

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 19, 2017

To: All Colleagues, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

From: Michael Staten, Bart Cardon Associate Dean,
Career and Academic Services 

Re: Progress toward strategic goal of producing employable graduates, Part 1

Several years ago, our external stakeholders began telling us that, as a college, we were taking too narrow a view of our educational mission, focusing too much on degrees (excellence within a major) and not enough on preparing students for careers after graduation. Since that wake-up call, probably no aspect of CALS activities has received more attention, or experienced more transformational change, than Career and Academic Services. Indeed, one of the early changes made by Dean Burgess upon his arrival five years ago was to signal a shift in culture by renaming the Office of Academic Programs to the Office of Career and Academic Services.

I'm happy to share with you a series of updates on our progress toward our goal to "produce employable graduates who can do jobs that do not yet exist and create new jobs." There is much to share, more than is conveniently digested in a single memo. So, in this first installment I'll describe our underlying philosophy regarding undergraduate education in CALS, and recent developments in student recruitment. In the coming weeks I'll share progress on our efforts to improve student preparation for successful careers, including advising and retention efforts to lower time to degree, as well as experiential learning and the activities of the CALS Career Center. A separate memo will address graduate education in CALS. In a final installment, I'll share what we are doing via the Cardon Academy for Teaching Excellence (CATE) to promote excellence in instruction and provide support for faculty.

Challenging environment for growing enrollments: CALS undergraduate enrollment has remained flat at just over 3,000 students for the past two years. Significant demographic headwinds are impeding enrollment growth nationally. But, the University of Arizona (UA) faces additional obstacles to growing enrollment as a result of sharp tuition increases without matching increases in financial aid. Our 2016-17 undergraduate resident tuition annual rate was \$1,100 higher than for Arizona State; for non-residents our tuition is nearly \$8,500 higher than for ASU. Increasingly, we are offering a product on which we must compete on quality because our price point is well above our traditional competitors. But, settling for fewer students is not an option. As both the flagship university for the state and a land-grant institution, our instructional mission is to boost the employability and economic prospects of the citizens of Arizona. As of 2016-17, CALS undergraduate enrollment was 5.5% (180 students) below its

share of the ABOR enrollment target for the university, and the gap is widening. And, the RCM model utilized by the university for distributing tuition revenue increasingly ties college budget growth (or reduction) to enrollment growth. We can't afford not to grow.

Putting Science to Work: In response, CALS has become singularly focused on preparing students for successful careers. We view our relationship with new students as an implicit contract: if they agree to come to CALS and put in the effort, we will do our best to provide them the technical (in-major) skills, the non-technical “career skills” and the networking exposure to employers to be competitive in the job market as they launch their careers after graduation. At today's tuition price point, we have no choice. When asked about their top reason for attending college, over 85% of freshman students responded that it was to improve their earning potential in the job market. For the large majority of students today, “discovering themselves” has taken a back seat to boosting employability as the reason for attending.

We believe that CALS degrees are especially well-suited for growth in this environment because they provide a solid foundation in science applied to practical problems, more so than in most other colleges on campus. Our degrees enable students to “put science to work,” and are improving each year as we add career skill training and experiential learning. We have the right product for the times. But, we must communicate that message much more effectively and to a wider audience. We are committed to helping the citizens of Arizona to expand their opportunities. Helping them realize what our degrees can do for them is part of our mission.

Leveraging technology to broaden the prospect base: In late 2016 under the new leadership of Jennifer Yamnitz (Executive Director of Branding and Marketing) CALS academic units began a major, year-long overhaul of their messaging to prospective students and parents (websites, social media channels, video content, direct outreach), essentially bringing 21st century marketing tools to our enrollment management. We will no longer wait for students to find the UA and then CALS. We are building web-based lead-generation sites and messaging that will appeal directly to students' career aspirations (regardless of their awareness of the UA), to show them how a degree from the UA and CALS can help them reach their goals. Leveraging technology significantly broadens our reach to prospective students, regionally and nationally, and at far lower cost than relying heavily on in-person recruiting visits. These new tools will be mostly complete and ready to deploy in September.

In-person recruiting: The CALS recruiting staff has experienced 100% turnover. Jenn Yamnitz is now responsible for executing our enrollment management strategy. We are in the process of hiring three new recruiters to be based in Maricopa County, Tucson and Yuma, respectively. The bulk of our face-to-face recruiting efforts will be focused inside Arizona, with special emphasis on building relationships with high school counselors to enable them to alert students to our unique programs. We will also build new and stronger relationships with the community colleges across the state, especially in Maricopa county where the population density gives us the largest ability to draw new prospects into both our main campus and online programs. We'll still do some recruiting out of state, but on a very selected basis in areas that make sense for particular majors (e.g., ag majors in Salinas and Central Valley of California).

Joint-production plan with CALS academic units: As of July 1st, the 2016-17 recruiting cycle generated 1,261 students who were admitted as freshmen by the UA into CALS majors. We have 441 who paid their deposit and attended orientation last month. While we hope to net a few more before classes start on August 21, at this point we appear to have a 35% “yield” from admitted students. This is better than the university as a whole and about on par with the historical CALS yield. But, our goal for next year is to boost that yield by at least another 10 - 15% through coordinated messaging from the academic units to admitted students. We are doubling down on personalized communication to show prospective students that we truly want them to attend. Nearly all of these students are applying to multiple universities. Our price point makes us special in negative way. We must offset that by convincing students that they will get a better experience here at the UA, and that starts with early relationship-building that will boost retention and carry all the way through (hopefully) to the alumni stage. Relationships take time and effort to build and can easily be wrecked through neglect or insincere messaging. A personalized touch is required. So, this part of our strategy will involve – and critically depends on - the good efforts of the entire CALS community: faculty, advisors, students, appointed staff, and even the CALS Alumni Association. Each academic unit will have a tailored communication plan by early September to roll out as students apply and are accepted through the academic year.

Two postscripts:

Best estimate of entering class in August 2017: In addition to the 441+ first-time freshmen mentioned above, we have matriculated another 179 transfer students from outside the UA, giving us an expected entering class in August of 620 students. Our actual entering class in August 2016 was 782. So, as of July 1st, we are down about 21%. However, we always pick up additional transfer students in the last 6 weeks before classes start, so some of that gap will close. Much of the decline relative to last year is due to sharply lower non-resident application and matriculation rates, likely fallout from our escalating non-resident tuition.

We must boost applications as well as yield: We can't realistically hit our ABOR enrollment targets just by boosting yield from accepted students. To grow by 200-300 students, we also need to boost applications, through innovative new programs (more in later installments) and through more effective messaging that gets the relevant career message to the right prospects.

Meeting our recruitment goals will require a team effort. We understand what we are asking of the academic units and deeply appreciate all of your efforts. On behalf of all of us in the Office of Career and Academic Services, I want to thank you for your hard work and good counsel over the past year in helping us to shape this strategy and build the new recruiting tools. We are excited about the challenge ahead, and frankly, we like our chances of success. But, it couldn't happen without the passionate commitment of the excellent team in Career and Academic Services and it won't happen without your partnership. Please do not hesitate to send questions and comments to me about any of the elements of our strategy. We are learning along with you. And, stay tuned for additional installments on our other activities in CAS.