

Challenges and Emerging Solutions to Offering a Joint Degree

Michael Keynes
American University
CGS 59th Annual Meeting

Background on American University

- Private University in Washington DC (Yes, our mascot is the eagle and our colors are red, white, and blue.)
- Carnegie: Doctoral Institution, High Research Activity
- ~14,300 total students
 - ~3,500 graduate students
 - ~370 doctoral students (10 doctoral, 110 master's degrees)
 - ~1,400 law students (not included in graduate student count)
- Seven schools offering graduate programs.

We are pretty much decentralized

- While we have a common admissions CRM and a common ERP (Ellucian Colleague)...
- Each school has its own admissions goals.
- Money for aid is at first distributed centrally, but then few restrictions once given to the schools.
- Schools are held accountable to their own headcounts and credit hours (taught).
- No common commencement ceremony.

Joint Master's Degree programs

- We have six joint degree master's programs, combining specialties from each school.
 - Ex: International Economics between the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of International Service
 - Ex: Political Communications between the School of Communication and the School of Public Affairs
- Most agree these are good degrees and interdisciplinary graduate education has been and continues to be encouraged.



Challenges with Decentralization and Interdisciplinary Education

Admissions:

- Since schools have headcount goals, and ERP has programs in one school, then students must be assigned to one of 2 schools.
- This means we have two coded degrees per joint program, students decide at admissions which school they are applying to, even though program is the same.
- Two different admissions websites, procedures for same program.

•





Challenges with Decentralization and Interdisciplinary Education

Financial aid:

- Some students send two applications to the same program (maybe because they don't know what is going on), but one in each school.
- This has led to bidding wars on financial aid between the schools *for the same student and the same program!*
- Incentive for both schools to get the student for headcount.
- I take it back - maybe the students do know what's going on.



Challenges with Decentralization and Interdisciplinary Education

More problems:

- Setting up curriculum (incentive to fight over who teaches what).
- Advising (mismatched expertise)
- Commencement (what if the good speaker is not at your school's graduation, but your friends in the program get to watch).

One Program Has a Solution!

- Data Science - joint between School of Public Affairs and College of Arts and Sciences
- Use tracks in the program to determine school (i.e., policy tracks = SPA, math/stat tracks = CAS)
- This is stated up front to students, so they understand advising/commencement implications.
- Downside: You switch tracks (should be minor), you must actually change degrees (not minor).

Initiative for University Wide Solution

- Have all schools work out responsibilities/schedule for each program (advising, admissions, commencement, financial aid etc.). Admissions must reside with one school. Financial aid dollars might be moved from one school to another to account for this.
- Creation of a new “school” in which all joint degrees would reside.
- Split the head count down the middle.
- Still in the works, although support from the schools

Challenges Moving Forward

- Will all schools come up with a reasonable agreement for existing joint programs? (We think so)
- Will this be a deterrent for school to develop new joint programs? (We hope not)
- Will our ERP and information systems easily accommodate this change? (we never make optimistic assumptions on that front)



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you!

Michael Keynes

Associate Dean of Graduate Studies

American University

keynes@american.edu