

Exploring Options for Departmental Structures and Developing a Concept Document

One of the features of the CALS Organizational Redesign is considering new structures for departments. As part of this redesign, some departments will undergo mergers. In addition to these mergers, departments may affiliate in a collaborative relationship that was called a “division” in the CALS Organizational Redesign Committee Report. In other instances, a department may retain its current structure.

Redesigning CALS will be broken into three phases:

1. Exploring department structure options and developing a concept document
2. Developing and submitting formal proposals for redesign
3. Implementing approved proposals for redesign

This document is meant to serve as a resource for CALS departments during phase one of the redesign, from exploring organizational options to developing and documenting a concept for the desired future state of the department. The pages that follow outline organizational options for departments, a timeline and tips for navigating phase one, and a template for developing a concept document.

The concept document required for this exploratory phase is not meant to be a formal proposal for redesign and will not address many decisions that need to be made as part of the process. Rather, the concept document will outline a merger or other collaborative affiliation for which departments are willing to develop a formal proposal or describe why a department believes it should remain as is. The template for the concept document asks departments to share basic, yet fundamental information, such as the rationale for a proposed department structure and anticipated benefits to be derived from the arrangement. While departments are not expected to have every detail of their proposed structure defined when submitting their concept document, they should feel optimistic about being able to do so in the future.

The goal for phase one is to have a concept for future departmental structure approved by the dean no later than July 1, 2018. After concepts are approved, departments will begin phase two of organizational redesign, developing formal proposals and five-year plans. Subsequent guidance for phases two and three will be provided as the CALS Organizational Redesign moves forward. As departments explore their future organizational structure, they should consider multiple options. Departments should also include the Dean’s Office in their discussions with potential partners.

Departmental Structure Options

Going forward, there are several possible outcomes for departments in a redesigned CALS:

1. Merge with other department(s)
2. Form a collaborative with other department(s)
3. Remain as they are today

Descriptions of these three options are as follows:

Mergers

For some CALS departments, merging with another unit allows them to achieve greater success than if they remain in their current state. A merger involves two or more departments coming together to form a single unified department around a center of gravity that will strengthen existing programs and foster innovation. In a merged department, there will be one executive committee, one tenure home, one set of departmental subcommittees, and unified governance and decision-making processes. A merger also includes a consolidation of department resources. While a merger could involve changes to academic offerings, a merged department may elect to offer multiple undergraduate and graduate programs. A merger can be an effective option when there is significant overlap in academic programs, research missions, and other priorities. However, merged departments do not necessarily have to unite similar disciplines. A successful merger can also occur from a multidisciplinary partnership around a common topic.

Collaboratives¹

The CALS Organizational Redesign Committee described approaches to forming divisions as means to foster collaboration among departments. At this time, CALS does not plan to divide into multiple sectors, with each department belonging to one or more, although this could be considered in the future. Rather than dividing the college, departments are encouraged to explore partnerships, called collaboratives.

A collaborative is an organizational structure that fosters teamwork while still allowing some departmental autonomy. By forming a collaborative, departments will share some resources, jointly perform some functions, and have greater critical mass to advance common priorities, especially new initiatives that could develop after the collaborative is formed. Collaboratives are expected to be of medium to long-term duration. In some cases, they may be a transitional structure, leading to a merger or other outcome.

¹ The term “division” has other meanings at the university, so other names were explored and considered by the Dean’s Office and Secretary of the Faculty before the Dean’s Office ultimately selected “collaborative.”

By sharing some resources, collaboratives could fund faculty positions, support administrative staff, and enhance facilities and instrumentation. The innovation and collaboration happening in these partnerships may be incentivized by the allocation of additional resources, such as support for faculty lines and seed funding. Examples of functions that collaboratives might perform include development of new revenue-generating programs, administration of shared academic or research programs, administrative support functions, advising of students, hiring for shared positions, and certain committee functions. However, departments in a collaborative still retain their own executive committees and are each a distinct tenure home, thus remaining compliant with governance outlined by Faculty Policies and Procedures.

A committee consisting of chairs from participating departments will coordinate each collaborative. If additional subcommittees are needed, participating departments will designate members. The collaborative's committee would be expected to meet at least quarterly, in addition to meeting with the dean at least annually.

Remaining "As Is"

For some departments, remaining largely as they are today may be the best option for future success. However, it is anticipated that this will apply only to a small number of departments. Those that remain in their current state will have demonstrated a critical mass, adequate resources and capacity, and success across mission areas. However, even the most robust departments may wish to consider affiliating with other departments where they wish to collaborate around a common goal.

Timeline for Exploring Departmental Structure Options and Developing a Concept Document.

The following is a timeline to help guide departments through the process of exploring their options and developing a concept document that outlines the chosen outcome. A template for the concept document is attached.

February: Chairs meet with the dean to discuss the current state of their department and to review options for future departmental structure. The dean distributes guidance for exploring departmental structure options. Chairs work with members of their department to identify potential partners for a merger or collaborative.

March: The dean releases a set of metrics and recommendations to help focus departments' structure exploration. It is recommended that each department appoint a subcommittee to prepare options for discussion with colleagues. Chairs exploring a merger or collaborative reach out to potential partners, if they have not done so already, to discuss redesign. Departments are encouraged to explore multiple options, in order to choose the one with the most synergy.

The Dean's Office is available to be part of these conversations and may initiate these conversations as needed.

April: Departments considering a merger or collaborative meet jointly to discuss content for a concept document. A joint structure committee may be formed with representatives from the participating departments to draft a document that outlines the concept for the merger or collaborative based on discussions at the joint meetings. It is recommended that chairs of departments considering a merger or a collaborative provide members of their departments opportunities to connect with one another outside of redesign meetings, to become better acquainted and to encourage such discussions. Finally, departments proposing to remain 'as is' also form a structure committee to develop a rationale for why remaining the same is the most viable option and to document what other options were considered and why they were dismissed.

May: Each departmental structure committee completes a concept document, based on input from their department(s) and using the provided template. Departments vote on the concept for their future departmental structure and submit documentation to the dean. Note that departments proposing to merge or establish a collaborative will work together to prepare a joint concept document. In such a case, both departments must vote on the concept.

June: The dean will review concept documents and discuss them with chairs to determine whether departments should move forward with developing formal proposals for redesign, or continue working towards an alternative plan.

July: Work on phase two, developing formal proposals for redesign, begins.

Tips for Exploring Departmental Structure Options and Developing a Concept Document

The following are tips to help with your exploration of departmental structure options and development of a concept document.

Identifying potential partners for a merger or collaborative

Identifying potential partners is something that departments should get started on immediately and one of the first steps in exploring their partnership options. All departments should work on identifying potential partners for a merger or collaborative in February and March, regardless of the collegiate structure they are leaning towards at this time. The Dean's Office may also suggest potential partners for a merger or collaborative. It may be helpful for departments to consider with whom they are already collaborating in their teaching, research, extension and outreach work, and where potential new synergies may exist.

Focusing departmental structure exploration

In March, the dean will release a set of metrics to help focus a department's exploration of organizational structures. With these metrics, the dean will provide recommended outcomes for each department that should inform the department's concept document. As a reminder, it is anticipated that only a small number of departments will remain as is, and all should be considering options to merge or form a collaborative.

Initiating discussion between departments

After identifying potential partner(s), it is recommended that members of the departments jointly meet to discuss a concept document for a merger or collaborative. Departments should be prepared to hold multiple joint meetings in a relatively short period of time in order to accomplish their required tasks.

Structure committee

A structure committee helps to define who will take the lead on preparing the concept document. It is important that the structure committee be representative of all of the involved department(s). An ideal committee would include 2-3 members of each participating department, including the department chairs.

Opportunities for connection

To help foster collegiality and better understanding of each other's work, it is recommended that chairs of departments considering a merger or collaborative provide members of their departments opportunities to connect with one another outside of redesign meetings. One option is organizing brown bag research talks throughout the redesign process so faculty can learn more about each other's work and identify potential areas for collaboration.

Concept document

All departments are required to submit a concept document, even if they are proposing to remain as is. Departments proposing a merger or collaborative will submit one document collectively per merger or collaborative.

Template for Departmental Structure Concept Document

Responses should be a brief narrative, but please expand text boxes as needed.

Authoring department(s):	
Proposed structure: <i>(merger, collaborative, as is)</i>	
Working title for new department or collaborative: <i>(if applicable)</i>	
Brief rationale for proposed structure:	
Potential impact on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Research- Teaching- Outreach/Extension/Stakeholder Engagement- Service- Diversity & Climate- Administrative Support- Revenue Generation	
Factors that need further consideration or lingering questions:	
Other alternatives that were explored, but not selected	

Template for Departmental Structure Concept Document

For mergers and collaboratives: Please use this optional space to describe or visually depict organizational designs generated to date. This should include areas of focus within the new organizations and how faculty might align.

Is there any other information you would like to share from your discussions on redesign, such as potential impact on your academic programs or administrative staff?

Are there any anticipated personnel changes (e.g. retirements) that would be helpful to know about at this time?