University Academic Restructuring

In this report, The Hanover Research Council presents innovations and emerging best practices in university academic restructuring. We outline key points in a body of secondary literature on this important and much debated topic, which can entail the radical reconsideration of traditional disciplinary fault lines and the reorganization of faculties, departments, and other academic units into more relevant and engaged bodies of research and pedagogy. Having reviewed XYZ University’s current strategic plan, with its emphasis on interdisciplinarity and innovation, we provide overviews of the experiences at several international institutions – from North America, Europe, and Australasia – which have undergone strategic academic restructuring. We conclude with a suggestion of emerging best practices in this enterprise.
Overview: Trends in Academic Restructuring

A perennial challenge for higher education institutions is to keep pace with knowledge change. In addition to investing in new faculty positions and launching targeted fund-raising activities, a prominent set of responses at the local campus level is to alter the academic structure...¹

This citation derives from Patricia Gumport’s 2000 article “Academic restructuring: Organizational change and institutional imperatives.” In it she argues that universities do well to examine motivations and exercise caution in the face of what is, in her estimation, a worrying trend that is rapidly abolishing and consolidating academic departments, radically changing the character and constitution of academia.

That institutions are restructuring their academic content and design is reflected in multiple areas, from the format of a multi-media doctoral dissertation to the architecture of the nascent “library of the future.” But the character and consequences of restructuring has also generated controversy and insecurity at all levels of the industry and in sites around the world. In April of 2009, Mark Taylor published a New York Times op-ed titled “End the University as We Know It,” which makes a bold argument for swift and revolutionary restructuring and sparked debate among higher education professionals. Assessing the state of the industry in the United States, in relation to economics as well as cultural relevance, Taylor writes, “If American higher education is to thrive in the 21st century, colleges and universities, like Wall Street and Detroit, must be rigorously regulated and completely restructured.”² Taylor goes on to draft six recommendations to guide this process, represented below:

♭ Restructure the curriculum to facilitate inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural interaction.
♭ “Abolish permanent departments” at all levels and replace them with “problem-focused programs.” These “zones of inquiry” might center on general themes like “Mind, Body, Law, Information, Networks, Language, Space, Time, Media, Money, Life, and Water.”
♭ “Increase collaboration among institutions.”
♭ Encourage subversions of the “traditional dissertation” model to reflect book market demands as well as the potential of new media (websites, games, etc).
♭ Prepare graduate students to pursue careers outside of academia.
♭ “Impose mandatory retirement and abolish tenure.”³

3 Ibid.
Taylor’s recommendations serve as a useful framework for a contemporary discussion of restructuring, although the details of his argument have been criticized by some of his peers. The Inside Higher ED blog features a prominent critical post in response to Taylor’s article. Blogger Dean Dad refutes, in particular, the idea that institutions should do away with traditional disciplines and replace them with broad subjects of inquiry. In relation to this proposal for radically new inter-disciplines, he poses a number of questions:

Who would evaluate them? Who would define them? … Who would make the decisions to ‘abolish, continue, or significantly change’ them? … In the absence of continuity, how would standards develop? Who would define them? What happens to a student who enrolls during, say, the fifth year of a seven year program? Would credits from other programs articulate? If not, would students be unable to transfer from one college to another?

Commentators on Dead Dad’s blog entry reflect a larger polarization between those who emphasize academe’s feudal governance and growing obsolescence, on the one hand, and those who fear a trend towards increasingly corporate administration of faddish content, on the other. Like the future of disciplinarity, the question of whether to abolish tenure lies at the nexus of both of these positions. Originally intended to safeguard academic freedom, the institution of tenure is increasingly seen as propagating a “pyramid scheme” of graduate students and junior faculty who compete for positions that will not open up. A recent New York Times article suggests that major universities are still “refraining from the tenure fight” for now, but a growing number of colleges are offering alternatives such as options for renewable contracts with better compensation and more generous sabbatical opportunities.

As both Taylor’s recommendations and its critics suggest, the restructuring of academe has the potential to impact the culture of the institution at every level. Around a decade ago, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published a scathing review of the quality of undergraduate education in America. Shirley Strum Kenny, chairwoman of the commission that wrote the report, was quoted in The New York Times as saying: “What we need to do is to create a culture of inquirers, rather than a culture of receivers.” Kenny’s comment provides an apt summary of a growing intention to revive academia as a site for the engagement with (rather than the custodianship of) knowledge. Authors Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin make a related argument in their 2001 article “Re-Organizing

Universities and ‘Knowing How’: University Restructuring and Knowledge Creation for the 21st Century:

… we see the way out of the dilemmas of contemporary universities to revolve around the practices of pragmatism in teaching and learning and democratization in the organization of university teaching, research, and administration. Universities must find a way to make ‘knowing how’ their foremost teaching effort and to relegate the conventional ‘knowing that’ emphasis of the last century’s educational system to a much more secondary role.

In this report, we profile a number of institutions, from around the world, that are attempting to restructure their academic content and design in order to facilitate this larger paradigm shift in the industry, a shift towards “knowing how” to better engage with a newly globalized knowledge economy.

At a Glance: Recommendations for Restructuring

- Restructure the curriculum to facilitate inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural interaction.
- Open up traditional disciplinary borders through the articulation of “zones” of shared inquiry.
- Increase inter-institutional collaboration.
- Encourage students to spearhead experimental research content and delivery.
- Prepare graduate students for diverse career possibilities.
- Reconsider traditional faculty hierarchies.

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Case Studies: Profiles of Institutions and Innovations

In this section we profile institutions from North America, Europe, and Australasia which have recently undergone or are currently undergoing strategic academic restructuring in some areas. In particular, we highlight innovative practices or perceived problems, which may be of special interest to the reader. We have selected these institutions based on information available, and believing them to bear some resemblance to XYZ University in terms of size and/or mission.

We begin with a description of the comprehensive process by which Simon Fraser University in Canada has developed a restructuring strategy. We then turn to a profile of innovative curricular restructuring that was adopted by Duke University’s Trinity College in 2000. We profile major developments in the restructuring of the University of Plymouth since 2002. Turning to the Australasian region, we describe the controversy around restructuring at the University of Melbourne, and we then examine changes in undergraduate admissions and curriculum implemented at New Zealand’s University of Auckland. We conclude our profiles with a presentation of the innovative Bologna Project, a transnational coordination of higher education restructuring across several European countries.

It is important to note that the current global economic recession has, in some cases, severely impacted the ability of institutions to meet certain restructuring goals, while other areas of change may be accelerated. We flag these issues where information is available.

Simon Fraser University, Canada

Simon Fraser University began its investigation into the potential of academic restructuring in 2005, and several documents related to this ongoing process are available on the institution’s websites. In November of 2007, the university’s Task Force on Academic Structure (composed of the university’s vice president, faculty members, and a graduate student representative) circulated for review and feedback a strategic plan for comprehensive, university-wide restructuring. The report, titled “Removing Barriers: Designing the Future of SFU,” was the output of a second phase in the restructuring process, which had been mandated by the university’s Senate a year prior to the release of the document. The Senate’s mandate charged the task force with responsibility to “review and recommend” the institution’s academic structure in terms of “overall academic configuration,” the “definitional clarity, administrative effectiveness, and appropriate differentiation among the structural building blocks,” and the potential for adapting design to foster “interdisciplinary

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7 See for example: “Simon Fraser University Faculty Union.” Simon Fraser Universit. http://www.sfufa.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160&Itemid=2
innovation.” The university’s long term strategic restructuring plan imagines the process culminating in a thoroughly re-designed institution by the year 2025. According to the 2007 report’s executive summary, the 2025 vision is geared towards improving the institution’s capacity to provide innovative and increasingly interdisciplinary resources to its four major stakeholder categories: faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and wider local and global communities.

This task force report was, itself, the product of a complex process by which twenty-five proposals from across the university’s schools, faculties, and departments were reviewed and evaluated by a number of working groups composed of faculty members and student representatives. Each working group, of which there were five, produced reports to the task force that formed the basis for open forums to invite feedback from the larger university community. According to the executive summary, a total of approximately 225 people participated in these forums.

Given the extensive scope of Simon Fraser University’s proposed restructuring, the 2007 report is divided into six “volumes” or “sub-reports” that each zero in on areas of content and process. These volumes are:

- **Introduction and Background**, providing historical context and detailed information about how the report was generated.
- **Major Structural Change**, providing the “core recommendations … with regards to changes in the academic structure.”
- **Interdisciplinarity**, which describes existing strengths and limitations and also “lays out a multifaceted strategy for improved facilitation, nurturing and incubation of interdisciplinary initiatives.”
- **Programs, Processes and Other Activities**, which details recommendations for specific programs and “speaks to additional issues raised by various areas of the University community” that had delivered input into the process.
- **Academic Structural Elements**, which introduces a proposed “new entity – the College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning.”
- **Implementation and Process Forward**, which comments on cost and administrative issues as well as potential impacts of restructuring on individuals in the university community.

Among the recommendations for major structural change are the elimination of one faculty (Applied Science) and the creation of three others (Contemporary Arts, Communication and Design; Engineering and Computing; and Environment and Sustainability). Other major recommendations involve relocating a school into an existing faculty, creating the College of Lifelong and Experiential Learning (which

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9 Ibid., p. 4.

10 Ibid., p. 4-5.
caters to both adult learners and undergraduates), and creating an Institute for Advanced Scholarship. The report’s most significant recommendation relating to interdisciplinarity is for the establishment of an Office for Interdisciplinary Collaboration that would be responsible for “championing” this strategic orientation.

The report’s final volume focuses on implementation and process issues, and especially the likely impact of restructuring on individual stakeholders. In particular, the report recommends that the process be designed in such a way that “educational programming” and “degree credentials” remain “stable and of the highest quality.” The report underscores that the restructuring investigation process, to date, has enjoyed a high level of involvement throughout areas of the university that will be affected, although it also acknowledges that some individuals will be unhappy with results. In relation to this latter category, the report states, “We believe it imperative that the University work with these individuals to ensure that suitable academic homes are found.” The 2007 report also acknowledges an increasingly difficult financial climate, although it insists that the restructuring proposed must remain a priority in order to safeguard the institution’s future success. Finally, the task force proposes a further round of open forums to allow university members to contribute new feedback after reviewing the report.

Of course, the fiscal concerns flagged in this 2007 publication have been significantly compounded by the subsequent recession. In March of 2008, Canada announced a decision to divert $16 million higher education dollars from universities to community colleges and trade schools in the British Columbia region. Simon Fraser University was among those impacted by this decision. This budget shortfall, combined with other effects of the recession, prompted the university’s decision to institute a hiring freeze in May of 2008. A protest group called “Stop the SFU Teaching Cuts” formed on the social networking site Facebook in response to this decision. In April of 2009, the university announced further measures to reduce expenses through line-by-line budget cuts at every level. It also opted to eliminate vacant faculty positions as well as twenty-three occupied jobs, with an anticipated impact on students involving larger class sizes and fewer choices. The university is additionally exploring ways to charge fees for services previously provided free of charge, such as non-credit courses for the community.

11 Ibid., p. 5.
12 Ibid. p. 11
13 Ibid., p. 16.
14 Ibid. p. 17.
We were unable to determine exactly how these new developments, which are resulting in de facto and reactive academic restructuring, are impacting the strategic long term restructuring agenda as it was outlined before the full impact of the recession had registered. It would appear likely, however, that the restructuring task force is currently working to determine how to focus and re-prioritize its recommendations.

**Duke University, the United States**

Duke University’s Trinity College of Arts and Sciences prides itself on its curricular design. The website for the college’s curriculum features the following statement of values:

> The curriculum of a university serves as its hallmark: within it are reflected the values of the faculty, the capabilities of its students, and the aspirations of the institution. Curricula evolve through a continuing process of change. As institutions and areas of knowledge develop, so do courses of study and faculty interests. Such has been the case from the medieval trivium … to the open curricula of the 60's and 70's to the emphasis on active and experiential learning of the 80's and 90's. So it must also be today.  

Trinity’s contemporary curriculum was instituted in 2000, and reviewed in 2004, after a strategic planning process undergone in response to “technological advances, the globalization of nations and markets, advances in science and genetics, and the emergence of entirely new fields of scholarly investigation …” The new curriculum is thus designed to better prepare graduates for work in a newly globalized marketplace where knowledge circulates and must be managed in radically different ways.

In particular, Trinity College’s curriculum includes three undergraduate requirements beyond the traditional academic major. These are “Areas of Knowledge” requirements, “Modes of Inquiry” requirements, and “Small Group Learning Experiences” requirements. These map against three categories, reproduced below, which Duke University has delineated as grouping expectation for learning outcomes:

1. **Knowledge of Humanity, Societies and Cultures, and the Physical and Natural World as expressed through the Arts and Sciences:**

   - Arts, Literatures, and Performance

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18 “Curriculum and Course Development.” Duke University Trinity College of Arts and Sciences. [http://trinity.duke.edu/curriculum](http://trinity.duke.edu/curriculum)

19 Ibid.
2. Intellectual Abilities, Competencies, and Skills

- Critical Thinking
- Analytical Reasoning
- Writing
- Quantitative Literacy
- Foreign Language and Transcultural Understanding
- Synthesis and Integration of Knowledge

3. Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic Engagement (Using Knowledge in the Service of Society)
- Ethical Reasoning
- Engaging Difference

To help students achieve in these three areas, Duke’s undergraduate programming features many innovative supplements to traditional classroom-based teaching. In addition to study abroad opportunities, students are encouraged to take advantage of specially targeted mentorships and fellowships, community-based “immersive service” learning, and seminar forums that invite interdisciplinary connections and the development of innovative practices for critical thinking. For example, the “Focus Program” is a seminar program that encourages first and second year students to engage with critical questions and issues that span across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. In addition to attending classes together, participating students are housed together in the same residential dorms and encouraged to develop inquiry beyond the classroom.

In general, Trinity College students are assisted in developing an independent research orientation and embarking on research projects from their first year of study. The “Undergraduate Research Support Office” helps students to connect with one another, with faculty, with internships and assistantships, and with possible sources of grants funding.

One of the important aspects of Trinity College’s curriculum is the clear provision for change, review, and (if necessary) restructuring. The process by which faculty and

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departments can request new majors, minors, and interdisciplinary “certificate programs” is clearly posted and described on the institution’s website and overseen by the “Office of Curriculum and Course Development” and the “Committee on Curriculum” for the college.22

The University of Plymouth, the United Kingdom

The University of Plymouth is a large and rapidly developing research university located in southwestern England. Framed by the goal to become “the enterprise university,” the institution began a series of restructuring efforts with a dramatic announcement in December of 2002 that the Board of Governor’s had unanimously approved a decision to close the historic Seale-Hayne Agricultural and Technical College branch of the university in rural Devon, as well as to move undergraduate teaching under the School of Arts and Sciences from two other campus sites to the main Plymouth campus. In essence, these major geographic transitions were designed to consolidate the university’s strengths within a single site. Then vice-chancellor Professor Roland Levinsky responded to approval by the Board of Governor’s by stating, “We now have a real opportunity to create a dynamic and thriving campus in Plymouth, which will be enormously attractive to staff and students alike.”23

Not everyone in the university community shared the vice-chancellor’s enthusiasm. The Seale-Hayne decision, in particular, prompted organized resistance from the university and local communities. A group of concerned members of the Seale-Hayne community, calling itself the “Seale-Hayne Future” group, circulated a document detailing reasons why the university’s decision was “flawed” in terms of academic, financial, and industrial arguments.24 Students, who had organized in opposition to the decision, responded to its confirmation by standing in a picket line outside the Board of Governor’s meeting place and releasing one thousand black balloons. The Guardian reported about students who described the decision as marking “a sad day for many students, past and present, on all our sites, who feel that an important part of Devon life is changing.”25

The University of Plymouth responded to this criticism in a few distinct ways. First, as a concession to students, it decided to allow existing cohorts of undergraduates at the Seale-Hayne campus to conclude their education at the site – a decision that meant there was some form of educational activity happening there through 2005.

Second, it announced a strong intention to transform the closed campus into a rural research institute and embarked on a process to determine the feasibility of this plan. In January of 2005, however, the university announced a decision that it would not proceed with this plan because independently commissioned feasibility study reports had determined there was not sufficient demand for rural research to warrant accepting the financial risks of going forward. The university did reiterate that it would continue to work with the area’s district council and “other interested parties” to determine best uses for the former college.

Subsequent to this major consolidation of the University of Plymouth’s campuses into the institution’s home city, the university turned its attention to the further restructuring of academic units. It renovated and extended its academic library system and spent 30 million GBP on the headquarters and a teaching facility for a College of Medicine and Dentistry, which is also affiliated with the Exeter University. Plymouth spent 11 million GBP building facilities for a new Faculty of Health and Social Work and nearly 16 million to build new undergraduate dorms and a state-of-the-art fitness center.

According to the university’s website, the most recent restructuring developments include the following:

- The creation of a dynamic new Business School dedicated to ethical, sustainable business skills, and supporting the economic regeneration of our city and region
- Bringing together complementary subjects in a new combined faculty of Science and Technology
- Creating the largest Marine Science and Engineering School in Europe.

Despite the controversy raised by its decision to close the Scale-Hayne facility, the University of Plymouth appears to have succeeded in significantly raising its profile as a major research institution. According to a review featured in Times Online, the University of Plymouth led its peers in the number of academics entered in the 2008 Research Assessment of UK institutions, and it holds the record of boasting eleven National Teaching Fellows among its faculty. The undergraduate population also enjoys a lower dropout rate than the national average.

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27 Ibid.
28 “Faculties, schools and subjects.” University of Plymouth. http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/faculties
29 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/good_university_guide/article2166656.ece
University of Melbourne, Australia

The curtain rises on a brightly lit stage and a young Melbourne University student struts around it, singing a song of innocent educational hope. By the time the floodlights dim an hour later, the student’s hopes are broken, the sandstone campus is a smoking ruin, and the vice-chancellor … is abandoning it...30

The above excerpt from an article in Australia’s The Age describes the arch of a piece of satirical musical theater developed by University of Melbourne students in response to a restructuring of the institution’s undergraduate curriculum that was announced in 2007 and phased in by the 2008 academic year. Now known as the “Melbourne Model,” this restructuring is described by the university, itself, in more benign terms:

The University of Melbourne has introduced landmark educational reforms known collectively as the Melbourne Model. These reforms are designed to create an outstanding and distinctive Melbourne Experience for all students. In moving to the new model, the University is responding to the challenges of today’s changing environment as well as aligning itself with the best of European and Asian practice and North American traditions.31

The Melbourne Model is, in essence, a transition towards an undergraduate curricular model that resembles the American liberal arts tradition in its emphasis on “breadth” of study combined with a major concentration. This is in contrast to a more European model by which students are professionally tracked from the undergraduate, or even secondary school, level. According to the logic of this paradigm shift, Melbourne graduates are better prepared to navigate a more complex, globalized, and interdisciplinary world, whether they head directly to the job market or opt to hone professional skills and credentials in a postgraduate studies program. At the heart of this restructuring lie a cluster of six “new generation” degrees, each of which requires students to take “breadth” courses outside the concentration. These degrees, which serve also as pathways to professional graduate training, are:

- Bachelor of Arts (with a special “alternate pathways” provision for indigenous students)
- Bachelor of Science
- Bachelor of Commerce

- Bachelor of Biomedicine
- Bachelor of Environments
- Bachelor of Music

Additionally, there are several “continuing” bachelor degrees, which do not transition to postgraduate taught or research courses. These are available in the fields of dance, dramatic arts, environmental horticulture, film and television, music performance, oral health, and production. The graduate degree offerings reflect a similarly wide breadth.

The controversy surrounding the Melbourne Model has been less about its curricular content and design and more about concerns over faculty job cuts, a lack of democracy in the restructuring process, perceived wastefulness in the restructuring budget, and an overarching sense that it is ushering in a “corporate,” American-style model of education. Gearing up for the transition, the university circulated a “redundancy policy” among its staffs. The policy explained that staff members would lose their jobs if a program is cut or undersubscribed, but that redundant staffs could apply to new positions without having to first leave the university for the previously mandated two years. Although perhaps intended to clarify the situation, this information served to stir up anxieties and anger on campus. In an attempt to appease protesting students, the university also announced a scholarship program for high achievers, a move that a student union officer insisted amounted to “bribing” students who were concerned about issues of equity and stability. Commenting on a higher education blog, one anonymous staff member posted the following: “Restructuring needs to be fully participatory, democratic, and transparent. It is not. Possibly the worst restructuring I have seen in 15 years.” The model has also been widely criticized by both prospective and existing undergraduate students, who bemoan the lack of consultation and transparency in the restructuring process.

Indeed, in October of 2007, The Age printed an article reporting that the university was experiencing a “slump in demand” for its undergraduate programs, with a growing number of secondary school graduates opting for enrollment at its main rival Monash University. A year later, the same newspaper printed a story revealing that the university was planning to spend nearly $12 million marketing its restructuring campaign in that year alone, with another $16 million slotted for the subsequent two years. The article also noted that the university’s ranking had dropped since the

transition; for the first time, it found itself outside of the top 35 research institutions in the world in the Times Higher Education ranking. It would appear that, whatever the potential benefits of the curricular restructuring in the long term, difficulties in managing the internal process and public relations of this transition has cost the university a great deal in the short term.

The University of Auckland, New Zealand

In January of 2008, Inside Higher ED reported that New Zealand’s premier research institution, the University of Auckland, was responding to a new national funding policy by restricting the number of students admitted to its undergraduate programs. New Zealand higher education has historically been funded based on enrollment numbers, but the state is now switching to a funding system based on perceptions of research quality at the recipient institution. As a result, Auckland has chosen to focus its attention on graduate student training, a decision that will also raise the bar for undergraduate applicants. The University of Auckland’s president described the decision as catalyzing a change in the university from “getting larger to getting better,” but critics claim it is an “elitist” and “Americanist” transformation towards a higher education industry characterized by casualization, work intensification, and drops in the quality of teaching, as well as towards a more class-entrenched society. Interestingly, in a post commenting on the Inside Higher ED article, the University of Aucklands vice-chancellor corrected its author and explained that the institution’s strategic plan has more to do with increasing postgraduate numbers in a way that ensures their funding than with deliberately curbing undergraduate admissions. Another commenter, however, issued a warning to Auckland: “If they follow Melbourne University, problems may arise.”

Well before this recent restructuring of its undergraduate admissions policy, the University of Auckland undertook a review of its curricular structure and content. The intentions to “rationalize the multiplicity of degree and diploma offerings” and to “minimize duplication and overlap” was first articulated in 1999. An investigation into the curriculum was initiated by the president in March of 2002, and a Curriculum Commission went on to “consider the University’s academic programmes, its teaching and learning structures and practices in relation to the graduate profile, and the composition of the student body.” The Commission recommended a new

39 Ibid.
system designed to increase “equivalency” and “portability” of degrees, which took effect in 2006.

The following principles, highlighted on the university’s website, guided the curricular restructuring decision-making process:

- The University’s course offerings should not be increased as a result of restructuring more than is absolutely necessary.
- Student workloads should not be increased as a result of restructuring.
- Staff workloads should not be increased as a result of restructuring.
- Restructuring should retain flexibility for students to take conjoint programmes, interdisciplinary studies and courses across faculties.
- The re-weighting of individual courses should maintain their academic coherence and integrity.
- Restructuring should not impact negatively on faculty funding.
- Wherever possible, restructuring should lead to the simplification of the administrative and regulatory aspects of qualifications.
- Additional changes, which would prevent the University from working through the restructuring in a timely manner, should be avoided.42

In addition to these guiding principles for the restructuring, itself, the university developed a set of principles to help manage the 2006 transition. Specific features included the provision of a “transitional transcript” for students enrolled prior to the switch, and the empowerment of deans and heads of schools to grant concessions and special credit to individual students who might struggle to make a seamless transition.43

Europe’s Bologna Project: Harmonizing Transnational Reform

The Bologna Project to synchronize the restructuring of universities across forty-six European countries is now in a final phase of a decade-long process, and it is attracting an increasing level of interest from higher education industries across the world. Clifford Adelman, with the US-based Institute for Higher Education Policy, recently released a report detailing why American institutions should mirror the Bologna Project, defines the project in the following terms, worth citing at length:

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
The undertaking is … named for the Italian city that is home to Europe’s oldest university, where the education ministers of 29 countries first agreed to the agenda and “action lines” that would bring down education borders in the same way that economic borders had been dissolved. That means harmonization, not standardization. When these national higher education systems work with the same reference points they produce a “zone of mutual trust” that permits recognition of credentials across borders and significant international mobility for their students. Everyone is singing in the same key, though not necessarily with the same tune. In terms of reaching across geography and languages, let alone in terms of turning ancient higher education systems on their heads, the Bologna Process is the most far reaching and ambitious reform of higher education ever undertaken.44

The Bologna Project has been described as a “grassroots” process that is, consequently, highly adaptable to different cultural contexts. Central to its success is a concept referred to as “Tuning”, by which all stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, and even potential employers of graduates or other community members) help to create consensus around the scope of academic training in particular contexts and across geographic borders. This harmonizing process “does not prescribe uniformity but aligns goals for student achievement in individual disciplines.” A Leeds University professor and expert on the project describes this method’s merits in the following terms:

The great thing about Tuning is that it is bottom up and culturally transferable … It involves the whole spectrum and links into employability agendas, but at the same time, it has a social dimension, with students at the center of process.45

The Bologna Project also places a great deal of value on the social dimension of higher education; issues like access to education are at the center of the agenda.

Outside nations are taking greater notice of this project for a variety of reasons. First, Bologna institutions will operate with a three year undergraduate degree, and would-be recruiters of Bologna-trained graduate students will need to find ways to “attune” to these different credentials. In response to the growing buzz, three American states have received funding from the Lumina Foundation for Education to go a step further and actually facilitate the introduction of some key aspects of the Bologna process – each state will administer surveys to faculty, students, recent graduates, and

employers “in an effort to define the knowledge and skills that a degree in a given discipline represents.” It is perhaps telling that the United States, which lacks a history of actively seeking to learn from industry norms in other regions of the world, has sent an official to observe the most recent conference on the Bologna Project, held in Belgium in April of 2009.46

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**At a Glance: Restructuring in Practice**

- Simon Fraser University’s restructuring investigation process is comprehensive and collaborative.

- Duke University’s undergraduate curriculum fosters independent and cross-disciplinary inquiry.

- The University of Plymouth radically revises its geography in order to become a premier “enterprise” institution.

- The University of Melbourne experiences strong resistance to its radical curricular restructuring.

- The University of Auckland copes with new national trends by standardizing its curriculum and tightening its undergraduate admissions.

- The Bologna Project has been described as, “the most far reaching and ambitious reform of higher education ever undertaken.”

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46 Ibid.
Conclusion: Best Practices in Academic Restructuring

In their 2001 article “Re-Organizing Universities and ‘Knowing How,’” referenced in our introduction above, authors Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin develop a list of institutional “commitments” that they feel should form the foundation for any academic restructuring enterprise. We reproduce these suggestions below:

- Commitment to testing knowledge in action both in research and teaching;
- Commitment to value-driven and value-informed research;
- Commitment to multidisciplinarity in research and teaching;
- Commitment to linking the analysis of social processes and technical systems into a seamless whole;
- Building research and teaching on ‘social’ partnerships;
- Providing safety in the teaching and learning process to all participants.

In addition to these suggestions from Greenwood and Levin, it is important to include process-oriented considerations, which are especially important because the project of restructuring is often perceived by members of the university community as posing a threat to one’s livelihood, status, or even mission within the institution. Patricia Gumport, referenced in our introduction above, provides some context for this common anxiety:

We are witnessing a reshaping of the institutional purpose of public higher education: in its people-processing activities as well as its knowledge-processing. The change entails not only what knowledges are deemed worthy but also who has access to and ownership of them.

A university that is seeking to undergo academic restructuring will do well to anticipate and carefully address, at every stage of the strategizing and transitioning processes, the overarching concern Gumport raises.

With an understanding of this and the many other issues raised within the large umbrella of “academic restructuring,” we have generated a list of “best practices,” both in terms of process and content, which we present below. We derive this list from our reading of the literature and our understanding of the experiences of the particular institutions we have profiled. In so doing, our intention is not to make any specific recommendation, but rather to expose the reader to what we understand to be emerging “best practices” within the industry.

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### At a Glance: Best Practices in Academic Restructuring

- Invite stakeholder participation through proposals, open forums, committees, etc.

- Develop strategies for communicating goals and intentions to the wider community, and build in an adequate period for consultation and feedback.

- Invest in leadership development to ensure that administrators at all levels are capable of effectively contributing to and managing a restructuring transition.

- Commit to transparency, including by posting all relevant strategy and process documents on the university website.

- Develop an interdisciplinary agenda that draws from existing, emerging innovations and supplements existing disciplinary strengths, without threatening the latter.

- Provide clear and timely information about staff restructuring and avoid staff redundancy whenever possible.

- Take care to explain how and when restructuring will not significantly impact the lives of staff members and students, and work closely to assist those in the minority who will be significantly affected.

- In redesigning curriculum, consider the national and international portability of any new credentials systems.
Note

This brief was written to fulfill the specific request of an individual member of The Hanover Research Council. As such, it may not satisfy the needs of all members. We encourage any and all members who have additional questions about this topic – or any other – to contact us.

Caveat

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