

BFC TASK FORCE ON RESEARCH REORGANIZATION

Report on Proposed Research Consolidation by VPR
3 November 2022

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In March 2022, the Vice President for Research (VPR) proposed, in a document called “Enhancing Research at IU,” centralizing support for research university-wide within the VPR office and eliminating the Bloomington-based Office of the Vice Provost for Research, which has been charged with supporting research on the Bloomington campus since it was established in 2002. Under this proposal, the research budget and other responsibilities of OVPR would be consolidated (along with the budget and responsibilities of comparable offices that have served the other IU campuses) in the Office of the Vice President for Research, with the idea that the centralized office, led by the Vice President for Research, would determine how best to allocate these resources to support the university's research objectives. In May 2022, the BFC resolved to create a Task Force on Research Reorganization, which was assembled over the summer of 2022, and charged it with assessing how the proposed research reorganization can optimize support for the full range of scholarship, creative endeavors and research excellence on the Bloomington campus. Given the diversity of research on campus and the inextricable relationship between research and education, faculty input is instrumental for the success of this process.

As the Task Force began its work in August 2022, it became clear that the Office of the Vice President for Research had already taken several steps to implement a reorganization plan, before the task force had adequate time to fully gain or synthesize faculty feedback on the opportunities presented by the proposed reorganization, as well as potential challenges, and before other key stakeholders, including deans, had an opportunity to provide input through other mechanisms. More recently, the university's strategic planning process (IU 2030) and the forthcoming resignation of the Vice President for Research were announced, both of which are taken into account by the task force in preparing this report.

Our central concern with the proposal is that it risks undermining the role of the IUB Provost, the chief academic officer of the Bloomington campus, in shaping and supporting research and creative activity on the IUB campus. The BFC Task Force on Research Reorganization finds the proposal fundamentally flawed for this reason. Indiana University is a multi-campus institution, with the Bloomington Campus as its flagship. Under the reorganization that is currently being implemented, key research roles are being conceived and filled by the Office of the Vice President for Research, which reports to the University President, not to the Provost. These roles include a new AVP and seven new Research Directors, who are charged with serving the university as a whole. At the same time, the role of the Office of the Vice Provost for Research appears to be hollowed-out, or potentially eliminated. This, in our view, will harm research development on the Bloomington campus. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that any new structure include a Vice Provost for Research Office, with full budgetary discretion and complete authority over research development, that understands this Campus, works close to faculty units, the deans, and reports directly to and under the authority of the Provost.

The task force and many of the faculty and other stakeholders we spoke with appreciate the theoretical goals of a restructure, which include reducing inefficiencies, increasing funding for research activities and increasing the percentage of IU researchers receiving external funding for their research (while

recognizing that external funding is not a primary marker of research productivity in some disciplines). Increased funding for research resources that can be leveraged to develop external funding is seen as a positive. Likewise, new resources dedicated to the strategic recruitment and retention of faculty are viewed favorably by many stakeholders. Improvements in services related to grant submission (ORA, PDS), with an emphasis on large center grant activity and more collaborative relationships between faculty and ORA, would likely increase the funding portfolio on campus for areas of research that rely primarily on external funding for support. **However, the faculty expressed serious concerns about the lack of rationale, criteria, and clarity regarding the proposed re-structuring.**

Any restructuring of research leadership and budget, and assessment of research productivity, needs to take into account the uniqueness of the Bloomington campus and the IU system. In proposing the restructuring, the Office of the Vice President for Research emphasized external funding as the core metric of research excellence. We agree that IU can certainly take steps to increase our funding portfolios, which would undoubtedly benefit the University's reputation and allow faculty to support more students with funds from these grants. However, to the extent the proposed restructuring is being driven by comparisons to other institutions, it is essential to recognize that IUB is different from the flagship campus of many of its Big10 peers and other large public universities. The Bloomington Campus, and IU as a whole, is not a land grant institution. Land grant institutions typically feature a flagship campus with large, traditional schools of engineering and agriculture that substantially increase the ratio of grant-active faculty on a given campus. Additionally, several other Big10 schools have flagship, or single, campuses that include a medical school, which likewise can substantially increase the ratio of grant-active faculty on the campus. IUB, by contrast, has relatively more faculty in schools and departments for which large, overhead-bearing external funding is neither readily available nor a driving force behind research and creative activities.

The dollar-driven/revenue-driven metrics presented in the proposal, accordingly, do not fully capture the productivity, breadth of contributions made to the state of Indiana, international reputation, and ranking of these units. Nor is external research funding the exclusive metric for eligibility in key associations such as AAU or R-1 research status. For

example, AAU's indicators also consider membership in national academies, faculty awards and fellowships, doctoral education, undergraduate education, and citations. There is a good rationale for having certain realms of research infrastructure centralized at the university level, such as an office of compliance. However, direction, academic leadership, catalysis, and development of the richly diverse

DEFINITION OF RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Research and creative activities include laboratory-, field-based, and other empirical hypothesis- or objective-driven explorations; interpretation of texts, data, or other media; development of theoretical models; curation of crucial archives; exploration, preservation, and interpretation of historic documents, artifacts, languages, literatures, performing and fine arts; and the creation of new literatures, performing, and fine arts on campus.

Any articulation of the university's "research" mission, and the resources that support that mission, must reflect the full, and exceptionally diverse, range of research and creative activities on campus.

Metrics used to assess research and creative productivity should likewise reflect this diversity and be calibrated appropriately for different kinds of research and creative activity.

research mission of the whole Bloomington Campus require a thorough understanding and appreciation of this mission.

Any major reorganization of the structure of research leadership requires clearly articulated and specific goals, good-faith, data-driven and reliable evidence, feasibility considerations, and mitigation plans. It should also be implemented in such a way to ensure stakeholders understand the process and its objectives and to minimize disruption to research activities and loss of trust in the process. The reorganization proposed by the VPR has already moved forward, per the VPR. However, the process has been flawed. A reorganization should start by articulating the specific problems/opportunities to be addressed. It should be informed, at a minimum, by the following: a study of appropriate comparators; regular consultation with stakeholders to identify actual hurdles to research and gaps in research infrastructure; and a clear presentation of accurate data on research metrics (including transparent disclosure of sources of information so that the data can be independently reviewed by interested parties). Even if the process has already begun, it is still essential that the leaders of this initiative gather this information and assess whether the structure will be effective in achieving the identified objectives, and/or whether the plan should be modified to better achieve these goals. Any new structure should aim to achieve these identified goals for the broad range of research and creative activity, facilitate collaboration across schools, and catalyze research excellence and growth on the Bloomington Campus.

In light of these developments, the task force has been asking for the process to be paused at least until the strategic plan has been finalized. By “paused” we mean halting any staff reassignment, budget reallocations, faculty hiring or appointments for research administration, or related activities. We suggest that as part of the strategic planning process, the relevant working groups seek input from other relevant stakeholders, including the Deans, Associate Deans for Research, chairs, and others to provide input into what would constitute the best structure to support research and creative activities on campus.

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