


## Reform Under Adversity

**By Peggy Blackwell**

The College of Education at the University of New Mexico is a complex and complicated place, as are most colleges of education. We happen to be located in a research university, but research has never been a priority of our College until fairly recently. We are a relatively large College, with about 120 faculty and 2,500 students, of whom two-thirds are graduate students. Pre-service teacher education is predominantly undergraduate—and has always held priority in our College, creating tensions and conflict within the College.

To talk about this College of Education in this time of reform means that some painful truths about ourselves before we began restructuring and some realities of where we are now must be identified. This is not intended to denigrate our students or faculty, but to place what has happened and what we have done in perspective and context.

In 1990, about the time we were failing our search for a new dean, the Regents discovered that the Legislature would probably never give them enough new money to do some of their pet projects. Unknown to the faculty, they mandated that the administration give them a plan to free up funds within the University. That plan was called Reallocation, and the College of Education was targeted in the plan. As the new interim dean, I learned about the plan three weeks after I was appointed in July 1991. For a period of

  
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time between July and April of 1992 our future was very much in doubt.

I found out that fall that the Provost had become increasingly irritated with our college in the two year period prior to the reallocation document. During this period, more and more students, primarily from elementary education, filed grievances and complaints about their treatment by faculty, copying everyone—from the President to the Governor, state legislators, and U.S. Senators. In addition, faculty continued complaining to the University administration about a variety of dissatisfactions. While many of the complaints were valid, they created a perception of discontent in the view of the administration, which had a pattern of using one case of one to draw a conclusion. Often, actions would be taken by the Dean after discussion with the Provost, only to have one faculty member complain and the Dean's decision reversed by the Provost. Our faculty are quick learners, and they frequently used this avenue to get what they wanted. Then, we had a second dean's search fail in 1991, as the candidates discovered they could not obtain commitments for the College. Constituent groups became more vocal to the Provost that we were not meeting their needs. He also knew that half our faculty would be eligible for retirement in the next five to seven years—and he knew that the Regents were about to approve an incentive plan for early retirement. All of those things combined to make our College very vulnerable.

Our College never has been what in the current language is called a learning community. Our faculty didn't come together, except in isolated pockets, to debate the major issues of the profession, to discuss challenges, to learn about one another's work. Our curriculum might be best characterized as an infinite add-on collection of disparate courses. In fact, we have been in many ways a paradox: we prided ourselves on the quality of our academic programs, but we were forever in trouble with the University over academic issues and the College failed NCATE Standard 1—the knowledge base—because the faculty disavowed it to the Board of Examiners. We have award-winning programs in elementary and secondary education through contracts with the Albuquerque Public Schools, but faculty increasingly declined to teach in them; our faculty complained endlessly about their teaching load, but continued to add new courses every semester and demanded more part-timers to teach core courses while faculty themselves taught increasingly specialized courses to fewer and fewer students; we celebrated collaboration to the outside world, but thrived on turf and internecine warfare internally.

In 1995, our faculty now are beginning to come together to discuss and debate issues of the profession and curriculum and what it means to be a good colleague; we have agreed on a conceptual framework and will see how that plays out in the fall with our continuing accreditation visit; we are closing some programs and revising others; we have changed our committee structure and our organizational structure; and new lines of faculty communication have been created.

But paradoxes still exist: we have the best and we have the worst; we have faculty who work themselves to death and we have faculty who do the barest

possible minimum; we have faculty who look forward and faculty who look backward; faculty who long have expressed a commitment to multicultural education but who cannot agree about how to imbue multicultural principles throughout the curriculum; faculty who continue to be reinforced by going to the University administration to complain and who at the same time express great pride in their work, creating confusion and conflicting signals with some predictable consequences; and we have a few faculty who continue to distrust the administration and who work actively to find ways to spread seeds of distrust and suspicion while we have some faculty who enthusiastically view the faculty-administration roles as a partnership working to improve the college.

Programmatically, the College is a conglomerate—ranging from art therapy to counseling to exercise science to teacher education. But collectively, the faculty are probably fairly typical, no matter the range of programs or size of the college. They range from those who really like things just like they were, to those who would return to the college in which they were hired, to those who think things must change. Regardless of where faculty are about restructuring, courses and scholarship center on interests of faculty—instead of the needs of the profession.

The story of reform in our College began when the reallocation plan became public in September 1991. The faculty reacted in predictable ways: they panicked, they ignored, they stampeded over themselves to try to get it changed, they blamed the Dean, they blamed each other, and a few began to think about strategies. As a result of the work of that few, we did something the University did not expect: we went on the aggressive, we became proactive rather than reactive. We offered to plan a College of Education for the future. After a series of national speakers beginning in November 1991, committee reports, task force reports, brown bag lunches reasonably ill-attended by faculty, town hall meetings, focus groups, and written position papers, we emerged in February 1992 with a Plan of Action.

The most acrimonious debates came around whether to reorganize our eight departments. Some faculty stated publicly that they didn't care what the plan of action said we'd do, they just wanted to know whether the departments would continue. When the Provost cut our budget by all the vacant positions we had—about 12 of them—the faculty began to talk about how they could get them back. The discussion changed to center on reorganization as a strategy to have the positions returned. As a result, they voted to set the department structure aside temporarily and go into three divisions.

The Provost accepted the plan and the reorganization and returned the vacant positions he'd captured. Our budget was put into a safe harmless formal agreement with the Provost, which expires this year. The terms essentially shifted—if you continue to reform and improve the College in demonstrable ways and if you reallocate within the College to meet your goals, you will be protected. But if you don't... So, what was a strategy for survival has become a complete restructuring of the College as we attempt to fulfill our part of the bargain. The turf battles have

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continued, the power struggles are daily, and attempts to exert control are ever-present. The traditional culture of the College continues to emerge as some faculty attempt to maintain the College as it was and what to them are normal operating procedures. But the majority of the faculty have forever changed how they think about their careers and work in a University and how they approach one another and the College administration.

Now, four years later, we have increasing pressure from the Faculty Senate and the Provost to finish this and reestablish what Steve Lilly calls “quiet in the halls.”

Where there are problems, there are more successes.

What we did by instinct or gut feeling, we found out later are accepted strategies to accomplish change, and that is both validating and disconcerting.

One such strategy is **destabilization**. In reading about this strategy after the fact, we discovered that it is high risk. We destabilized when we set aside the departments. Faculty were assigned to one of three divisions, with all programs but one going into divisions A & B. All teacher education programs went into division B and non-teacher education programs into division A. This unintentionally created problems of its own, as programs in division A decided they were slated for termination, so adjustments were made the next year (year three of restructuring) to alleviate the paranoia. This forced us to abandon the idea that had been made public to the faculty that programs would progress into division C slowly over the next few years as programs restructured. I’ve learned that you have to adapt and to modify as you go in adjustment to changing conditions and you have to communicate the what and the why. But I’ve also learned that, no matter how sustained the communication is or how good the reason is for changing tactics, some faculty will use adaptation and modification as cause for complaining about inconsistency and failure to follow plans.

In the terms of one faculty member, we tore everything up, allowing questions to be redefined, and now we’re reshaping the College to provide a return to security to the faculty but in a College that looks and operates on different norms than before. He said that it was absolutely necessary for our College to do this for the faculty to get to the point where they could think about systemic change in programs. To help with this, the faculty created a Planning Committee designed to stay above the fray of daily politics to look at the entire picture of the College and to intervene in facilitative ways at critical points.

Another strategy was to create **new communications patterns**. This was partly driven by Health Education’s demand to be moved away from Physical Education. I moved 130 people’s offices—staff and faculty—in July 1992. The moves moved faculty and staff from their departmental locations to offices where faculty from various programs were intermingled. Out of this new alliances were formed and new partnerships created for research and teaching.

A third strategy is the **organizational structure**, which continues to evolve. The College’s departments were reasonably similar to Balkan States. Many of our

faculty had never even met one another, even if they'd been employed for ten years. There was competition between departments, fostered by the University practice of following credit hour production by department. Departments had become isolated and inward looking as they attempted to drive up credit hour production however they could, even if it meant that students never took a course anywhere else. It also led to curriculum duplication and overlap.

To assist in the creation of a new culture for the College, we encouraged faculty to form initiatives, leading to new or revised programs—an existing program would become an initiative when the faculty agreed to review and revise the program—and collaboratives, where faculty came together around an issue of research interest or a high need of the state. Collaboratives did not lead to degree programs, but in their own way, contributed to new communication lines across programs.

The third division, Division C, was the division that had almost all the faculty who had been engaged in planning all year and the Health Education program. Faculty from every department belonged to Division C, freeing those faculty from the old peer pressures and expectations of the departments. Thus, every department was broken up, both physically and administratively, with division deans and no department chairs.

Faculty were further freed from established expectations and norms of their department colleagues when we formed initiatives and collaboratives. I announced that credit hours accrued to the College, not programs or divisions, but that we would track number of majors, numbers of graduates, and centrality to the College, where centrality means students from other programs take your courses and your students take courses elsewhere. Initiatives were formed in early childhood, middle schools, health education, and math, science, and technology. Collaboratives were formed in educational policy, gender, and research, with language, literacy and culture starting as a collaborative and now at the point of emerging programmatically.

The division structure created a high level of discomfort for the faculty and encouraged them to continue to move forward with the restructuring. This has been a key point of bickering as we have some faculty who demand to know everything before it happens—who will sign what piece of paper, who will answer phones at what hour, every possible event to be prescribed before it happens.

Last spring, the faculty formed a task force on organizational structure and at their recommendation, officially voted out the departments and the divisions. We spent 1994-1995 in a relatively deconstructed state, administering the College at the program level. In March 1995, the faculty voted for a six multi-programmatic division structure. Division directors were selected and the general feeling is that the organization has finally settled into a system that has the potential to facilitate programs and cross-program interests of faculty. We did not do well at communicating with the rest of the University, however, as to why we have changed our organization. As a consequence, the Faculty Senate continues to raise questions and

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is invited from time to time by one faculty member to investigate events in the College.

Another strategy is through **new faculty hiring**. Since the fall 1991, we have had 42 resignations/retirements. We hired seven new faculty in 1993, nine new faculty in 1994, and 15 new faculty for 1995, with seven searches planned for 1996. The Plan of Action stipulates that positions will not automatically return to a program. One exception to this is when faculty vote not to award tenure—rather than have them vote yes to tenure just to keep a position, I’ve said that a no vote that is sustained means the position will return to the program. All other positions are put into a pool and faculty are invited to write proposals for faculty positions against stipulated criteria. A faculty panel judges the proposals and makes recommendations to the dean. Thus, the pattern of hiring is very different than before we entered restructuring.

Yet another strategy has been to generate **external support for the College**. We’d had some years where the deans of education in the state had been at cross-purposes with the State Board of Education. Quite by accident, I found an enthusiastic supporter for change in the College in the new President of the State Board. She, herself, was advocating educational reform in the state and we suited her agenda. I expanded that quest for external support to the unions, to the Legislature, to the business community, to the Governor’s office, to foundations, to state agencies, to school districts, and to the State Superintendent. This spring, with the assistance of a state senator, we have formed a “Friends of the College of Education” Advocacy Board, primarily of business leaders in the state. In seeking external support, however, a double-edged sword was created. All these groups vocally support change in the College. The double edge of the sword is created if we fail to meet their expectations.

We have been very concerned that we think about how **promotion, tenure and merit** must change if we are to support a new culture and new work ethic of the college. For two years, faculty coming up for tenure and/or promotion were evaluated by a Peer Review Panel, selected in much the same way that outside peer reviewers are chosen—with some input from the candidate but final decisions made by the program faculty with an associate dean. A chair of the panel provides the de facto “department” chair recommendation. Program faculty have the opportunity to review the dossier and to provide input to the panel. From that point our process remains as it was Before Restructuring. We are attempting to incorporate some revision of standards based on the Ernest Boyer model, but the success or failure of that has yet to be determined. With the new division structure, the process will be more strongly based within the division with an opportunity to invite faculty who have worked closely with a candidate to participate in the peer review process.

The **budget** is an administrative strategy, since the real goals and priorities are set by the budget, not by written plans. This year, a fairly large group of faculty—about 30—have helped prepare the College’s three-year budget request for new

funds. They determined priorities based on what was lacking to accomplish our Plan of Action as a college-wide set of priorities, rather than the old practice of asking what people wanted. The group has decided to base our budget request on the mission of the college and said, explicitly, that needs of the state and the College must prevail over individual interests of faculty.

The strategies to change **curriculum** are just now beginning to take shape in our college. Three of the colleges in the Network started to work on curriculum and left organizational structure alone. I am sure that would not have worked in our College. But the Network has proven invaluable as faculty have been able to come together to discuss issues and effectively have ended their isolation. As one faculty member recently said, “our horizons are expanded” and we learn that we are not alone in facing the problems. The sharing with the other colleges about curricular issues has greatly enhanced our own ability to think through what we want to accomplish in program revision and renewal. For example, we’d like to have a curriculum that exhibits coherence and cohesion, where we know why we offer every course and how one course leads to another. Hopefully, that will be evident to our students also.

We seek to base our reform of teacher education programs in ways that tie closely to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and INTASC. We also are asking faculty to incorporate issues of cultures and languages in the curriculum in ways that do not put individuals into boxes. We are looking hard at our master’s degrees, which are under subtle assault from the state. The bottom line question in the state that is being asked is whether the teacher or administrator who has a master’s from the college of education is accomplishing better student performance than those who do not. Pretty much, the conclusions are negative, meaning that we must do two things quickly: revise programs or create new ones and put long-term evaluation of their effectiveness in place. It means that the role of the traditional psychological foundations faculty may have to shift to focus on understanding how children learn and to promising interventions in teaching and learning that will enrich the learning of all students.

We want to work more closely with the faculty in Arts and Sciences. Last year, we took great strides toward accomplishing that aim when we were given a grant from the Sandia National Laboratories to design a math/science curriculum for elementary teachers. Our faculty came together with A&S faculty, teachers from the schools, and Sandia scientists to design the curriculum. This year we have a second grant to develop the courses and we are seeking new funding to implement this really exciting curriculum, which is based on national standards and involves team teaching by education and A&S faculty.

We are working hard to put the College into the professional development arena. Right now that is dominated by the University’s Continuing Education Division. We’d like to see a planned, coherent curriculum based on needs of our clients. So we’ve created a Professional Development Council, and the faculty

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passed a policy for professional development credit. Last spring, a faculty team called for the college to create a Center for Professional Development that would propose a consortium of all colleges of education in the state for the purpose of meeting school needs in this area.

Above all, we are seeking linkages across programs. As the restructuring has evolved, more and more faculty have come to support the idea that the College is more than the sum of its parts, that we have the expertise in the faculty to work together toward common goals and aims. This will require that no program and its faculty be isolated from others in the College, that the opportunity must be always there for faculty in family studies, for example, to work on issues of classroom learning with teacher education faculty. In the same sense, health education and wellness faculty should work with faculty in family studies and teacher education. If we are to understand the school as a system, we need to consider having family experts work with prospective school and family counselors and prospective teachers and administrators and human resource experts, all of whom work together in a team. But if family studies returns to its splendid isolation from the rest of the college, this cannot happen.

Opening up boundaries, creating ways to exchange ideas, creating an environment that is supportive of risk-taking, learning to work together toward common purposes, and sharing our successes and failures with others who are trying to accomplish reform in colleges of education are all critical to our future. It is a painstaking and time-consuming endeavor, but I truly believe that the future is ours to design.