

Q&A on Shared Support Services

November 14, 2011 – Dean Nancy Squires

A&S Executive Committee Preamble

The following set of questions is being presented to the Dean of CAS in order to provide clear and useful information that would help dispel rumors and misconceptions concerning Shared Support Services. The expectation is that a joint document will emerge that the A&S Senate will distribute widely through CAS, and pass on to the University Senate for further dissemination. The present document arose in response to the draft of a larger document that the A&S EC produced and was presented to the Senate on September 26th, 2011, without proper discussion. It is to be stated from the outset that this document is part of an ongoing conversation with the Dean about Shared Support Services.

QUESTIONS (Exec Committee) and ANSWERS (Dean Squires)

1. Q: How did the concept of SSCs originate at SBU? Is the concept of SSCs and their implementation largely a result of recommendations from Bain?

A: The concept of shared support services has received a lot of attention since the University engaged Bain & Company but the University in fact had embraced this model well before the retention of Bain. For example, Undergraduate Biology Department has been providing shared support services for all the undergraduate programs in the Life Sciences for many years; well before Bain & Co. arrived on the Stony Brook campus. It is a model which truly showcases how effectively and efficiently a department can operate, and to which other departments can aspire. Working side-by-side with department chairs and staff, Bain representatives collected relevant background data on workload such as number of HR transactions¹ and procurement transactions per year, annual course enrollment, number of majors graduate students, staff and faculty members, etc. The accuracy of the data was verified in consultation with the Department chairs and staff. After seeing how effectively Undergraduate Biology was operating, and analyzing and benchmarking the data collected, Shared Support Services was recommended by Bain & Co. to the Operational Excellence Steering Committee² which elected to pursue the concept in other departments.

¹ Examples of HR (Human Resources) transactions: time sheets - biweekly for some employees, and monthly for others; PTC files; position postings (faculty, staff, clerical, RF); academic year appointments for TAs/GAs/RAs; summer appointments for TAs/GAs/RAs; Summer Session appointments for faculty & course TAs; Summer appointments for 10 month faculty being paid from grants; Part time faculty appointments (appointed per semester); Annual evaluations for staff; Annual performance programs for staff; Reappointments for staff (per the Provost, this is annual - used to be up to a 3 year term); Annual reappointments for Lecturers; Position change forms (RF)

² (<http://www.stonybrook.edu/sb/50forward/oesteeringcomm.html>)

The Bain & Co. phase concluded in August 2011; consultants from the firm are no longer working with the University. The implementation phase is the responsibility of Stony Brook staff and faculty members. We are now in the process of working with faculty and staff in different areas within the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Medicine and Health Sciences to design the most efficient department-specific shared support service program.

2. Q: When will the university administration make available to the university community a copy of the Bain findings, and in particular those pertaining to SSCs?

A: The Operational Excellence Program Management Office (PMO) has received several requests to see a “final report” from Bain & Co. A final report was not part of the Bain assignment because Operational Excellence is an ongoing process meant to address the University’s administrative challenges and growth over the next 50 years. Bain assisted the University with data collecting benchmarking analysis, and set forth an assessment process. It is now up to the University to make its own decision how best to improve services and realize savings.

3. Q: What are the analytical justifications (e.g., economic, quality of service) for undertaking these substantial personnel and structure changes?

A: Shared support services allow administrative staff to use their specific skill sets across similar departments so they benefit more people and provide a greater level of expertise. It is *not* a merging of departments. It is a more efficient and equitable use of administrative resources so that all departments and students in those department benefit. The specific metrics have yet to be fully determined but might include items such as 1) a reduction in the amount of paperwork returned to the department because of errors (e.g., appointment forms, PTC files); 2) student satisfaction with staff support. The list of metrics will be developed in consultation with the stake holders in the area of focus. Because we expect increased performance due to economy of scale (the more someone does something, the better they get at it) we expect that joining efforts of staff across departments will reduce errors on infrequently-performed tasks. On student satisfaction, the preliminary results from the Theatre/Art cluster suggest that this measure is showing improvement, not decline. (See, also, question 13.)

For example, what are the projected economic savings across CAS from the implementation of SSCs?

Savings will come from natural attrition

4. Q: How would savings in personnel consolidation return to academic units affected?

A: We anticipate that the savings will stay with the departments/programs, as has been the CAS policy for several years, depending on economic conditions.

5. Q: Has the Dean's Office, or any other administrative area, conducted an impact assessment on how students would be affected whether adversely or positively?

A: The goal is that the students will not feel any impact or, better yet, improved interactions with more highly skilled staff in the student-support areas. The results of the preliminary student survey in Theatre/Art (see question 3) suggest that this is a realistic goal.

6. Q: Has the Dean's Office consulted both undergraduate and graduate students on SSCs?

A: We have talked to student representatives in the A&S and University Senates and leadership of the Undergraduate Student Government. We were scheduled to meet with GSO but the invitation was withdrawn by the GSO.

7. Q: One of the widely reported Bain findings was that SB is already administratively lean. How then do we justify further cuts to our administrative and support staff?

A: The goal of Shared Support Services is not to cut administrative support staff; it is to utilize staff talents and areas of expertise more efficiently and effectively.

8. Q: Doesn't the less dire university budget situation vitiate the need for further cuts in an already lean support and service infrastructure?

A: Operational Excellence focuses on University operations – streamlining procedures, growing revenue streams, and taking advantage of every opportunity to optimize programs and support services for students, faculty and staff.

The reality is that income realized from the SUNY 2020 revenue increases does not solve the University's \$82 million accumulated budget reduction over the past four years. These cuts have had a significant impact - resulting in larger class sizes, elimination of staff and faculty positions through attrition and voluntary separations and retirement incentives, reduction of services in the area of facilities operations and more. We need to continue to manage spending and operate more efficiently to continue to manage these tremendous cuts.

9. Q: What is the model for SSC, or are there different models depending on different academic units?

A: There is no single model. Each group will develop its own shared-services design, depending on its specific needs. All models will incorporate advantages achieved by economy of scale and fitting jobs to staff members' skills and preferences. Each shared support service area will continue to evolve, depending on what works and what doesn't.

10. Q: Why is the centralized and hierarchal structure of the proposed SSCs considered optimal relative to other possible models?

A: Shared support services are “centralized” only at a very local level. The urgency behind joining forces, locally, is that some departments and programs have already lost critical staff members and cannot function without other units’ willingness to join forces. The Shared Support Service structure is not more hierarchical than many existing department structures, especially in large departments.

11. Q: How many and where are SSCs planned?

A:

Fine Arts (1)

Humanities (1 or 2)

Social Sciences (TBD)

Life Sciences Graduate Programs (1-3)

Technical Support Shops (2-3)

Other Life Science functional areas (TBD)

UG Bio and Biochemistry undergrad programs (1) – already completed

12. Q: Has the Dean’s Office considered the experience of other universities where similar SSCs have been implemented?

A: Members of the Program Management Office did speak with colleagues at Berkeley but not specifically about Shared Support Services.

13. Q: What are the criteria of evaluation that implemented SSC’s have been successful?

A: Chair, program director, faculty and student satisfaction with services. Also cost savings; increased productivity/efficiency; staff satisfaction.

14. Q: What would be considered ideally successful in terms of SSCs?

A: More productive staff; greater opportunities for professional growth; higher quality work; better backup of critical staff members (in handling vacations and unexpected absences, for example), better student support and better coordination with central student-support offices such as Academic Advising.

15. Q: What is the time-line for SSC implementation and what determines the time-line? Will implementation be stepwise or approximately simultaneous?

A: Shared Support Services are under discussion in several clusters. The timeline of completion depends on the pace at which each cluster can design and implement Shared Support Services. This will be an ongoing process of analysis and improvement, and there is no final deadline. Hopefully the type of analysis and readjustment that we are now involved in will become part of the culture.

16. Q: Does the implementation of SSCs entail geographical relocation of certain services?

A: Not necessarily, and only within small geographical limits (e.g., within a single building). The exception is likely to be the Life Science Graduate Program, which covers several buildings on east and west campus.

17. Q: Have other colleges and schools at Stony Brook begun to implement SSCs?

Yes.

If so, which ones?

The School of Medicine and Health Sciences started looking into implementing Shared Support Services several months before CAS.

18. Q: Has there been resistance to the implementation of SSCs within CAS, and if so, why?

A: There has been resistance in some areas at first, seeming to result from a misunderstanding of the goals. This decreases with improved and ongoing communication. On the other hand, there are areas where the idea has been welcomed because it solves serious long-standing problems.

19. Q: What alternatives to SSCs were considered, for example, management structure? Who had input regarding possible alternatives?

A: Because of serious gaps in staffing due to attrition and budget reductions there is no alternative to joining forces to cover department needs. As for what alternative structures are being considered, there is no one answer. Each group we work with develops a different strategy. The management structure and implementation of shared support is not pre-defined and will vary between areas.

20. Q: How would confidentiality be secured and maintained by SSCs?

A: Confidentiality should not be a greater concern in a shared support services than it is in existing department and administrative offices. Note that large offices such as CAS, the Graduate School and Human Resources handle a great deal of confidential information successfully. With more specialized staff roles in the departments and programs, issues such as confidentiality might actually be improved.

21. Q: How would the cyclical nature of SSC staff positions be distributed and parceled to ensure smooth operation?

A: This is a realm in which shared services should be very beneficial as a result of training and redundancy of knowledge and skills, something we do not have now where all functions in small department depend largely on a single individual, with no backup.

22. Q: How will the resources required by different departments be balanced within a single SSC?

A: The majority of each budget is in faculty salary. This remains the purview of the chair/faculty. It has not yet been decided how the staff salary budget will be handled and this will probably differ and will be formalized in an agreements between departments/programs sharing services.

23. Q: How will academic units brought together by SSCs be assured that their academic integrity will not be affected?

A: All academic decisions are still the responsibility of the faculty members in the academic programs. No changes in academic programs will result from Shared Support Services.

24. Q: Will SSCs impact collegiality, loyalty, and conviviality amongst students, staff and faculty at SB?

The intent is for these quality aspects to improve.

25. Q: Will the proposed new SSC structure impact departmental morale, identities, and institutional continuity over the long term?

A: Questions of morale, loyalty and collegiality depend to a large extent on faculty and staff leadership. In the future, as now, morale will depend on how chairs and program directors communicate goals and inspire a spirit of cooperation. Over the past few years we have weathered very tough economic times, and the departments that succeeded best had leaders that kept the focus on a vision for the future. As evidenced by the early data from the Theatre/Art initiative, there is potential for the shared services to bolster morale and set the ground for greater collegiality and intellectual collaboration. Giving the staff the opportunity to create their own optimal work environment will play an important part.