Merger - Transition Plan

Cullen College of Engineering
College of Technology

June 2022

Background

The University of Houston began implementing a new University strategic plan in 2021. The two top goals identified in the strategic plan are (1) Student Success and (2) Nationally Competitive Research. The announced retirement of the Dean of the College of Technology, Tony Ambler, provided a window of opportunity for us to assess if there were better ways to fulfill these strategic goals. Recognizing the fact that most research universities offer engineering and technology programs under one umbrella, the question was raised if it may be a suitable model for us at the University of Houston. In search of answers, President Khator established a SWOT Merger Task Force to consider the implications of merging the Cullen College of Engineering and the College of Technology. The task force was charged to identify opportunities and challenges from the merger and to assess the value added of a merged college in meeting the strategic goals of the University.

SWOT Task Force

The task force was comprised of ten faculty members--five from each college--and was chaired by Greg Bean (faculty in the Bauer College of Business). It was assisted by Joseph Curtin (Institutional Research) to ensure data availability and accuracy. The task force reviewed background statistics from each college as well as a very high-level review of other Tier 1 universities around the country and the administrative structure of their programs. Input was gathered from approximately ten focus groups representing faculty, program directors, department chairs and staff. Input was also solicited from members of the advisory boards of each college through a formal on-line survey. The results of focus groups, surveys, and analysis of data identified opportunities and threats posed by merging the two colleges.

Strengths/Opportunities

Opportunities for Students

- The merged college will provide a larger selection of courses and programs for students. It should help in student retention.
- Students will be able to seamlessly transfer between programs as long as they meet minimum requirements. It should prevent student drop out and help with degree completion.
- Students will have better support for services in a merged college. It should help students complete their degree on time.
- Students will have more opportunities for "high-impact learning" experiences, like undergraduate research and college-wide competitions. It should enhance retention and should also strengthen their skill set.
- Combined career fairs and career services will expand exposure to employers and recruiters for both Engineering and Technology graduates. It should result in the increased placement of students into the workforce.
- Because of its diversity of disciplines and options, the merged college will be more attractive to prospective students. It should result in an expanded access to both engineering and technology.

Opportunities for Faculty and Staff

- The merged college, with its size and diversity of disciplines, will be better able to compete for new talent. Most universities house their engineering and technology programs under one umbrella making theirs appear larger and stronger than ours. After merger, the size of the new college will be on par with others, which should help attract higher caliber and more diverse faculty.
- Faculty in the merged college will have better access to interdisciplinary grants that require both a theoretical and applied approaches. It should help bring more research funding to the college.
- Bringing theoretical and applied areas under one roof will likely lead to more patents, technology transfer and new products.

- Currently, the College of Technology does not offer doctoral programs. The merged college should provide opportunities for faculty to serve on doctoral committees and have access to doctoral students.
- Access to doctoral students by Technology faculty will provide opportunities for more competitive research grant proposals. While many faculty collaborate across college boundaries, it is hoped that the merged college will make it easier for faculty to do research together.
- The merged college can provide better career opportunities and tools to the staff from both colleges.

Weaknesses/Threats

The task force identified several areas of concerns as threats.

1. Some programs in the College of Technology may not be a good fit for the merged unit. It is important to identify a path for these programs.
2. Minimum entry requirements for the two colleges are different (3.0 GPA for College of Engineering and 2.5 for College of Technology). It is important to maintain access for lower-GPA students to the merged college.
3. Faculty in two colleges have been hired under different sets of expectations. It is important to maintain distinct faculty expectations with regards to tenure and promotion.
4. The merger will require streamlining of administrative roles and responsibilities. It is important to maintain merger ideology in administrative changes.
5. College of Technology enjoys a strong brand and recognition. It is important to maintain the identity of COT programs.
6. Two colleges are governed under different sets of by-laws, which includes the status of non-tenure track faculty. It is important to manage and resolve these differences.
7. The merger is likely to raise many issues, particularly the issue of its underlying purpose. It is important to create a clear narrative on the purpose and benefits of a merger of COT and COE.

Task Force Recommendation:

In two reports, the task force offered several recommendations. The primary ones are below:
1. Any program that does not fit in the merged college should have an identified home college.
2. The merged college should be consistent with the organizational structure at the majority of Tier 1 universities that have the theoretical and applied engineering and engineering-related programs under the same administrative unit.
3. Identity of our technology programs should be protected and enhanced.
4. Student access to programs in the College of Technology should be protected.
5. Faculty's pathway to tenure and promotion should be consistent with the expectations at the time of their hiring.
6. The merger should be in two phases to allow for a smooth transition. In the first phase, a distinct School of Technology should be organized within the merged college.
7. The decision should be made sooner than later.

Proposed Decision: Based on the report of the task force with its analysis and recommendation, *President Khator proposes to merge the two colleges* with the following guiding principles, process, and timeline.

Guiding Principles:

1. Technology programs' brand names be protected. The name of the merged college can be Cullen College of Engineering or Cullen College of Engineering and Technology or any other proposed name.
2. Students should experience better opportunities for access and success. More specifically, access to technology programs should not be sacrificed.
3. Process to evaluate and promote faculty should be based on the assigned expectations. Similarly, careful consideration should be given to allow staff to develop and advance within the merged structure.

The merger should be in two phases, as proposed by the Merger Task force. In the first phase, there should be School of Technology created within the merged college.

Phase One
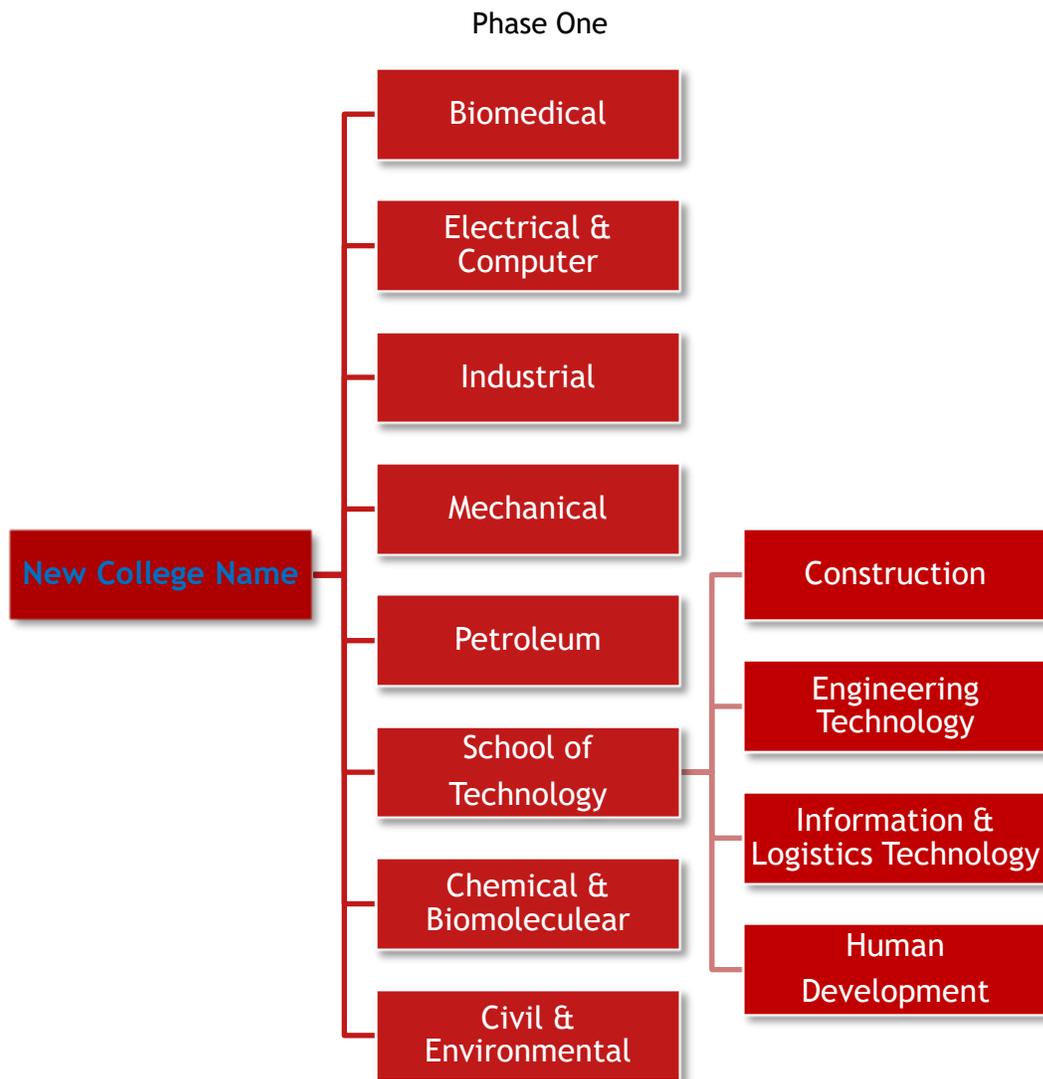
Over the next three years, departments and programs will be evaluated and new organizational structures created to enhance student success and research productivity to meet the University's strategic goals. The organization after Phase Two may look like this (only two departments are used below to illustrate the point).

Phase Two
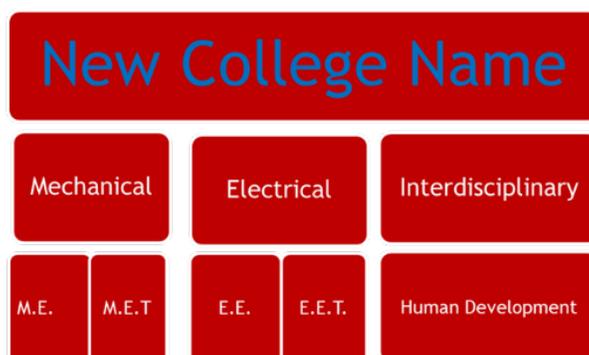
Process

The Provost will appoint a Transition Committee which will include deans of the College of Engineering and College of Technology. The Provost will also appoint four subcommittees to address the challenges identified by the task force. The proposed subcommittees are:

1. Governance Subcommittee: This subcommittee will solidify the administrative structure and propose by-laws for the merged college. The Subcommittee will also review the steps needed to ensure various accreditations in the two colleges. (Threat 1, 2 and 6).
2. Students Success Subcommittee: This subcommittee will propose strategies to enhance access (entry requirement for students) and success (advising, career fairs, etc.) in the merged college and help revise the student catalog appropriately (Threat 4).
3. Faculty and Staff Advancement Subcommittee: This subcommittee will evaluate faculty and staff promotion and advancement guidelines in the two colleges and propose strategies to mitigate any challenge. (Threat 5).
4. Branding Subcommittee: This subcommittee will propose branding strategies as well as strategies to connect with alumni for the merged college (Threat 3).

Timeline

August 2022: Town Hall Meetings to seek feedback from faculty, staff, alumni, and students on this proposal.
September 2022: Formation of subcommittees on Governance, Student Success, Faculty and Staff Advancement, and Branding
Sub-committee work due: November 2022
Formal unveiling and celebration for the new college: December 2022
Start of merged college: January 2023

Next Step: We value your feedback. To facilitate direct feedback, the Provost will organize four town hall meetings in August. VP Brice will organize meetings/opportunities with alumni and advisory groups during the same time. If you wish to provide feedback in any other way, please feel free to send it to the President or Provost.

SWOT Analysis – Report

SWOT Threat Assessment - Report