

## TASK FORCE ON FUTURE ACADEMIC DIRECTIONS

January 8, 2021

**Overarching Goal: Strategically plan academic programming and delivery models that ensure Missouri State University will be an innovative and resilient institution for student success**

### Introduction

MSU will continue to provide a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. Recent data indicate that almost half of college graduates will change jobs in less than two years after initial hire, so they must be equipped with knowledge and skills that are adaptable and transferable. MSU's focus on public affairs equips individuals to serve as engaged citizens who make valuable contributions to their communities. The value of offering a wide range of academic options to students must not be lost. However, the MSU academic environment also must be one of innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Information regarding the employment landscape indicates that MSU offers many academic programs that are tied to present and projected desirable career opportunities. These include both areas with higher career salaries and those with societal need. Many of these existing programs could benefit from potential rebranding and revising curricula to increase visibility and assure identifiable student pathways. At the same time, there are demands in academic areas that the university does not offer, or only offers on a limited basis, so academic programming must be expanded and new programs must be initiated to meet increasing societal needs.

In the next decade, higher education will be guided by operating principles that address consumer expectations, reflect institutional values, and ensure best use of resources. The need for education is ongoing and mandates that a growth mentality pervade the MSU culture as specified in the SEM plan. The university must use the latest technologies to provide a dynamic and flexible academic environment to continue to attract and support a diverse range of students.

Research and creative works are a vital dimension of the MSU educational process, and they contribute essential benefits to society. Faculty will be both supported and expected to engage in impactful research that is disseminated widely. Scholarly activity supports experiential learning opportunities, and it is an integrated component of academic programming. Student mentoring is a fundamental component of research at MSU that gives both undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to engage with faculty in research activities.

### Program Enhancement and Development

The next long-range plan should emphasize the need to initiate, rebrand, infuse, and revise academic curricula to ensure strong, relevant, marketable academic programs. The line between enhancing existing programs versus developing new ones is somewhat fuzzy, and both areas will require fresh and innovative perspectives.

- **Existing Programs** (in alphabetical order)
  - Accounting – Meet accreditation, profession and credentialing demands through curricular revision, infusion of technology, and intentional recruiting for a wide range of career paths.

- Biotechnology – Integrate existing coursework offered across disciplines, expand curricular offerings, and increase awareness of the value of this field of study.
  - Computer/Information Technology – Enhance focus on software developers, systems analysts, cybersecurity, infrastructure, and application fields (geospatial sciences, agriculture, etc.).
  - Cultural Studies and Global Understanding – Explore opportunities to rebrand and further develop programs that equip individuals to serve in and promote diverse and inclusive environments.
  - Data Science – Explore collaboration between colleges, potentially merge current offerings, and ensure adequate preparation in target areas.
  - Educators in High Demand – Meet increased need in STEM fields, agriculture education, special education, and educational technologies.
  - Healthcare – Continue preparation of strong leaders in healthcare, which will be an important and dynamic industry during the next five years and beyond.
  - Logistics/Supply Chain Management – Integrate logistics education to bolster practical applications across multiple disciplines and increase visibility and awareness of this focus.
  - Management – Meet industry demand for managers in the fields of marketing, finance, sales, analysts, etc.
  - New Collaborations in Communication Studies – Evaluate integration of curricula in Communication and Information Technology and/or Computer Science to prepare for increasing demands and opportunities in digital communication modalities.
  - The Arts – Continue to build on successful fundraising to support facility improvement and development, and implement the vision supported by gifts to the Judith Enyeart Reynolds College of Arts and Letters.
- **New or Expanded Programs**
    - Mental Health – Increase, and perhaps redirect, programming to prepare professionals to provide mental health services.
    - Sustainability – Emphasize this broad-based and inclusive area of study, focusing on environmental science, climate studies, policy, economics, and culture.
    - Technology Assisted Healthcare Delivery – Initiate certificates and other programming that reflect emerging needs of professionals delivering healthcare remotely.
    - Technology Assisted Teaching – Develop certificate and other programming for teachers regarding online, hybrid, and video-conferencing instruction that fits academic content and the developmental level of the learner.
    - Emerging Technologies – Ensure a perspective that faculty must work diligently to stay abreast of emerging developments and ensure that students are informed early and deeply.
  - **Professional Doctorates**
    - Commit to the plan of the Committee on the Future of Professional Doctorates at MSU (2019) that indicates next degrees likely will be the Doctorate of Occupational Therapy (OTD), Doctorate of Health Sciences (DHS), Doctorate of Education (EdD), and Doctorate of Psychology (PsyD).
    - Respond to identification and documentation of career demand.
    - Connect modes of instruction to target markets.

## Operating Principles for Faculty and Administration

- **Expect Growth in Programs with Opportunities**
  - Workforce demand will be monitored to determine opportunities for growth, as defined by increased demand in the field as well as gaps in demand and current MSU graduates.
  - Programs will ensure that recruitment and admission practices promote a diverse student population.
  - Allocation of resources will be informed by data, which will include metrics on student enrollment and career placement, as well as fundamental aspects of public affairs and liberal arts and sciences.
  - Student capacity will be determined and inform the establishment of annual enrollment goals.
  - New programs will be compatible with MSU's institutional mission.
  - Predictions for long-term career pathways and demand will be routine.
  - The flexibility to respond to emerging career fields will be critical.
  
- **Flexibility in Delivery of Instruction and Credentials Offered**
  - Delivery strategies (virtual, in person, hybrid) will be matched with content and student access needs and characterized by person-centered, high-touch approaches.
  - The demand for and use of learning models that allow students to move back and forth between in person, online synchronous, and online asynchronous will be explored.
  - Self-paced courses and on-demand, flexible start-completion, and block schedules will be typical.
  - Expectations, roles, rewards, and tracks for faculty, such as a dedicated teaching track, that reflect the emphasis on this flexibility will be explored.
  - The ability to provide additional micro-credentials in direct response to need will be emphasized and streamlined.
  
- **Technology in the Educational Processes**
  - Student competencies with current, cutting-edge technologies used in areas of study/future career path will be ensured, and students also will be equipped to stay abreast and develop proficiency with future technologies.
  - Faculty will be optimally prepared and supported for contemporary instructional delivery that includes the latest technologies, including simulations, augmented and virtual reality, and artificial intelligence.
  
- **Student Preparation**
  - State of the art academic content will be delivered, and students will be equipped to be independent, life-long learners who are able to upskill when needed.
  - Sources of academic instruction and content will include university faculty and external talent.
  - Social justice will be embedded in coursework offered by all departments.
  - The development of leadership, civic engagement, and cultural competence will be emphasized.
  - In-person and digital interpersonal and nonverbal communication skills will be targeted.
  - The use of internships and apprenticeships will be expanded where appropriate.

- **Cross-Campus Collaboration and Partnerships**
  - Teamwork in academics (instructors, certificate/degree programs, coursework) and research (studies, grants) will be supported and encouraged.
  - Strategies to develop student competencies and skill development across a variety of areas will be explored.
  
- **Collaboration with External Partners**
  - Agreements with academic institutions as well as other organizations (government, military, corporate, nonprofit) will be pursued.
  - Awarding academic credit for high quality industry training and experience will increase.
  - University agreements and partnerships to share and/or consolidate resources will be developed to promote educational access for a broader population of students.
  
- **Educational Efficiency and Efficacy**
  - The emphasis to decrease barriers will be continued.
  - Continuing and new opportunities for dual credit seamless transfer, and accelerated graduate degrees will be emphasized.
  - Admission processes, including time to decision for new students as well as the addition of credentials for existing students, will be streamlined.

## **Summary**

Missouri State University will expand enrollment over the next few years by growing its academic disciplines and programs to meet student demand and societal needs. The University offers a variety of strong academic programs that prepare students with basic skills and a grounding in public affairs, which combine with the advanced expertise needed for future careers. The pace of change in the marketplace and expectations of adaptable life skills require an agile and flexible academic environment. To meet these challenges, MSU will exhibit an innovative, entrepreneurial, and efficient approach to program majors and degrees, delivery of classes, and pathways to emerging new career fields that align with the mission. Attention to supportive and inclusive student access, recruitment, and retention strategies will permeate all actions.

Current academic programs will increase their visibility and marketplace relevance by curriculum adjustments, rebranding, and frequent cross-curriculum and industry collaborations. Infusion of technology applications will prepare students for the future marketplace. Some current programs poised to grow include computer applications, information and data science, biotechnology, communication studies, and teaching with technology. Additionally, the university will gear up to meet the continued need for well-educated business management personnel, teachers, the Arts, and STEM fields. Development of a new interdisciplinary, sustainability program addressing environment science, policy, financial, and culture is envisioned. Expansion of programs and new programming for healthcare professionals will be needed in order to prepare students for health care occupations, including those in mental health. The university will emphasize its Carnegie classification as Professional Doctoral by developing new doctoral programs in occupational therapy, health sciences, education and psychology.

This report was developed by the following committee between August 2020 and January 2021.

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