

Changing Department Culture

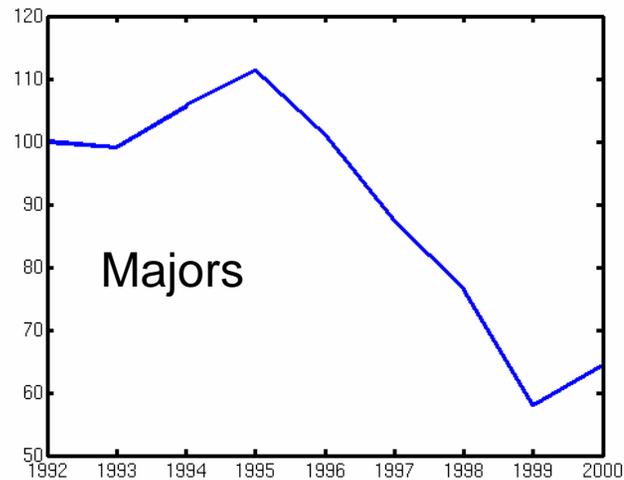
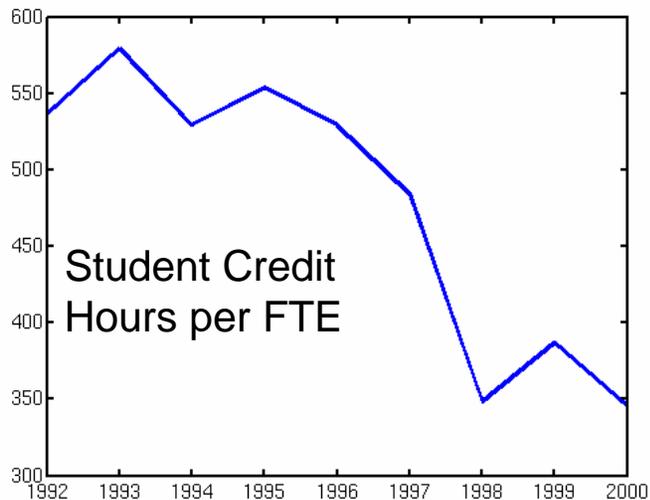
Perspectives from one Chair

Earth and Space Sciences

- Formed in 2000 from merger of Geological Sciences and Geophysics
 - Convergence of scholarship
 - Stronger together than apart
- Mergers are stressful
 - Different department cultures - not always aligned most constructively
 - Where does an individual fit in new organization?

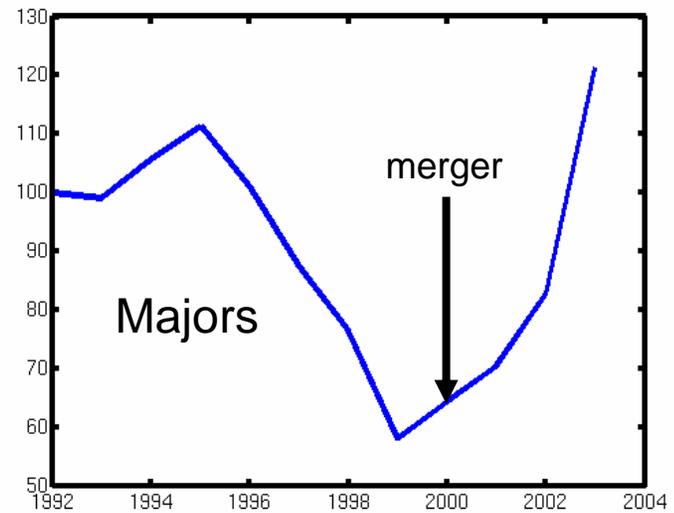
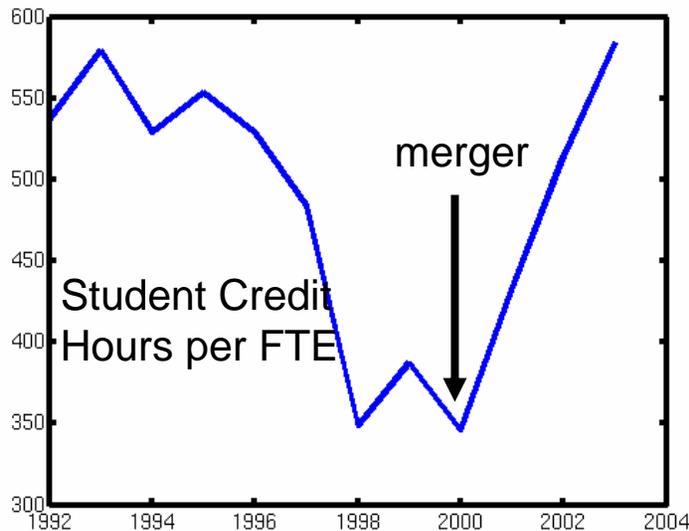
In 2000

- “Sharp edges” & “harsh environment”
 - Serious morale issues
- Declining numbers of students



In 2004

- Signs of improved morale
 - Spontaneous positive comments about peers and department
- Clear improvement in numbers of students



A Hypothetical Worst-case Department: Excellent people who don't work together (not ESS)

- Lack of trust and respect in each other
- Difficulty in identifying with institutional goals
 - “Tit for tat” mentality
 - Dialog of “history” rather than “future”
 - Prone to “conspiracy theories” and “victim” mentality
- “Inside-the-box” thinking - justify status quo
 - Accepting of unsupported “conventional wisdom”

Consequences:

New faculty will be like old

- Conditioned by environment
- Self-selection to (not) participate
- Shared implicit beliefs
- Not a suitable environment to foster participation by under-represented groups

What a Chair Can Do

- Create environments where positive behavior is more probable
- Persist
 - Permanent change will not happen instantly

Some Ideas

- Promote open and transparent processes
- Identify and tackle long-festering issues
 - Prioritize and think about timing
- Acknowledge the high-stress and high-demand world of faculty
 - Protect and promote faculty interests

- Care in staffing key departmental committees
 - The right person can make a world of difference
- Work for productive faculty meetings
 - Insist on committee recommendations
 - Revert to committee if discussion is not leading to consensus
 - Insist on respecting views of all stake-holders

Take your message “one-on-one”

- Use neutral ground
- Give generous praise
 - Reinforce that everyone is worthy and respected
 - not a cynical activity, people are working very hard with few strokes and lots of stress
- Offer unrequested assistance
 - Break cycle of “what incentive is there for me to help”
- Have message of institutional goals
 - “I’m sure you would agree ..”

Prepare to “Fall on your Sword”

- A Chair’s enthusiasm may not always carry a battle
- Sometimes better to back off of a divisive issue

Consensus

- ESS experience is (near) unanimous votes on all important departmental decisions
 - Don't rush a vote until all stake-holders have had ample opportunity to participate
 - Minority views inform the process and lead to significant revision

Other Ideas?