

Aligning Form and Function in Health Science Education

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In the [September 30, 2009 issue](#) of On the Same Page, I introduced the process that we would follow to create a comprehensive strategic plan for our academic health center, composed of the UF Health Science Center and Shands HealthCare working in close collaboration. This process can be summarized in the figure below. Since August 2009, the college deans, institute and center directors and hospital leadership (our "Strategic Planning Cabinet") have been meeting monthly to develop an overarching plan, shown as the top series of arrows, while each dean, director and hospital CEO has been working with the faculty and staff in his or her unit to develop a more specific strategic plan that is consistent with the overarching goals and strategies, but which is tailored for the needs of that college, institute, center or hospital.



In this figure, the overarching plan is nearing completion of the "Strategies" section, and you will be hearing more about the outcome in the weeks ahead. Regarding the plan for education, I wanted to share some of the Cabinet's ideas about the educational curricula at our Health Science Center, and in that context, provide some information about space renovations to the Communicore, as these will commence next month soon after classes have ended.

The original vision was for the University of Florida Health Science Center to emphasize interdisciplinary education, with shared student experiences across the six colleges. Over the years, this has been only partly achieved. Aspiring to reach our potential in making the best use of health center resources, however, the Cabinet defined an overarching vision for education: "to be a national model of education in the health sciences and health professions."

We are uniquely positioned to accomplish this goal because of the co-location of the colleges of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health and Health Professions, and Veterinary Medicine, all juxtaposed on the same campus with a major teaching hospital and a large and academically superb state university. Only two other universities — Ohio State and the

University of Minnesota — have this type of physical proximity of health professions colleges on the main university campus, and these do not have the governance of these colleges under unified leadership.

Each of the six HSC colleges has specialized aspects of its curriculum. For example, microbiology for dental students will have a different emphasis than microbiology for medical students. Thus, after much discussion, the Strategic Planning Cabinet concluded that many aspects of the curriculum in each college should remain tailored for students who are being trained in the discipline of that college. However, there is also much overlap. Regardless of the type of health professional education, the goal is for students to learn, both during their formal training and throughout their professional careers, how to weave together cutting-edge, evidenced-based science and the relationship-centered art of clinical practice.

While much of the science and clinical application that is tailored for nursing students will be different than that tailored for medical students or students in other HSC colleges, there is commonality in the need for systematic education in the areas of professionalism, communication, interpersonal skills, team building, health systems, and evidence-based practice and informatics. Thus, a superb health professional in any field is one who possesses more than scientific knowledge and technical skills. He or she will critically analyze the literature, confidently practice evidence-based health care, effectively communicate with patients and members of the health-care team in a multicultural society, continuously assess the quality of care provided, and understand complex health-care systems to improve patient care safety and quality.

It is in these latter areas that there is opportunity to take advantage of our six co-located HSC colleges, and our adjoining health systems in Gainesville and Jacksonville, to create curricula that allows students across the HSC to benefit from their respective perspectives, experiences and skills. Certainly, some of this has been done already, but there is considerably more to do. Thus, the appropriate education deans at the six colleges are being challenged to work with one another to foster these student interactions and learning experiences, both formally and informally. Such interactions will entail new learning environments that have not been fully developed at the HSC. These include small-group learning modules with interdisciplinary teams in several modules — problem-based learning, simulation, case studies, journal clubs, health system quality improvement projects, community health interventions and family-based continuity of care, among others.

To implement these curricula, new education space will be needed. Thus, a major goal of the education component of the Strategic Plan is to design and fund through philanthropy a new education building for the Health Science Center. This building will have new lecture halls with state-of-the-art technology, but will also emphasize small-group learning rooms as well as contemporary electronic library and media services, along with a variety of simulation laboratories, which will harmonize with the new curricula of the Health Science Center colleges.

It will take several years of fundraising, followed by an additional several years of design and construction, to complete such a health science education building. In the meantime, we are committed to developing the new curricular innovations described above, starting now, and to

renovating existing space to match the curriculum. Toward this end, we are starting with renovation of the Communicore.

The Communicore renovation will proceed in two phases. In the first phase, there will be a new, more contemporary and welcoming entrance. Once in the lobby area, you will see architectural and functional upgrades to the flooring, the restrooms and the passageway to the library. The entire heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems in the Communicore's seven classrooms will be completely new, as will the light fixtures and controls. This will improve temperature control, comfort, air quality and lighting in these learning spaces. Phase 1 will be completed over the summer, commencing immediately after the end of classes, which is just around the corner.

Phase 2 will be the replacement of the tables, seating and carpeting in the Communicore's lecture halls, as well as technology upgrade considerations, subject to our overall budget. Before decisions are made about this phase of the project, however, we will hold focus groups of students and faculty regarding their needs and wish lists. We will also assess the needed capacity (number of seats) of these rooms, based on schedules of classes occupying them, along with class sizes, as well as similar data in other buildings such as HPNP and elsewhere. These focus groups will be held in the summer and fall, in time for renovation of some of the rooms over winter break. I must give wholehearted thanks to Carol Walker, UF's associate vice president for Facilities, Planning and Construction, for her recognition of the need for this project and her generous contribution of funds that remain from other HSC projects, which, along with HSC reserves, will cover the costs of this renovation and upgrade.

This Communicore renovation will complement the "Sun Terrace" project, which has been designed for better use of the Sun Terrace space adjacent to the Communicore Building and food venues, and also to create a destination point for students/faculty/staff/visitors. Work will commence in early June on a 1,000-square-foot addition to the existing food service facility. In addition to Chick-fil-A and Einstein's Bagels, there will be "Freshens" (ice cream, yogurt and smoothies) and "Croutons" (salad and sandwiches). Additionally, a completely new facility (4,500 square feet) will be attached to the Communicore Building, and will house a Starbucks and a Panda Express, both with interior seating and wireless capability. A covered walkway from the MSB lobby to the Communicore will complete the project. The overall design has been planned to provide a fresh, contemporary look, with a glass façade to create an open atmosphere.

We hope you will enjoy these upgrades and that they will spur an enhancement to both the formal and informal learning in the Health Science Center.

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