

INTEGRATION AMONG SCHOOLS AND ACROSS RUTGERS

Reorganizing the Basic Sciences across Rutgers

The integration of Rutgers and UMDNJ in 2013 occurred in the midst of an unprecedented period of growth in access to patient genome sequences and complementary data coming from high-throughput measurements of biological systems. This “perfect storm” of institutional change and the big data revolution demands that Rutgers, as an institution, develop a considered strategy that defines the optimal means by which the Rutgers schools of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Environmental and Biological Sciences should seek to collaborate with the basic science and clinical departments of RBHS. One of the specific issues to be addressed is the number of existing basic science departments within RBHS alone, as well as across the broader institution.

The potential reorganization of academic units across Rutgers is a strategic priority for Rutgers and was recommended as part of the Rutgers strategic plan. Accordingly, a Rutgers-wide Committee on Academic Unit Organization has been formed to consider the reorganization of academic units across Rutgers, then provide recommendations. It is anticipated that basic science units, particularly those within RU-New Brunswick, RU-Newark, and RBHS, will be a focus. RBHS is well represented on this committee and will participate actively.

In addition, an RBHS task force will be created shortly after the strategic plan is finalized to work in collaboration and coordination with the Rutgers-wide committee to consider reorganization options in the basic sciences within RBHS. The task force, formulated by RBHS leadership in consultation with the RBHS Faculty Council, will consist of representatives of each of the RBHS schools with basic science departments. The RBHS task force will:

- establish and promulgate overarching principles and affirm community standards/values governing the RBHS reorganization process, with particular emphasis on transparency;
- determine what issues need to be addressed, if/where reorganization is to occur;
- develop specific objectives to address these issues;
- define the scope of a potential basic science reorganization;
- determine the motivations for a basic science reorganization;
- determine the relationship between the RBHS basic science reorganization effort and the Rutgers reorganization effort, and identify mechanisms of interaction to ensure congruity;
- conduct external data gathering regarding the ways in which peer and aspirant institutions have sought to reorganize related academic disciplines in similar situations, the objectives and expected benefits of these reorganizations, and successes and failures and other lessons learned of these reorganizations;
- conduct internal (RBHS) data gathering regarding what is meant by “basic sciences” – identifying all basic science faculty by this definition, basic science research programs and financial/support information regarding each, teaching activities of each basic science program, basic science outreach programs, and the location and utilization of all shared facilities/equipment and resources;
- examine through interviews the lessons learned from prior reorganizations of the biological sciences at Rutgers (1978-1980, circa 2000, and the RWJMS basic science reorganization of circa 2010), and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the status quo within all basic science units;
- establish the role of the Rutgers University Senate in the process of any basic science reorganization;
- identify and solicit participation from stakeholders (alumni, undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, staff researchers and technicians, tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, emeritus faculty, department chairs, deans, chancellors, center, bureau, and institute leadership, and external advisors);
- empower key stakeholders to formulate broad objectives and enumerate expected risks and benefits, both internal and with respect to external perceptions/rankings, for undertaking a basic science reorganization;

- establish a precise date by which these objectives and expected benefits will be subject to public comment across the Rutgers basic science community;
- establish action plans with interim objectives and assess resource needs to achieve specified objectives;
- identify and involve individuals affected by action plans/objectives;
- link action plans to objectives and access to necessary resources enabling achievement of overall goals, and include periodic interim review, with accountability for transparent reporting;
- organize working groups to implement specific objectives via defined action plans;
- prior to implementation, establish an accepted system of metrics for assessing the quality of the implementation (i.e., how could this have been done better?) and achievement of goals and objectives (i.e., did this achieve what was expected and was the effort worthwhile?);
- establish a date by which assessed outcomes will be reviewed and questionable elements of the reorganization will be re-examined and either further refined or abandoned;
- establish a date by which a scholarly report detailing the Rutgers experience will be made public.

Finally, the RBHS task force, working with the Rutgers-wide task force, will identify a timeline and metrics for these specific initiatives.