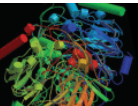


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• EDITORIAL

How to Change the University

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Savvy university administrators all over the country know how hard it is to change the ways of a university. Tired ideas, unworkable programs, and rigid department structures all have a life of their own. They are deeply woven into the fabric of higher education even though they are strangling growth, creativity, and spontaneity. Self-interest and protectionism are now rampant. The modern university is partitioned along academic lines that no longer truly reflect today's intellectual life. These academic groupings are now just categories that accountants and business managers use to build a budget. The issue is most pronounced in the scientific disciplines, but the humanities need transformation, too.

Through Candide, Voltaire advocated the cultivation of one's own garden. But modern knowledge systems are inseparably interdisciplinary. For example, cognitive neuroscience draws on neurology, computer science, radiology, basic neuroscience, and more. What I like to call the mind sciences cast an even wider net, including economics, anthropology, philosophy, computer science, human factors, education, evolutionary biology, and so on. In the process of defining a new intellectual life, people will want to join others who are like-minded. For example, a cognitive neuroscientist, commonly affiliated with a traditional psychology department may find that courses about Freud may interfere with progress in other directions.

To cope with change, some administrators have started centers, programs, or institutes. Resources in the form of jobs, money, and space are given to these superordinate entities, often with the stipulation that any appointee also must have an academic appointment in a traditional department. This may seem like a fine idea; however, strains develop because of teaching loads and other issues of perceived unfairness.

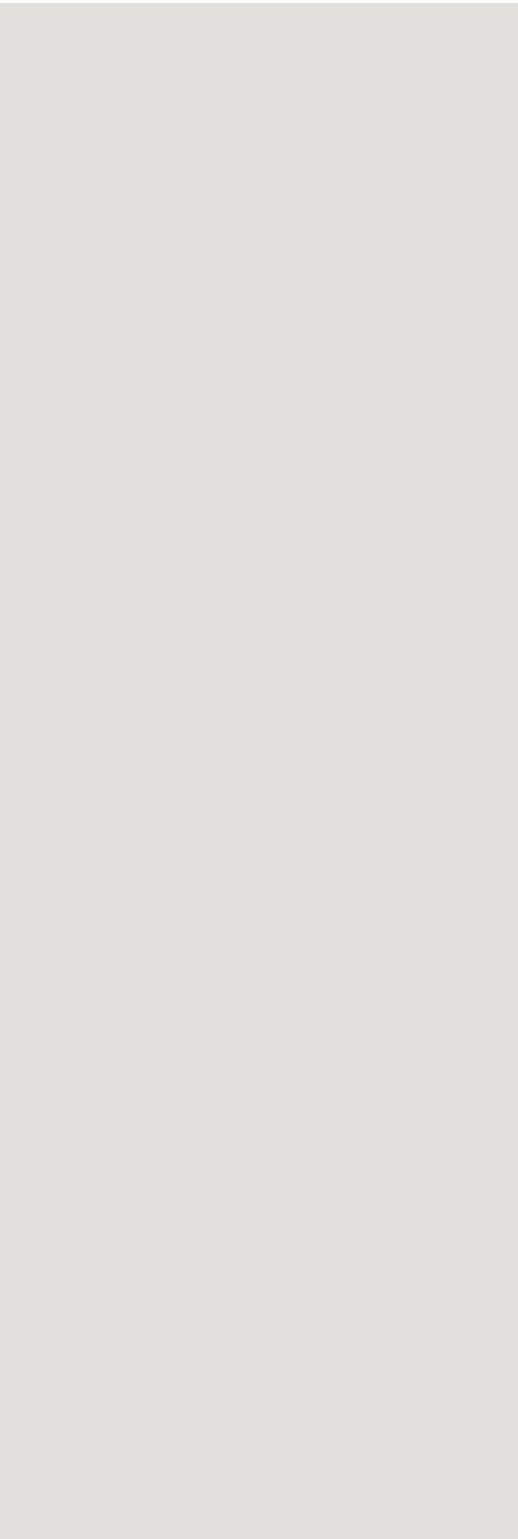
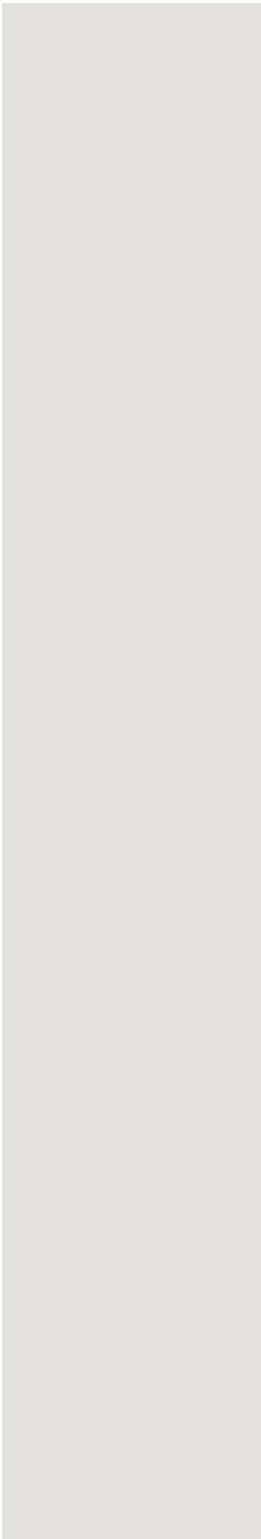
It is time to reorganize the whole university, and not by doing it piecemeal. My suggestion is that the university administration announce to its faculty that while continuing to function as they are for 1 year, they are free to reorganize themselves in any way they see fit, planning new curricula, graduate programs, special emphasis groups, and all the rest. For instance, faculty from different departments could combine to teach about an area, such as the mind. They would request space for their new venture and spell out the teaching load they would share. At the end of the year, the new organization of the university should reflect the new configurations of the academic world. After regrouping, people would be better prepared for the intellectual work of the next century.

A number of models could also keep the institution open to change. One is Rockefeller University, where there are no departments at all, only professors and their laboratories. As new problems are identified, groups are free to form for a few years to address the issue at hand. When the problem is either resolved or dissolved, the group disbands, and the parties ready themselves for the next problem.

I also propose that large foundations form a consortium and offer four or five leading universities a one-time grant of \$300 million to defray the transitional costs of intellectual renovation. Expenses include balancing teaching loads, renovating buildings, and funds to launch research and to provide scholarships. Once the leading universities do this, the others will follow suit.

This particular proposal may be doomed, but reorganization frequently does work on the modest scale of a new center or institute. After breathing the exhilarating air of change, sharing organizational insight and energy with the larger university community becomes a goal. With thought and care, the problems of dealing with the prima donnas and defenders of the status quo would be manageable and worth the effort.

Someone once said that Americans think the weather starts in California and ends in Maine. We all have such a limited view of our existence. Intellectual pursuits change, as does everything else. In today's world, trying to maintain a personal garden is an endeavor that will die on the vine.



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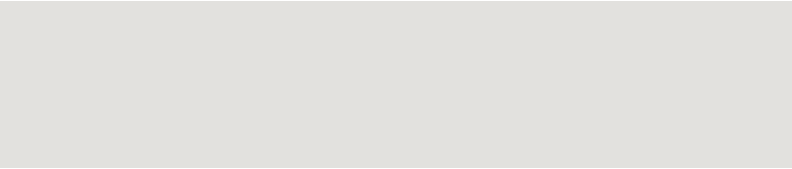
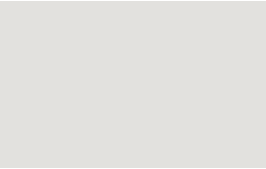
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