

Mark J. Zoran, Dean

February 12, 2025

RE: Arts and Sciences Strategic Plan: A Foundational Future

Dear Adam,

Thank you for agreeing to chair our Strategic Planning **Graduate Studies Working Group** as we craft the first strategic plan for the College of Arts and Sciences. Your group is one of four created that will focus on critical activities we pursue to achieve **national and international preeminence** across the college. This is an exciting moment as this plan will help chart our path for the next 10 years.

The objective of the strategic plan is to develop a framework for goals and actions that cement our newly formed College firmly as the **foundational future** of the Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M University. Dramatic changes in learning and teaching, training and skill development, acquired knowledge and creative competencies are rapidly transforming education, particularly the missions and future of higher education. New challenges in technology, communication, globalization, financial stability and the future relationship between a university and the citizenry add obstacles to academic transformation in research and instruction.

My **charge** is that your Working Group develop a set of recommendations that account for the emergent challenges posed by our rapidly changing graduate educational landscape and that will best position our college to positively impact the future of Texas, the nation, and the world. The question that drives our strategic planning conversations is simple, ***“What is the shared vision in Arts and Sciences for creating national and international prominence in our research, teaching, and outreach?”***

Your Working Group will have access to the **Idea Papers**, table reporting documents, that were produced at your recent Spring 2025 Graduate Studies retreat. I charge the Working Group to review any applicable data, conduct meetings with focus groups and generate a report that includes potential goals, objectives, strategies and actions, as well as assessment metrics, that support our vision for the future of Arts and Sciences graduate studies and the important areas of our shared mission with which graduate students intersect.

I leave it to you, your co-chair (if applicable) and the working group to define its conduct for initial aspects of your work, with the latitude to structure its process in a way that fits the unique context of your assigned area. However, to ensure a shared approach and inclusivity in the formulation of our ultimate strategic plan, please follow the steps outlined below and illustrated in the accompanying graphic.

- **Create a Working Group and identify Focus Groups that reflect the diversity of key stakeholders germane to your area**, such as faculty, staff, students, and administrators. Develop strategies for engaging these key stakeholders regarding their perception of your area and future possibilities.

- **Continue to reality test your evolving set of goals, strategies and actions**, understanding approaches will change over time as you deliberate. Reassessment of the utility and viability plans is important as university constraints or emerging societal trends may disrupt and challenge our thinking.
- **Track cross-cutting issues and overlaps that may be relevant to other Working Groups.** Each Working Group has a particular focus, be mindful of ideas that arise that might impact other groups' planning and pass them along to the appropriate chair.
- **Produce a preliminary report by April 11, 2025.** Please include a brief executive summary in your **Working Group Reports**. These brief overviews will be posted on a college website, so as to inform planning progress. Following the completion of preliminary reports, coordination meetings among the Working Group Co-Chairs will be scheduled to explore cross-cutting issues and how the college may address them as well as provide updates on the progress of the Working Groups.
- **Submit your final report on strategic planning by May 30, 2025.** Note that the preliminary and final report have no required format or template at this time, but more guidance will likely be forthcoming. Again, final executive summaries of the reports will be posted to the website.

For the Graduate Studies Working Group, I ask that you consider the following issues and questions in your deliberation:

Graduate student research: What practices or policies at the department level are particularly effective at enhancing graduate student research? What are the challenges to creating a robust graduate student research climate? What can the college do to more effectively support graduate education and research?

Graduate student teaching: Given the College of Arts and Sciences' central role in teaching core curriculum courses across the university, how can we best prepare our graduate students to become excellent classroom teachers and mentors? What best departmental practices exist to promote excellent teaching by graduate students and pedagogical training?

Career preparation and community engagement: How can the college and departments support graduate student career development for academic and/or nonacademic jobs? What are the opportunities to align our graduate education mission with the needs of the regional, state, national, and global economy? Are there opportunities to better engage with external partners and stakeholders to enhance student career preparation?

Interdisciplinary and inter-departmental programs: What opportunities currently exist or might exist in the future for developing new cross-departmental or cross-college graduate programs, programming or training? What are the current challenges in the administration of interdisciplinary or inter-departmental programs and what can the college do to help alleviate these problems?

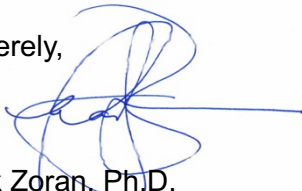
Master's Programs: What opportunities exist to promote the sustainable growth of master's programs in the college? Are there opportunities to develop new master's programs or cross-departmental master's programs? What challenges and opportunities exist in distance master's programs? What can the college do to support distance programs or develop new high-quality distance education?

Policies and Procedures: Are there opportunities to streamline administrative processes related to graduate education? How are best practices in graduate program education/administration shared across the college?

Graduate Funding: Assuming a flat university budget in the next few years, how can we make the most effective possible use of existing internal funding mechanisms for graduate students? How can we better promote and support external awards (NSF-GRFP, SSRC, etc.) for graduate students? What other funding opportunities exist?

Thank you for leading this working group. I greatly appreciate your willingness to undertake this important task for the college. I strongly believe that the talent and resources we have in the college give us the opportunity to become one of the leading colleges of arts and sciences in the nation and I look forward to working with you to make this a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Zoran', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Zoran, Ph.D.
Dean of College of Arts & Sciences