

Shared Services Listening Sessions Analysis

November 2024

Phase 2 of the Academic Affairs Organizational Structure Project



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Executive Summary

This report summarizes insights from 12 listening sessions conducted to explore University of Utah faculty and staff perspectives on the potential transition to sharing services across four academic units: the College of Humanities, College of Science, College of Social and Behavioral Science and the School for Cultural and Social Transformation. Approximately 264 participants shared their experiences, challenges and concerns in facilitated discussions designed to inform the U's decision-making process. These sessions revealed both systemic challenges that shared services could address and concerns about the potential impact of shared services on college and department autonomy, local expertise and morale, among other faculty and staff priorities.

Participants identified several institutional challenges that shared services could address, including a lack of training and onboarding resources, disruptions when staff are on leave or turnover, operational silos, uneven resource distribution and limited career progression opportunities for staff. Sharing specific administrative functions could provide solutions, such as standardizing workflows, pooling resources for smaller units, preserving institutional knowledge and providing professional development for staff. Faculty and staff also highlighted existing shared services

they value, such as research administration, which many described with satisfaction and appreciation. At the same time, participants expressed skepticism about a broader adoption of shared services, fearing losses in college autonomy and department-specific expertise, as well as reduced accessibility, decreased morale and diminished student support. Faculty and staff skepticism of shared services was compounded by low morale and a general distrust of central administration.

As the U develops and implements shared services, careful design and launch will be essential to addressing these concerns. Recommendations include 1) preserving local expertise and college autonomy; 2) engaging faculty and staff deeply and centrally in the shared services design and implementation; 3) addressing low morale; 4) examining existing shared services models that faculty and staff view as effective – and identifying what makes them successful – to guide broader implementation; 5) rolling out shared services intentionally and with opportunities to test the model; and 6) ensuring transparent communication about the project, goals and outcomes. When designed and executed thoughtfully, shared services have the potential to address systemic inefficiencies while preserving the autonomy and culture essential to the success of the participating academic units.

Introduction

In summer 2024, the University of Utah Office of Academic Affairs conducted an analysis of peer institutions and found that nearly 70% of them have implemented shared services across their liberal arts and sciences disciplines. These institutions have adopted shared services because it addresses practical challenges, such as reducing redundancies, improving efficiency and ensuring equitable access to resources across departments, regardless of their size and budget. By pooling administrative functions, these universities have been able to streamline processes, enhance collaboration, and better allocate resources to support their academic missions. Shared services have proven to be an effective approach for institutions striving to balance operational effectiveness with the complex needs of diverse academic disciplines, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Recognizing the potential benefits, the Office of Academic Affairs and the deans of the College of Science, College of Humanities, College of Social and Behavioral Science and the School for

Cultural and Social Transformation identified the opportunity to assess whether a shared services model could improve administrative efficiency, enhance support for faculty and staff and create more consistent service delivery across their units.

At the beginning of the fall 2024 semester, the deans announced to their faculty and staff that the university would begin exploring the idea of shared services through a series of listening sessions and a survey. These listening sessions were designed to solicit input from faculty and staff, understand their experiences and identify both challenges and opportunities associated with shared services. This report summarizes the key findings from the listening sessions, providing insights into the perspectives of faculty and staff while outlining recommendations for moving forward. By incorporating these voices, the university aims to design a shared services model that addresses systemic challenges while maintaining the autonomy and culture that are central to the participating academic units' success.

Methods

To gather feedback on the shared services project, 12 listening sessions were conducted. The purpose of these sessions was to explore which functions – such as IT, HR, and research administration, among others – are working effectively, where improvements are needed, and what would be important to faculty and staff in a shared services model.

These sessions were segmented by job function to ensure that faculty and staff could share perspectives relevant to their roles. Three sessions were hosted for faculty (postdoc, adjunct, career-line and tenured or tenure-track), one for each of the colleges; School for Cultural and Social Transformation faculty were encouraged to participate in the College of Humanities or College of Social and Behavioral Science session as relevant to their joint appointment. In addition, one session was hosted for department chairs and associate deans. Seven sessions were hosted for staff, including:

- One session for staff who are student-facing and provide student services (combined across all four academic units).
- One session for staff who are externally-facing and provide support in marketing/communication, pre- and post-award support and development/alumni.
- Two sessions for staff who provide administrative support (e.g., calendaring/scheduling, etc.) and event planning support.

- One session for staff who provide tech/lab support (e.g., stock rooms, lab managers, etc.).
- One session for finance/budget and HR staff.
- One session for facilities and IT staff.

Staff who hold multiple roles (e.g., an administrative support person who also handles finance) were encouraged to attend the listening session correlating to the job function with which they most identify. A final open session was hosted for any faculty or staff member who wanted to participate but was unable to attend their designated session.

Invitations to participate in the listening sessions were sent via email using the faculty and staff listservs of the four units exploring shared services. The initial email invitation was followed by two reminder emails encouraging registration. Only those included on their unit's listserv received the invitation, and policies regarding who is added to these listservs vary by unit. As a result, individuals not on their unit's listservs did not receive an invitation.

A total of 290 participants registered to attend the sessions, including 102 from the College of Science, 79 from the College of Humanities, 83 from the College of Social and Behavioral Science and 18 from the School for Cultural and Social Transformation. Of the registrants, 97 were faculty and 193 were staff.

(Appointments that spanned multiple colleges were grouped by their primary appointment college.) Attendance records show that about 264 faculty and staff participated. The number may be slightly higher, as some individuals may have joined after initial headcounts, or slightly lower, as some staff attended multiple sessions. (Attendees did not sign in to the sessions.)

Each session lasted 90 minutes. The sessions were primarily conducted in person, with the exceptions of the College of Humanities faculty session and the open session for all faculty and staff, which were held online. The sessions began with an overview of the shared services project delivered by a leader from the project team and a welcome by a dean from one of the participating units. Afterward, the project team leader and dean left the room, and the facilitator took over. To create an environment where participants felt comfortable being candid and honest, facilitators were intentionally university faculty or staff members who are neither affiliated with the units exploring shared services nor the shared services project team; further, central administration was explicitly excluded from the facilitated discussion, and the sessions were not recorded. The facilitated discussions followed a semi-structured format.

The listening session guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences with a variety of services (HR, IT, financial services, research administration, facilities management, marketing and communication, etc.) and what they would value most in a shared services model across the four units. Questions varied slightly by session, given that particular questions were more relevant to some participants than others (e.g., questions about experiences with research administration are more relevant to faculty participants than staff participants). Some sessions addressed the entire list of questions, while others did not, depending on the flow of conversation and the time spent on specific topics.

Sample questions included:

- When it comes to human resources support for your team's recruitment, retention and training needs, what do you feel works well, and where do you see room for improvement?
- When it comes to IT support, what is currently effective, and where might there be opportunities for growth?
- How easily are facilities issues addressed in your college or school? Can you describe any recent experiences, either positive or negative?

(See Appendix A: Listening Session Guide for the full list of prepared questions.)

Two note-takers were present at each session to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate capture of participant feedback. One note-taker provided shorthand documentation of the discussions to provide a near-verbatim record, while the second focused on summarizing key themes and capturing direct quotes that were particularly insightful or representative of participant concerns. Notes between the two note-takers were cross-referenced to enhance accuracy, consistency and a fuller understanding of the discussions.

The listening session notes were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, including familiarization with the data, coding statements and phrases, identifying patterns among the codes and developing and naming themes. Over 80 themes were identified through open coding of the data. These themes were refined through axial coding, where related themes were grouped into categories and patterns were identified among themes. Finally, selective coding was used to further refine and organize categories into broader themes.

Findings



The findings from the listening sessions revealed two distinct groups of themes that provide critical insights into the shared services project. The first group of themes focuses on the **systemic challenges** that shared services could address. These themes highlight areas where shared services, if designed thoughtfully, could create meaningful improvements in processes, resource allocation and institutional support. Themes were as follows:

- 01** Lack of training and onboarding support
- 02** Support gaps due to staff absences or turnover
- 03** Operational silos
- 04** Uneven distribution of resources
- 05** Limited career progression opportunities

The second group of themes centers on faculty and staff **perspectives regarding shared services**, emphasizing their concerns, priorities and recommendations. These themes offer essential guidance for the design and

implementation of any shared services model. Faculty and staff perspectives about shared services are shaped by their views of:

- 01** Centralized services such as HR, University Information Technology (UIT), etc.
- 02** Local support and support communities
- 03** Morale
- 04** Central administration
- 05** Local shared services

Together, these themes provide a comprehensive view of both the opportunities and potential challenges associated with the implementation of shared services, offering a foundation for designing a model that addresses systemic issues while aligning with the values and needs of faculty and staff. The sections that follow delve into each group of themes, detailing the issues shared services could address and the considerations necessary to ensure their successful implementation.

Systemic Challenges

The listening sessions revealed several systemic issues that a thoughtfully designed shared services model could address. These challenges include lack of training and onboarding support, support gaps due to staff absences or turnover, operational silos, uneven resource distribution and lack of career progression opportunities for staff.

01. Lack of Training and Onboarding Support

Participants across the sessions frequently mentioned inadequate training and onboarding resources, which hinder faculty and staff from quickly getting up to speed in their roles and from being successful. This issue is particularly acute for new hires and those transitioning into roles requiring specialized knowledge or compliance with complex university policies. For example, a Science staff member remarked, “For people who are new to a certain aspect or job, there is no basic training. It is always assumed there is training and you know what’s going on, but if you’re brand new, you’re totally thrown in... I am trying to learn how to do this, but there is no basic training, [there is no] here are the rules.” The phrase “thrown in” was commonly used to describe the experience of learning a new responsibility.

Another Science staff member noted, “There are often times that I reach out to payroll with questions specific to – they’ll reference that in a report. Well, is there training to let me know where I can find things? Because there are a lot of reports in the HR library, and I have no idea what they can do or where I can find info on my own, and there’s no training resources to learn those things.” Similarly, a Humanities staff member recounted, “I’ve been here for a long time, and I still don’t feel like I know all the systems. There’s no formal training on things like

financial services or travel, and it’s all so daunting for new people trying to figure it out on their own.” A Social and Behavioral Science staff member commented that supervisor training is “nonexistent,” and related how she and her team are building their own resources on how to mentor and supervise their staff, including how to conduct performance evaluations and have difficult conversations – “but, we’re making it up as we go,” she noted, expressing frustration at the lack of support from the university.

These deficiencies were especially pronounced for new hires. A Science staff member reflected on when he started working at the university and shared, “I was astonished at the lack of training – HR training – beyond institutional requirements... Supervisors with no training. Hiring – no training that goes with it. I was frankly flabbergasted because I’ve been a part of other institutions and those sorts of trainings are a part of ongoing training – if you step into certain roles, you get training that goes with it.” A Humanities staff member agreed with her colleague and added how frustrating it was to not receive basic training on the structure of the university when she started. She also mentioned not having access to a directory of people in roles similar to hers across the institution – people she could learn from. “I can’t even figure out what the departments are,” she noted. These sample comments represent references to inadequate training from over 30 staff.

Faculty also reflected on the lack of training and onboarding support they experienced. A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member, for instance, stated, “When I started, there was no training on how to use the systems or navigate university processes. I had to figure it all out myself, and it took months to get comfortable.” Another Social and Behavioral Science faculty member added, “I think there needs to be an onboarding program for new faculty. That was lacking for me. You’re just blind and feeling around to figure out who to talk to and what to do.”

Faculty also commented on current resources. A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member noted, “CTLE is great, and you have all these workshops – and they’re great. It’s like, how to use AI in teaching – but then, no one can tell me how to use the scantron. Just these basic things.” She commented that there are not CTLE resources, for example, on how to teach asynchronously and added, “where’s the foundational support on what we need on a day-to-day basis?”

Shared services could pool knowledge to build training and onboarding programs, providing new hires with consistent, comprehensive resources to navigate university systems and policies such as a repository of documentation and tutorials tailored to common roles and tasks.

02. Support Gaps Due to Staff Absences or Turnover

Support gaps due to staff transitions or staff taking leave (vacation, sick, etc.) were common frustrations for faculty and staff. As it relates to staff turnover, participants described how the loss of experienced colleagues creates disruptions in operations, leaving departments scrambling to address knowledge gaps. A Science faculty member, for instance, described the challenges caused by transitions in pre- and post-award staff, noting that new hires often lacked the knowledge to set up grants, manage matching funds and handle other key tasks. He emphasized the importance of smooth handoffs during staff turnover to ensure the institution runs effectively.

Administrative staff in particular noted frustration when department chairs and associate deans turn over, which happens often from their perspectives. Staff expressed frustration that the burden to train new faculty leaders often falls on their shoulders, which is disruptive given their already full workloads. One staff member likened having to provide this training to the movie *Groundhog Day*, while another quipped that those who train new faculty leaders should receive additional

compensation for the temporary but intense workload increase caused by turnover – a remark that was met with claps and snaps from many participants. The challenges with turnover and the impact on faculty and staff workloads are exacerbated by the lack of training and onboarding support noted above.

Similarly, faculty and staff expressed frustration with disruptions to service when key staff members are on leave, citing the lack of cross-training or backup coverage as an issue. Many noted that when someone is out, their work slows – or, “grinds to a halt,” as one staff member put it – leaving tasks unfinished or creating bottlenecks that prolong critical processes, which participants noted could last weeks, and in a few cases (e.g., extended leaves, such as parental leave) when a single person knows how to complete a task, faculty and staff described months-long delays. Participants described how this lack of continuity adds stress and forces remaining staff or faculty to step in quickly to cover gaps in service, often without adequate knowledge or resources to do so effectively. Faculty and staff emphasized the need for systems that ensure smoother handoffs and consistent service, even when individual staff members are unavailable.

Shared services could develop systems to retain and share institutional knowledge, such as having a system for documentation or developing and implementing cross-training programs. These measures would ensure continuity even when staff members are on leave, transition into new roles or turnover.

03. Operational Silos

Participants frequently described how silos between units and departments create inefficiencies and, at times, ineffective service delivery. When staff in one listening session discussed the challenges of onboarding new associate deans and department chairs, another participant mentioned a centralized training

program designed to help. A Humanities staff member observed that silos across the university make it difficult to even be aware that such resources exist.

Staff provided several examples of how silos create confusion and inefficiencies across departments. An IT staff member (college affiliation withheld to protect the participant's identity) shared frustrations about the lack of centralized guidance during the rollout of new cybersecurity tools. In the absence of clear instructions, individual IT teams created their own user guidance, resulting in inconsistent communications that left users confused and frustrated. Additionally, IT professionals noted that the lack of standardized equipment across departments increases their workload, as they must troubleshoot a wide variety of computer models.

The challenges created by silos extend to several other areas. Many staff members, for instance, reported being tasked with student recruitment and marketing and communication responsibilities, such as managing social media and updating webpages, despite lacking training or connections to centralized recruitment teams or professional marketing teams. These disconnects not only burden staff but also risk inconsistent messaging, which can weaken their colleges' ability to manage their brands, attract prospective students and faculty and engage with donors and the broader community.

In several instances, staff noted their efforts to bridge gaps between departments or colleges to create a larger pool of knowledge and expertise. Many IT staff members, for instance, participate in a group called IT Professionals, which operates outside of UIT to create community and share expertise across units. In other cases, staff discussed more organic networks of experts across departments or colleges that they've built individually.

At times, staff expressed frustration at feelings of disconnectedness or isolation. A Humanities

staff member commented that she feels isolated from peers: "There's my job in my department, and outside of that, there isn't a lot of interaction with others and how things are run...It's harder to have larger institutional knowledge when everyone is so closed off." Another staff member (college affiliation withheld to protect the participant's identity) described how disconnected they feel from both their college and the university; they remarked that although part of their job is communications, they're not on any university marketing and communications listserv.

Faculty also expressed frustration with operational silos, particularly when trying to coordinate interdisciplinary efforts or navigate shared responsibilities. A Transform faculty member recounted the difficulty of team-teaching, pointing out that navigating the SCH model is a major obstacle to collaboration and reinforces silos between academic units. A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member commented that because budgeting processes are different in every college, when faculty try to collaborate, "it's a nightmare to figure out who's responsible for what."

Shared services could address operational silos by facilitating collaboration and standardizing some processes across academic units, while still allowing for flexibility to meet the unique needs of individual departments or teams. This approach could enhance efficiency, improve communication and foster a more cohesive operational environment. As one Humanities staff member put it, "Everything is so siloed... Having the ability to network or reach out and talk to people to gain access to people's knowledge would be helpful."

04. Uneven Resource Distribution

Faculty and staff frequently mentioned disparities in access to resources across departments and colleges. Smaller units often

lack the infrastructure, budget, or specialized staff to handle complex administrative tasks and are often stretched very thin. For instance, several Transform faculty and staff noted significant gaps in staff support across a wide variety of services. A Transform faculty member shared that her experience in her joint appointment college has been excellent. However, she noted that Transform lacks similar resources, particularly at the departmental level. Her unit does not have sufficient staff to manage grant award payments, which she emphasized is a significant issue given the university's goal to increase research awards.

Several staff discussed how limited departmental budgets, particularly in smaller units, restrict their ability to fund essential support services like HR or marketing and communications. For example, a staff member from Social and Behavioral Science noted that the college's marketing team is too small to meet demand. Sharing staff across units could expand access to specialized skills, such as graphic design, currently unavailable. This staff member described relying on contractors or centralized marketing support as inefficient and sometimes detrimental to branding consistency. A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member from a smaller department described that the biggest challenge he faces is resource constraints – that his unit lacks the faculty to teach their classes.

A shared services model could pool resources across units, ensuring that smaller departments gain access to expertise in areas such as marketing and communication, HR or IT support while reducing the strain on larger units.

This approach could create a more equitable distribution of resources.

05. Lack of Career Progression

Some staff noted that current pathways for advancement are limited or unclear. Several faculty and staff expressed that in smaller departments or units, staff often hit a ceiling in their roles, with few options to grow or take on leadership positions. Shared services, some felt, could create opportunities for professional development by pooling resources and offering centralized teams where staff could specialize, cross-train and take on broader responsibilities. A Science staff member remarked, "Many of us have advanced degrees, but we don't receive pay that reflects that, especially in the current career ladder – or lack of career ladder."

Shared services could create career progression opportunities for staff by creating larger teams, allowing staff to gain expertise, cross-train and take on leadership responsibilities within their areas. This structure can provide pathways for advancement and professional development that may not be available in smaller, isolated units.



Perspectives Regarding Shared Services

Having explored the challenges that shared services could address, the next section of the report delves into faculty and staff perspectives on shared services, including what they value, what their concerns are and how their experiences have shaped these views. These perspectives are in part informed by positive experiences with shared services (e.g., research administration), but they are predominantly informed by longstanding issues with centralized services at the university. Negative experiences centrally have driven many faculty and staff to rely heavily on local contacts – department-specific staff who are embedded within the unit and possess deep knowledge of its unique culture, workflows and needs. These local contacts (or experts) are widely regarded as the only dependable means to navigate the complexity of university systems and policies.

Sub-themes such as the overwhelming complexity of the university, communication deficits between centralized services and local units, and the unresponsiveness of centralized services have led faculty and staff to prioritize relationships with local contacts. These local experts are not only viewed as critical to getting work done efficiently, but also as essential to maintaining the unique culture and identity of their departments. This reliance on local support strongly influences reservations about shared services, as faculty and staff fear losing the proximity, expertise and trust they have built within their units. Over time, this dynamic has created an “us versus them” culture, where faculty and staff view centralized services and administration as disconnected from their needs and priorities. The divide fosters resentment and erodes collaboration across units, ultimately hindering productivity and the development of cohesive solutions to institutional challenges.

Participants’ skepticism was compounded by low morale, especially fatigue with institutional changes. In addition, participants expressed a lack of trust in central administration, with many believing that shared services would prioritize cost-cutting over quality or effectiveness. The section concludes with participants’ reflections on shared services models they believe are effective and could serve as examples for future development.

01. Perceptions of Centralized Services

Faculty and staff described a breadth of negative experiences with centralized services, including in HR, UIT, the Office of the Vice President for Research, Facilities Management, Travel and more. A prominent sub-theme to emerge from the listening sessions was the **difficulty in navigating these offices' complex systems and policies**. Participants described these systems and policies as confusing, frequently changing and often disconnected from the specific needs of faculty, staff and students. Many expressed frustration at not knowing where to go for assistance or how to address routine administrative tasks efficiently. A Humanities staff member, for instance, commented that, "Sometimes you don't know who to go to, and even if you get to the right office, are you talking to the right person? Have they forwarded [your request] on?" Many staff mentioned the need to "hunt" for answers, a painful process – as a Science staff member put it, "Information is so compartmentalized, you have to crawl over broken glass to get [answers]." These challenges create barriers to productivity and exacerbate feelings of frustration, confusion and inefficiency.

Specifically, faculty and staff described how the complexity of university systems:

1. **Creates confusion around roles, policies and responsibilities.** Faculty and staff reported a lack of clarity about the processes and points of contact for addressing their needs, which often results in delays or errors. A faculty member (college affiliation withheld to protect the participant's identity), for example, observed that after a decade of attempts, their team remains unable to secure an offsite research rate. They commented that the steps are unclear and noted a disconnect between research administration and the needs of their unit.

2. **Leads to inefficiencies in day-to-day operations.** Navigating disjointed systems often requires additional time and effort, diverting attention from more critical tasks. A staff member from Social and Behavioral Science provided an anecdote about trying to coordinate between her office and a central unit, which took six months to finalize: "We didn't know who to contact, and the priorities of different offices weren't aligned... It felt like we were stuck in quicksand."

3. **Hinders interdisciplinary and collaborative efforts.** The university's current structure often creates administrative hurdles for work that spans multiple departments or colleges. A Transform faculty member noted, "This is a massive university. How do we know where to find the things?...How do we know who to work with on interdisciplinary collaborations? We don't know who those people are or how to access them."

A second sub-theme to emerge was the **inadequate communication of policy and process changes** by centralized services. Many reported learning about changes only after encountering problems or being forced to troubleshoot issues on their own, further straining already limited time and resources. A Science staff member described this frustration: "Policies change constantly, and there's no way to know what's new unless you run into a roadblock. It feels like we're constantly playing catch-up. It shouldn't be this hard to stay informed."

Specifically, faculty and staff described how insufficient communication from central offices about policy and process changes:

1. **Leads to confusion and frustration.** Staff and faculty reported feeling caught off guard by sudden policy changes or unclear guidance. This often results in wasted time and duplicate efforts. A staff member from Humanities, for instance, described how she

had run into some HR-related problems that, given a lack of guidance from centralized HR, she chose to handle and then learned afterwards (from centralized HR) that she had mishandled those problems. “Where were we supposed to learn that?” she asked, pointedly.

2. **Delays critical operations.** Participants highlighted how the lack of timely and clear communication often causes significant delays in administrative processes. For example, a Humanities faculty member explained spending a day emailing back and forth with central offices to correct errors on a fellowship form; each exchange introduced a new issue, and the faculty member felt that no one had a clear understanding of the process.

Many participants noted that central offices tend to communicate in a reactive rather than proactive manner, often issuing updates only after problems arise. Faculty and staff described struggling to stay informed about important updates because

communication channels, such as listservs or procedural emails, are poorly managed or inconsistently used. A staff member from Social and Behavioral Science shared, “We only find out about updates when something gets rejected. There’s no heads-up, no guidance – just a message saying you did it wrong.” Similarly, a Humanities staff member reflected, “I feel like I spend more time trying to figure out the current process than actually doing the thing. It’s frustrating to keep finding out you did it wrong because the policy changed, and no one told you.”

Several faculty and staff pointed out that when changes are communicated, they are often accompanied by insufficient training or unclear documentation. This lack of preparation leaves departments struggling to interpret new policies. For instance, a faculty member from Social and Behavioral Science remarked that he wanted to comply with purchasing policies but that the instructions were scattered and contradictory, resulting in hours of lost time.



A third sub-theme expressed by faculty and staff during the listening sessions was the **unresponsiveness of centralized services** to requests or tickets. Participants described slow or nonexistent responses to their inquiries, which often forced them to devise workarounds or delay critical work. Many faculty and staff reported that the lack of timely support undermines their productivity and adds significant stress to their already demanding workloads. One staff member (college affiliation withheld to protect the participant's identity), for example, described the frustration and stress of not getting "any answers" from HR regarding leave for a faculty member who will be imminently out of office. A Social and Behavioral Science staff member noted that the HR email hotline is "basically useless," because it can be weeks before getting a response (counter to the perceived purpose of a hotline, which is expected to provide timely assistance for urgent issues).

Specifically, faculty and staff highlighted how the unresponsiveness of centralized services:

1. **Causes delays in addressing time-sensitive issues.** Many participants noted that delayed responses from central offices disrupt their ability to complete tasks efficiently. A Humanities faculty member shared having a significant issue with a student in crisis and being unable to get anyone at the central office to answer the phone. The faculty member said the office never called back, and the student was left without support during a critical time. With regard to centralized HR, a staff member (college affiliation withheld to protect the participant's identity) reflected on when they spent three months trying to figure out the process to get approved for parental leave, explaining how they reached out multiple times and were repeatedly redirected. They said, "It felt impossible to get answers, and I ended up having to message people on

Teams just to make any progress." Many staff suggested that they have found better, although fragmented, support when using Microsoft Teams, so long as they knew who to contact for help.

2. **Forces reliance on workarounds.** Frustrated with delayed or unhelpful responses, faculty and staff frequently resort to devising their own solutions, often wasting time or risking noncompliance. A Science staff recounted, "I got to the point where I was frustrated with not getting an answer. But if I turn something in wrong, I get a quick response because then – then they push it back! It's the only way to get attention." Other participants laughed and clapped at this anecdote.

Faculty and staff sometimes linked this unresponsiveness to central offices being understaffed or overburdened (especially when staff in these centralized functions turnover), leading to backlogs and inconsistent service quality. Two faculty, for instance, discussed their feelings that the Center for Disability Services is understaffed. A staff member from Social and Behavioral Science described regular interactions with the Office of Sponsored Projects: "If someone is out, no one picks up their work unless it's an emergency. The backlog is unsustainable." Similarly, staff cited central HR's embedded model as a source of frustration when new staff transition into the role who are unfamiliar with their units' needs, leading to long delays in response and poor service quality.

Faculty and staff also described poorly functioning ticketing systems as a reason for unresponsiveness from central offices, including facilities management and UIT, especially. A Humanities staff member, for instance, described the frustrating experience of engaging with centralized facilities management services: "I get lost in their system constantly. I put in a request, and it disappears, and it makes me feel crazy, and I don't know if I'm doing something wrong on the form... Is it disappearing, or is it going

through? I see the green message saying it's done, but I don't get a notification saying it's completed or assigned."

There were many complaints about the UIT ticketing system, including among local IT staff. Local IT staff mentioned that they lack access to information about the status of centrally submitted tickets, which prevents them from providing updates to faculty and staff who inquire about the progress of their requests. This leaves them unable to effectively respond to their users' needs. Similarly, a Social and Behavioral Science faculty member provided an anecdote about using UIT support's ticketing system, noting that once a ticket is submitted, a user can't see if work has been assigned or if it's done, and that he has waited months on a response in the past. A staff member from Science noted that it's a better use of his time to try to figure out his IT issues than submit a ticket and wait a week or more for solutions to simple problems. A Humanities staff member expressed frustration with the inefficiency of the current ticketing system, describing how an IT professional helping a nearby colleague refused to answer her quick IT question on the spot, instead requiring her to submit a new ticket and wait for the question to be assigned. These comments were among nearly 20 focused on staff and faculty frustrations with UIT's ticketing system.

Multiple faculty and staff across the Colleges of Humanities and Social and Behavioral Science, as well as Transform, expressed frustration with UIT support being initially handled by student workers, who often lack the expertise needed to address complex or urgent issues. This practice adds unnecessary delays and extra steps to resolving problems, undermining the efficiency and effectiveness of UIT services. For instance, a Social and Behavioral Science staff member emphasized, "I don't get why a large organization like ours uses students as the first line of contact for email and phones. It doesn't make sense when we're dealing with complex issues that

require more expertise." Similarly, a Humanities staff member shared frustrations with relying on student workers for classroom technology support, explaining that unresolved issues often lead to the embarrassment of technology failures at important moments. And, a Transform faculty member said, "Every time I call central IT, the first person I talk to is a student, and they don't have the knowledge to help with anything complex. It's inefficient and wastes time when you're trying to resolve urgent issues."

A final sub-theme in the listening sessions was faculty and staff experiences with the uniform, **one-size-fits-all approach to processes and problem-solving** provided by centralized services. Faculty and staff believe that these systems fail to accommodate unique departmental needs. Referring to his IT support, for example, a Science faculty member remarked, "This is not a one-size-fits-all kind of a problem. Every department has its own needs." Similar remarks were echoed in other listening sessions. A Transform staff member expressed this frustration: "We're constantly told to follow central procedures that don't work for how our department operates...The communication about these changes never considers how they actually affect our day-to-day work." Participants referred to centralized policies as severely limiting their ability to succeed, using terms such as "[our IT team] is shackled by UIT" and "handcuffed by central procedures."

Several faculty and staff emphasized the importance of maintaining budget autonomy as critical to their ability to complete work efficiently and effectively. They expressed concerns that a one-size-fits-all shared services model might standardize financial processes in ways that infringe on their ability to allocate funding for tasks ranging from event catering to hiring staff for new projects. Participants feared that such an approach would create unnecessary delays, requiring approval for routine expenditures and hindering their ability to respond quickly

to departmental needs. As one Humanities staff member explained, having the ability to make spending decisions locally ensures that departments can function smoothly and meet their goals without bureaucratic bottlenecks. Faculty and staff argued that flexibility in budget management is essential to maintaining operational effectiveness and avoiding inefficiencies that could arise from a standardized, centralized system.

Participants also noted that an overly standardized approach risks overlooking the unique identities and cultures of their units, which are critical to their success. A Humanities faculty member explained, “If everything is the same across units, we lose what makes our department distinct. Shared services need to account for our specific needs, or they won’t work.” Similarly, a Humanities staff member related that her biggest concern with shared services is the loss of unique culture that her team has worked hard to create.

Repeatedly, faculty and staff commented that “a uniform approach doesn’t work” – several times using that exact phrase. Faculty and staff frequently emphasized that while consistency and efficiency are valuable, they cannot come at the cost of flexibility and responsiveness. The fear of a one-size-fits-all approach was closely tied to broader concerns about losing local expertise and the ability to adapt services to unit-specific requirements. Faculty and staff overwhelmingly shared negative experiences with centralized services, with several commenting that if shared services resemble these models, the transition would be detrimental to their effectiveness.

02. Local Support and Local Communities

Largely because of their experiences with centralized services and the challenges of navigating a fragmented system, maintaining local contacts who can assist with HR, IT,

facilities management and other requests is of paramount importance. The concept of **local experts** emerged as a central sub-theme within the broader theme of Local Support and Local Community. As a Science staff member put it, “If you don’t know [who to go to], you’re stuck for a long time.”

Faculty and staff overall regard local support highly and are protective of their local contacts, who are embedded within the unit and possess in-depth understanding of its distinct culture, processes and requirements. Variations of the phrase “know who to call,” “have a contact” or “need a contact” in reference to getting answers or getting work accomplished proliferated the sessions. In fact, several faculty and staff noted, with a hint of humor, that they prefer not to share the names of their trusted contacts with colleagues out of concern for overburdening these individuals, which could reduce their availability and responsiveness. As much as staff expressed significant frustration with UIT, they frequently praised their local IT teams, complimenting their responsiveness and expertise across the Colleges of Science, Humanities and Social and Behavioral Science. “I don’t want to share them with anyone else,” a Social and Behavioral Science staff member said. Similarly, a Transform staff member talked about a friend who often helped her with IT challenges. Other staff in the session jokingly asked for the friend’s contact information. During one listening session, a Humanities staff member shared how she resolved a broken elevator button in her building by turning to Natalie, a competent and reliable liaison with facilities management. The comment sparked jokes throughout the session, with several staff saying they wished they had “a Natalie” for their own facilities issues.

Many faculty and staff envisioned shared services as creating an environment where, as one Science faculty member put it, “a uniform operation over four colleges where we don’t know who we call on the help line would be devastating.”

Faculty and staff emphasized how their relationships with local experts are essential not only to the smooth functioning of their work but also to maintaining the unique culture, identity and effectiveness of their departments. These local experts serve as critical connectors, ensuring continuity and personalized support within the university's unwieldy ecosystem.

Specifically, faculty and staff described how their local contacts:

1. **Allow for quick resolution of issues**, which they viewed as particularly valuable in dynamic environments, such as managing student crises or navigating administrative hurdles. Referring to how things worked before shared advising, for example, one Humanities faculty member recounted, being able to simply walk 50 steps to get the information she needed; after the implementation of shared advising, the faculty member said she needs to make an appointment to simply talk with an advisor, and it's unclear to her which advisor she should speak with.
2. **Provide context-specific expertise**. Local staff possess an understanding of the specific needs of their unit, including curriculum nuances, research complexities and student demographics. A Science faculty member noted that local IT staff understand his department's research needs and specialized equipment. The faculty member emphasized that in a shared IT services model, he would lose that expertise, hindering his ability to be successful. A Transform faculty member emphasized that "efficiency is based on knowledge, and knowledge is local."
3. **Are knowledgeable generalists**. Staff with department-level expertise often function as generalists, managing diverse responsibilities and applying their knowledge to their units' needs. Several staff highlighted the

fulfillment they derive from the dynamic nature of their work.

4. **Create community and a highly valued local culture**. Local contacts (and proximity, as noted below) create an environment where collaboration, trust and shared understanding flourish. A Transform faculty member, for example, explained that local staff are more than just service providers – they are the fabric of the department.

Participants frequently highlighted **proximity**, another sub-theme, as a key factor in fostering relationships, often referencing the ability to "walk down the hall" to quickly resolve issues or collaborate on tasks. Accessibility eliminates the need for formal communication structures, such as frustrating ticketing systems or lengthy email exchanges, which faculty and staff reported have delayed responses and reduced efficiency in areas like UIT or facilities management. A Humanities faculty member said, "I can walk students to our advisor's office and get careful, specialized advising fast. That small-scale, local relationship is invaluable and makes my job much easier." This immediacy reduces logistical burdens on faculty and staff. Proximity also fosters a culture of collaboration and trust that many fear would be undermined in a shared services model.

Faculty and staff also discussed the impacts that local contacts and proximity have on students, describing their importance to creating a welcoming atmosphere for students, particularly those who may feel marginalized or overwhelmed. Faculty and staff discussed how familiar faces and accessible support help students feel valued and connected to their department or college. Faculty and staff believe this sense of community is critical for student success, particularly for those navigating crises or needing personalized guidance. One Transform faculty member emphasized, "Our advisors build relationships with students, fostering trust and a sense of

belonging. If we lose that connection, we're not just losing efficiency – we're losing the heart of what makes our department a community." Several Humanities faculty and staff members expressed that upon moving to a shared advising model, their students no longer knew who to go to for support and that the shared advising rollout weakened students' connections to their departments, as well as to faculty and staff.

Overall, faculty and staff worry that sharing services would replace personal, department-level expertise with a more fragmented and impersonal system and decrease the autonomy of the departments. They fear shared services would make it harder to resolve issues efficiently and effectively, while also diminishing their feelings of connectedness and community. One staff member in Social and Behavioral Science, for example, explained, "When services are centralized, you lose the relationships that make things work. It becomes harder to know who to contact, and you spend more time just figuring out the system." Similarly, a Science staff member remarked, "Right now, I can just walk down the hall to talk to a colleague or get advice from an advisor. If we move to shared services, everything will be fragmented."

03. Morale

Faculty and staff perceptions of morale influenced their views of shared services, with three key sub-themes emerging: burnout and exhaustion, the impact of institutional change and perceptions of being undervalued.

Many staff reported feeling **burnout and exhaustion** because of heavy workloads, resource constraints and the pace and volume of institutional change. When asked to reflect on the past academic year and what success looked like to them, staff in three listening sessions used the words "survival" or "I/we survived." They contextualized these responses by describing change initiatives and being asked to accomplish

more without additional resources; in fact, faculty and staff across the listening sessions noted being currently understaffed, including in areas such as research administration, student advising, IT and marketing and communication, among several others. A staff member from Transform summarized this sentiment: "We're all just trying to survive at this point. There's no time or energy to think creatively or improve processes when we're buried under everything that needs to be done today."

Feelings of burnout and exhaustion limit faculty and staff's capacity for additional **institutional change**. Several faculty and staff described how the cycle of learning new policies and systems disrupts their workflows and negatively impacts their performance and morale. A Science faculty member shared, "Every year, there's a new mandate or system to learn. It's like we can never settle into a rhythm because everything keeps changing. It's exhausting." Across the listening sessions, the words "exhaust," "exhausted" and "exhaustion" were used nearly 20 times, highlighting how these feelings resonate among participants. Participants voiced concerns that the discussion of shared services had already created ambiguity and anxiety among staff and that a shared services rollout would bring even greater harm to morale, which could lead some staff to seek other jobs, negatively impacting the units. Several faculty noted with angst that such turnover would likely increase their workloads.

Burnout and exhaustion have also left many faculty and staff feeling **undervalued** and unsupported. Participants expressed frustration with initiatives that feel disconnected from their experiences. A faculty member from Transform remarked, "We keep being sold wellness Zooms... We don't need mindfulness practices. We need living wages and meaningful input into the decisions that impact our work." Several faculty and staff commented about low staff wages and feeling that staff are not fairly compensated. Moreover, many Transform faculty said they feel



the university does not advocate for or protect them, describing how they feel unsafe since the passage of Utah House Bill 261, a new law that restricts diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices in education and government. A Transform faculty member described feeling gaslit by the university's "U BELONG" campaign, recounting how walking past a "U BELONG" banner outside the library felt deeply disingenuous. Several other participants voiced agreement with her sentiment.

Participants consistently emphasized that without meaningful efforts to address these challenges – such as reducing administrative burdens, stabilizing processes and prioritizing well-being – morale and effectiveness will continue to decline.

04. Relationships with Central Administration

As the previous theme alludes to, faculty and staff described strained relationships with central administration, centering on four key sub-themes: perceptions of exclusion from decision-making, a lack of transparency, a lack of clarity regarding goals and direction and a disconnect from departmental realities. Many expressed frustration that shared services and other major administrative changes felt imposed from above, with limited attention to how these decisions affect daily operations. Participants also noted confusion over frequently used but ambiguous terms like "efficiency" and "student success," which they felt lacked clear definitions or relevance to their work.

Negative feelings toward central administration primarily emerged in faculty and staff comments about decision-making. Participants' comments often centered on the perception that they were **excluded from decision-making** and that their feedback did not matter, as decisions seemed predetermined. For example, a faculty member from Transform said the listening sessions seemed disingenuous, and the questions felt leading; as a result, she believes that faculty input about shared services will not shape outcomes. Many participants expressed the belief that decisions about shared services had already been made, making the listening sessions feel like a formality. The words "insulted" and "disrespected" were used several times by faculty to characterize their feelings toward central administration, stemming from a perceived exclusion from decision-making processes and the dismissal or trivialization of their concerns.

Many faculty and staff stated they felt a **lack of transparency** in how and why decisions were made. A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member, for instance, stated, "Changes are being made, but it's unclear why and what's happening." Multiple faculty and staff expressed the belief that the shared services project has a hidden agenda to cut staff positions. Concerns that the project aims to cut staff positions were raised in nearly all the listening sessions. A Transform staff member explained, "We keep hearing that this is about efficiency, but no one has defined what efficiency means or how it will improve things for us. It feels like decisions are being made behind closed doors." Several faculty and staff noted that the word "efficiency" had not been defined by administration.

Faculty several times used the words “code” or “coded conversation” in reference to what the shared services effort is about, and a few expressed their beliefs that the project is actually about merging colleges. Similarly, a staff member from Social and Behavioral Science remarked that efficiency is a less-alarming way of saying “budget cuts” or “staff reductions.”

As these sentiments illustrate, faculty and staff voiced frustration over the **lack of clarity** surrounding goals and direction of projects, including key terms frequently used by central administration, such as “efficiency” and “student success.” Participants noted that these terms often feel vague and disconnected from their daily responsibilities, creating confusion about goals and expectations. This ambiguity deepens distrust, as many believe terms like “efficiency” are used to justify budget cuts, centralization or “getting students in and out as quickly as possible” without addressing potential consequences. A faculty member from Science observed, “Efficiency seems to mean cost-cutting, not improving how things work. If that’s the goal, it’s not going to benefit us or our students.” A Social and Behavioral Science faculty member shared a similar perspective, stating that efficiency is the enemy of effectiveness and that there is risk of losing sight of the mission if there is too much emphasis on efficiency. Faculty and staff emphasized that the lack of clear definitions makes it difficult to align departmental work with institutional priorities. A Humanities staff member explained, “If we don’t know what student success means to [central administration], how are we supposed to work toward it? Right now, it feels like we’re all interpreting it differently.” In general, staff struggled with answering an open-ended question in the listening sessions about what success looked like to them in the previous academic year, and their responses indicated they lacked clear direction on what success would look like to central administration.

Finally, participants repeatedly commented that central administration is **disconnected from the realities of departments and colleges** and, as some claimed, is not interested in hearing or learning about those realities. Many described leadership as prioritizing compliance, efficiency or external optics over the well-being of faculty, staff and students. For instance, many faculty shared concerns about the closure of three student centers designed to support students with marginalized identities. They emphasized that the responsibility for providing this support now falls on faculty, as students approach them to meet their needs. The increase in faculty’s workload negatively impacts the time they have available to teach and do research. One Transform faculty member stated that there was no effort on the part of the university to transfer those duties to another unit so that those students would remain supported. Another faculty member from Social and Behavioral Science jibed that this type of support would be well-suited for a shared services model, a suggestion that was met with laughs and applause from others in the session. A faculty member from Humanities remarked that it seems that central administration is more concerned with how things look to the state legislature or donors than with how changes impact the people doing the work.

05. Local Shared Services

Despite their concerns about shared services, some participants acknowledged that shared services can work well if implemented thoughtfully and tailored to the needs of the units they serve.

For example, faculty and staff in the College of Science, which recently merged with the College of Mines and Earth Sciences, shared more nuanced views and positive experiences with their relatively new shared services model. A Science faculty member described how staff

coordinate across units now that the merger is complete, sharing expertise but preserving local knowledge. A Science staff member shared a similar experience: “We were segmented through different buildings, but now we have teams. They meet monthly... We have an admin team that meets monthly, a budget team that meets monthly... And we have a contact now for things.”

Several Social and Behavioral Science faculty also noted that shared advising works well. “Our primary advisor for each unit, they go to the faculty’s meetings, curriculum meetings, and they can give that expertise to the cluster. It works really well for students, but you have to have that level of integration.” A Science faculty member shared similar views, adding that the rollout was “heavy-handed” and led to some staff turnover, but overall, the results have been beneficial to students.

Similarly, participants spoke highly of the shared research administration services currently in place across the College of Humanities, College of Social and Behavioral Science, School for Cultural and Social Transformation and College of Architecture and Planning. These staff were consistently praised for their expertise and responsiveness. One Social and Behavioral Science faculty member explained, “We’ve already had shared services taking place... and it works really well because the staff are excellent, and they know exactly what we need.” Another Social and Behavioral Science faculty member added, “Our research administration team has been critical to supporting our grants. It’s a model of shared services done right.”

Not all local shared services garnered praise. Many staff pointed out that when advising became a shared service, parts of advisors’ responsibilities were dropped, with no plan for how or by whom those duties would be absorbed. Administrative support staff described how they were ultimately tasked with taking on the work, despite lacking the training, context and connections needed to be successful,

making the transition especially difficult. Additionally, as discussed in the Local Support and Local Communities section above, many Humanities faculty and staff noted that shared advising led to poorer service for students and weakened relationships among advisors, faculty and departments.



Recommendations

The listening sessions revealed structural and operational challenges within the current system, including insufficient training and onboarding resources, disruptions when staff are on leave or turnover, operational silos, uneven resource distribution and limited career progression opportunities for staff. A well-implemented shared services model has the potential to address these issues by providing a shared pool of expertise, creating a standard of services and facilitating collaboration across units. However, for shared services to succeed, they must be designed thoughtfully, with input from faculty and staff, and tailored to meet the diverse needs of the four units' departments. The following recommendations provide additional details about recommendations based on the findings of the listening sessions.

01. Preserve Local Expertise and College Autonomy

First and foremost, shared services should prioritize preserving college autonomy, including local expertise. Faculty and staff were explicit about this need. A Humanities staff member, for instance, stated, "What's important is not losing people who are specialized and sit in the colleges." Many emphasized the importance of balancing local expertise with access to a

broader network of specialists who can assist with complex challenges, provide coverage during staff absences or offer support during transitions caused by turnover. As such, shared services must be designed to respect, rather than replace, the specialized knowledge and relationships that exist within individual colleges and departments.

Preserving college autonomy is equally important, as departments need flexibility to adapt shared services to their unique needs, cultures and workflows. For instance, departments with specialized research equipment may require tailored IT support, while others may benefit more from generalized services. Prioritizing local expertise and autonomy will ensure that shared services enhance, rather than disrupt, daily operations.

02. Engage Faculty and Staff Deeply in the Design Process

The success of shared services depends on meaningful engagement with faculty and staff at every stage of the design process. Participants expressed frustration with past top-down initiatives and emphasized the importance of their input being valued and integrated into decision-making. Engaging faculty and staff will not only build trust but also ensure that shared

services are designed with an understanding of the practical challenges and needs of those who rely on them. Transparent and collaborative design processes are essential to fostering confidence in shared services and creating solutions that work.

03. Address Faculty and Staff Morale to Build Capacity for Change

Burnout and exhaustion were recurring sub-themes in the listening sessions, with many participants expressing limited capacity for further institutional changes. Before implementing shared services, leadership should take steps to prioritize faculty and staff well-being. Addressing morale is likely to lead to faculty and staff being more open to the shared services project and better equipped to manage the transition.

04. Base Design on Successful and Unsuccessful Models

The design of shared services should be informed by an in-depth exploration of existing models that faculty and staff view as either successful or problematic. For example, shared research administration was widely praised for its responsiveness and effectiveness, offering a model for what works well. Conversely, some Humanities faculty and staff felt the shared advising model lost department-specific knowledge and created inefficiencies, highlighting pitfalls to avoid.

Although this listening session series highlighted many challenges faculty and staff face with

centralized services like HR and UIT, it may be valuable to analyze how these services were designed and implemented to identify how future efforts can be more effective. Further, deeper dives into these services, in collaboration with the leaders and staff of each area, are likely to lead to process improvements that will decrease faculty and staff reliance on local contacts and feelings of “us versus them” which are detrimental to overall institutional productivity and well-being.

Finally, examining shared services models at other universities can provide valuable insights into best practices and potential challenges. By analyzing how similar institutions such as AAU peers have implemented shared services – what has worked well and what has not – across the liberal arts and sciences disciplines, the U can better tailor its approach while minimizing risks and inefficiencies.

05. Roll Out Shared Services Intentionally with Testing and Feedback Loops

The rollout of shared services should be deliberate and phased, allowing for testing, piloting and feedback loops. While shared advising has been a pilot toward broader adoption of shared services, selecting a small-scale pilot in an area with general support for shared services can provide valuable insights into what works and what needs adjustment. This approach allows faculty and staff to provide insights, ensuring that shared services are refined and improved in response to real-world challenges. Intentional rollouts also reduce the risk of widespread disruption and build confidence in the model. While there was little agreement in the sessions on areas that would

be good candidates for shared services, several staff suggested event planning may be a useful place to start.

06. Communicate Clearly and Regularly about the Project

Many faculty and staff expressed confusion over terms like “efficiency,” frequently used by central administration without clear definitions and associated metrics. And, faculty and staff frequently noted that they were unclear on what was happening with the shared services project and why. Current efforts to communicate about the project (e.g., regular email updates, a webpage with information about the process, etc.) are not meeting faculty and staff’s needs. Additional insights from the leadership teams of the participating units could enhance communication strategies. In addition, staff in the listening sessions frequently noted that they seek and secure support and rely on Teams for

more communication needs than email; shifting some messaging to be shared by leaders via Teams may be more effective. As the project proceeds, transparent communication about the purpose, goals and measurable outcomes of shared services – such as response times, cost savings or satisfaction levels – will likely reduce skepticism and build trust. Regularly sharing project updates and metrics with faculty and staff can foster accountability and create a shared understanding of the project’s progress, success and how faculty and staff insights are shaping the process and outcomes.

These recommendations provide a framework for designing shared services that aligns with the needs and values of faculty and staff. By preserving local expertise, engaging stakeholders, addressing low morale, learning from existing models, adopting an intentional rollout strategy and communicating clearly about the project, the university can implement shared services that address systemic challenges while maintaining trust, effectiveness and departmental identity.



Conclusion

The listening sessions revealed a series of challenges and opportunities related to shared services at the U. Faculty and staff provided valuable insights into several systemic issues that a thoughtfully designed shared services model could address, such as inadequate training and onboarding, support gaps due to staff absences or turnover, operational silos, uneven resource distribution and limited career progression opportunities. At the same time, participants shared concerns about how shared services might be implemented, expressing fears of losing local expertise, diminishing college and departmental autonomy and sacrificing service quality for efficiency, among other concerns. These perceptions about a transition to shared services were amplified by low morale and strained relationships with central administration.

The findings underscore the importance of designing a shared services model that balances institutional goals with the unique needs of the participating colleges and their departments. Faculty and staff emphasized the need for a collaborative design process that preserves local expertise and flexibility while leveraging the efficiencies of shared resources. Successful implementation will require a deliberate rollout that includes testing, feedback loops and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Learning from existing shared services within the colleges, at the U and in the AAU more broadly – including both successful and problematic models – will be critical to identifying and applying best practices and avoiding pitfalls.

Moving forward, the U should prioritize clear and consistent communication about the shared services project. Defining key terms like “efficiency” and “student success,” setting measurable goals, and providing regular updates will reduce confusion while building trust. By addressing low morale, engaging faculty and staff as collaborators and tailoring solutions to meet the needs of its academic units, the U has an opportunity to create a shared services model that addresses systemic challenges while maintaining the autonomy and culture that are essential to the participating units’ success.

Appendix A: Listening Session Guide

Faculty listening session questions:

- What aspects of the current research support provided for faculty in your college – such as pre- and post-award, grant management, and more – work well for you?
- What barriers do you encounter in the research process, from securing funding to project completion?
- How do the existing student success initiatives in your college help you in supporting your students?
- Are there additional resources or services you feel are needed to better support student outcomes in your college?
- How well does our current institutional structure and resources facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching?
- How well does our current institutional structure and resources facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in research?
- What improvements could make it easier to collaborate with colleagues across different disciplines?
- As it relates to your professional development as a faculty member, what additional opportunities for training, mentorship, or academic growth would benefit you?
- As it relates to support for marketing and communication needs within your college, what's going smoothly, and where do you think changes are needed?
- When it comes to IT support, what is currently effective, and where might there be opportunities for growth?
- Are there specific services or resources you feel are currently lacking in your college that would help you be more effective and that we haven't already discussed?
- Have you encountered any inequities in access to services or resources compared to other departments or colleges and schools? If so, can you provide examples?
- Imagine that the four liberal arts and sciences academic units shared some services or resources. What would be the most important aspect for you in a shared services model?
- What services or support functions do you think could benefit from being shared across units?
- If you currently share services, what is working well and what can be improved?
- Internal communication refers to communication to faculty and staff regarding important updates, policies, initiatives, events, professional development and operational changes. Do you feel internal communication is clear and effective? What improvements, if any, could be made in this area for your department, your college, and the university as a whole?

Staff listening session questions:

- Reflect on the work you and your team did last academic year. How did you and your team define success?
- What were your biggest challenges or obstacles to being successful?
- As it relates to support for marketing and communication needs within your college or school, what's going smoothly, and where do you think changes are needed?
- When it comes to human resources support for your team's recruitment, retention, and training needs, what do you feel works well, and where do you see room for improvement?
- When it comes to IT support, what is currently effective, and where might there be opportunities for growth?
- How easily are facilities issues addressed in your college or school? Can you describe any recent experiences, either positive or negative?
- How do you feel budget management processes are handled within your college or school? Are there any particular areas where processes are successful, and others where you feel confused or frustrated?
- Are there specific services or resources you feel are currently lacking in your college or school that would help you do your job more effectively and that we haven't already discussed?
- How well do you feel your team is integrated with central university services? Are there areas where integration could be improved?
- Have you encountered any inequities in access to services or resources compared to other teams, departments, colleges or schools? If so, can you provide examples?
- Imagine that the four liberal arts and sciences academic units shared some services or resources. What would be the most important aspect for you in a shared services model?
- What services or support functions do you think could benefit from being shared across units?
- If you currently share services with another college or school, what is working well and what can be improved?
- Internal communication refers to communication to faculty and staff regarding important updates, policies, initiatives, events, professional development and operational changes. Do you feel internal communication is clear and effective? What improvements, if any, could be made in this area for your team and your college or school?

Associate deans and department chairs listening session questions:

- Reflect on the operational support available to faculty and staff in your college or school, including research administration, budget management, human resources, IT, facilities management, event planning, marketing and communications, administrative support, and more. Which area in your college or school, if any, stands out as being a model for efficient and effective service? Why?
- Reflect on the work you and your department, college or school did last academic year, as well as how you defined success. What were your biggest challenges or obstacles to being successful?
- Are there specific services or resources you feel are currently lacking or under-resourced in your college or school that would help you do your job more effectively?
- Have you encountered any inequities in access to services or resources compared to other departments, colleges or schools? If so, can you provide examples?
- If you currently share services with another college or school, what is working well and what can be improved?
- Imagine that the four liberal arts and sciences academic units shared some services or resources. What would be the most important aspect for you in a shared services model?
- What services or support functions do you think could benefit from being shared across units?



A Report Commissioned by the Project Team

The project team includes deans of the four participating academic units, staff of the Office of Academic Affairs, and the chair of the Academic Excellence Taskforce. The taskforce is composed of deans and provides recommendations and feedback on strategic initiatives and change management aligned with the University of Utah strategic planning process, Impact 2030.