

Dynamics of Merging Two Major US Universities

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Abstract

The presentation, consisting of three distinct segments, began by describing the acquisition of Northcentral University (NCU) by the National University System (NUS), and then the subsequent merger of NCU with National University (NU). The considerations and decisions made leading up to the acquisition of NCU by NU were identified as were the uniquely different philosophies and academic programs of each university. Although both NU and NCU are teaching universities, there were two main differences that were identified and discussed. The first difference discussed was the type of programs taught; the majority of programs at NU serve Masters' students with some Undergraduate and Doctoral students, however, the majority of academic programs at NCU serve Masters' and Doctoral students. The second difference discussed was that NU's academic model is structured so that students enroll in a series of single one- or two-month cohort group courses taught by different faculty members, while NCU's academic model allows for students to enroll at any time, with weekly Monday starts, and enroll in 1:1 personalized instruction with faculty members during their coursework. After doctoral students complete all coursework prior to their dissertation, NCU students are assigned a dissertation committee consisting of a dissertation chair, subject matter expert, and an academic reader while NU students are assigned a more traditional dissertation committee.

The second segment of the presentation focused on the merger of NCU and NU and identified administrative issues that arose as the result of the differences between the two academic programs and then described how the issues were resolved with full participation and commitment by administrators, faculty, and staff of both NCU and NU. Specific examples were provided and discussed. NU's Sanford College of Education, which is larger than most universities in the U.S. state of California, was used to demonstrate how the Dean, Department Chairs, and Program and Specialization Leads merged programs, determined merged faculty teaching loads, and developed new faculty salary and promotion standards for merged faculty.

The third, and last, segment of the presentation consisted of a discussion between two faculty members, one from NCU and the other from NU, who presented their perspectives of the merger and the challenges that faculty face with teaching in both academic models. They discussed how they are overcoming merger related challenges by working together and focusing on the common goal of building a unified and collegial culture among all faculty, while improving their own instruction and mentorship to meet the needs of students across both academic models.