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FINANCE

Can Closing a Humanities College Save a University?

By *Eric Kelderman* | APRIL 13, 2018

✓ PREMIUM



U. of Central Missouri

Central Missouri and many other regional public universities have been stretched thin over the past decade by falling enrollments and stagnant state appropriations.

In 2010, Charles M. Ambrose became president at the University of Central Missouri and led an effort to put the institution on firmer financial footing by recasting its mission and creating new initiatives to both become more efficient and create new revenues.

The result was called “Strategic Governance for Student Success,” and it produced a wide range of measures with catchy names emphasizing the university’s positive aspirations. “Learning To A Greater Degree,”

“Strategic Resource Allocation Model,” and “Contract for Completion,” to name a few.

The university also eliminated one of its five colleges, redistributing academic programs in health into a new College of Health Sciences and Technology.

In February, administrators announced another effort to improve the university’s long-term financial outlook, relying mostly on budget cuts, including a proposal to eliminate the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

While the details have not been finalized, one result could be that departments such as English, history, and philosophy could be merged with programs from the College of Education. Art, music, and dance departments could share a college structure with a variety of sciences, statistics, and technology.



U. of Central Missouri

Charles Ambrose, president of the U. of Central Missouri:

“You could easily say the fiscal pressure on the state budget puts higher education in the crosshairs.”

idea was introduced.

The relatively quick pace for making such changes is not only necessary, the president said, but desirable. “We are being very active and offensive in this plan so we don’t have to keep doing it,” he said in an interview.

Administrators are estimating the changes could save \$600,000 a year by getting rid of a dean and five department chairs. Though many of the people in those jobs would remain on the faculty, money would be saved from the stipend and release from teaching time the university grants those employees.

Ambrose said the changes are necessary to respond to declining numbers of international students, stagnant state appropriations, increasing health care and pension costs, and a state law limiting tuition increases to the rate of inflation.

Although the measure is still in draft form, Ambrose expects that the university’s Board of Governors will vote on a final version at its April 27 meeting, just a few months after the

Along with the reorganization, the administration has recommended cuts to the athletics department and building maintenance, as well as eliminating nearly 100 vacant positions. A February estimate of all the cost-cutting measures added up to nearly \$11-million in potential savings.

All of this is part of the effort that was begun in his first year, Ambrose said: “One thing we did in 2010, we made a commitment to reshape public higher education for the state.”

And while there is uncertainty over details and the speedy pace of the changes, Ambrose said he has tried to be transparent about the process, with several forums to hear concerns and input to shape the final proposal that the board will consider.

“The speed concerns some more than others,” he said. “But I have had several senior faculty members say we will still be great faculty working at a great university. They understand these are not ordinary times in Missouri.”

Eric Kelderman writes about money and accountability in higher education, including such areas as state policy, accreditation, and legal affairs. You can find him on Twitter @etkeld, or email him at eric.kelderman@chronicle.com.

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