.

Our budgetary proposals closely follow the plan outlined above. We are pursuing hires in our areas of strength (statistics), and we are pursuing hires in new fields to broaden our offerings to both graduate and undergraduate students (mapping, computerized text analysis). We are also strengthening our footprint in this area by bringing together faculty with these skills across the College. Just for example, our Task Force on Media and the Moving Image is forging more robust linkages between the departments with this strength, and is building an inter-disciplinary minor which will emphasize communicating through visual media as well as discerning and analyzing messages received from visual media.

III. HEALTH INITIATIVES

CLASS excels in three areas for providing health professionals, and in addition the critical analysis of health is prevalent in virtually every CLASS department. One by-product of the community engagement initiative discussed below is developing multi-disciplinary projects across all of the CLASS departments in the health area. In addition, however, we propose to strengthen the offerings in the three departments producing health professionals. For example, the Department of Psychology is already poised to grow in the clinical area with the new HBSB 2 building. Hires in this area would further exploit the strengths of the clinical program in behavioral health, child psychology, and neuropsychology, and would facilitate their move towards a clinical science model that integrates psychosocial and neurobiological approaches to behavior.

In Health and Human Performance (HHP), and through TORC (obesity research), we are in the process of obtaining two opportunity hires, and propose to hire a third faculty member to integrate research in obesity, culture, and exercise in a variety of potential dimensions including with several other departments. This Department has experienced a 40% increase in SCH since 2011.

Third, completing the development of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (ComD) is an objective to fully exploit the institutional investments that have already been made. The project of building this department now shows excellent potential if we are able to complete the plan so that this department soon offers a Ph.D. This degree is in high demand, and offering such a degree here at UH is consistent with the strong specific assets that already exist including:

- *3 faculty in the appropriate National Academy
- *New strong junior faculty
- *Increasing funding from the federal government

- *A strong and successful clinic program, both on campus and at remote sites
- *A 100% pass rate by its students for the last six years on the national certification exam.

The final health related project, still in the planning stages, is to create a program, and perhaps ultimately a department, of Physical Therapy. HHP is perfectly suited to initiate this plan, as it houses the only licensed Physical Therapy person on campus. Further, space has already been reserved in the new HBSB 2 building. The success of CLASS at building the ComD department suggests it is organizationally strong, and thus is able to initiate the Physical Therapy initiative.

IV. *COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES*

CLASS is home to several important cultural studies centers, including the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS), Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), African-American Studies (AAS), India Studies, Arab Studies, and Jewish Studies. Each of these study centers has a distinct balance of strengths between research, teaching, and community. There is a vast unexploited potential in these centers, however, as they can serve as a focal point for the traditional disciplines in all three areas of research, student success, and community engagement. Further, these centers are able to serve as a focus for the many different cultural groups in Houston, and can therefore leverage the community support for our University.

*We will base fund the Research office in CLASS, and it will stimulate research by individuals and small groups. Some of these projects will be with the cultural studies centers, including multi-disciplinary research projects.

*If we are able to attract the support of Central Development, there is a vast potential to use privately contributed resources to further the research, student success, and community outreach missions.

One central objective is to find mechanisms to put CLASS faculty in front of community groups. Faculty would not necessarily discuss their specific research project, but would speak on issues of community interest informed by their research. Building the new Hobby School of Public Affairs will accentuate the need for faculty to speak informatively on issues of public attention. Special events are sporadic, of course, but interact in an important way with development. Thus, to both provide institutional support and to facilitate development, we propose to create a Community Outreach Office in CLASS.

We anticipate this office will ease the burden on the CLASS development team, stimulate more public engagement events in CLASS, and strengthen the effectiveness of the many events already being pursued by CLASS departments.

V. LONGER TERM AND FUTURE PROJECTS

As the University prepares to launch its billion dollar capital campaign, CLASS is in position to make major contributions to this program. Our endowment is already so large, even after the departure of the Arts units, that we contribute \$844,000 annually to development. A development team of five people could develop many of the other projects that we cannot yet currently support with Provost resources, such as:

*The Valenti School of Communications is on an upward trajectory, and has a significant level of community and corporate support. They are short many faculty, and need an extension to their building.

*African-American Studies is in the process of trying to get a major approved. Several prominent Houstonians have expressed the opinion that this program should be an independent department. Irrespective of the administrative form, growth in this area offers important opportunities for Houston and our students.

*Arab-American Studies is growing rapidly with considerable community support. They would benefit from additional faculty appointments.

*Indian-American studies needs a tenured academic anchor, who if they existed would be a powerful magnet for the strong community interest.

*Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies has tapped into a wellspring of community support, and faculty support could be generated with further development.

*All of the cultural studies centers could be used to ease the advising burden on the College, as we are nearing the end of opportunities to reduce the load on advisors. The next step will be to expand the number of advising professionals.

*Creative Writing, one of the top programs in the country, has considerable community and corporate support, but it is vastly under-utilized.

*The Masters in Public Administration Program, which offers training to those implementing policy, will eventually join the Hobby School of Public Affairs. Before doing so, however, their proposal to develop a Center for Urban Governance is attractive, and has significant community interest.

The objectives of the growth initiatives discussed here are to leverage the existing leading assets in CLASS to further the objective of building a unique and thriving University, harnessing academic strengths to accomplish positive change. The strengths in CLASS are broad and cover every single initiative of the University. Our near-term focus is to accentuate the vital skills we offer, but the traditional educational assets in this College including how to think critically, articulate clearly, and communicate effectively are the building blocks of any person who solves problems- which is literally everyone.