

A letter to The University of Tulsa

Dear all,

I'm writing this email, with emotions of myself staying at TU for 8 years with different titles, student, tutor, graduate assistant, and now, adjunct instructor, to whom it may concerned, saving our school.

I've noticed the recent major decision that the school has made, without most of the stakeholders of the school. I don't agree with part of the decisions, but I wonder if it's too late to try to change that. **If the decision couldn't be changed, please ignore the next paragraph and jump to next section.**

As we all know, budget problem is/has been one of the biggest obstacles for this school to grow – after all, you can't do a lot without money. From that perspective, cutting programs doesn't sound like a bad idea. However, as a Statistics geek, I strongly doubt the method/model that the school used to decide which programs to be cut. From my understanding, it is not scientific. The worst thing in Statistics is garbage in, garbage out. It doesn't consider timeline, growth, department condition and so many more factors. Not to mention if the data is relatively good data. For example, MSFinance and MSQuant Finance. When the international enrollment of MSF started declining few years ago, I talked with Dr. Chiang in Finance-Operation Management department saying we may need two more programs: Business Analytics and Mathematical Finance. I said that for two reasons: 1. They are both STEM programs, that could attract more international students for OPT extension. 2. Business analytics is a hot trending nowadays that the demand is big. Quantitative finance is a good program to upgrade/replace traditional finance, plus, we already have a lot of math in the finance program. With both of MSF and MSQF existing, people would like to choose MSQF rather than MSF. That also means, we don't need extra resources/cost for QF since it's basically a combination of Business Analytics and Finance. Dr. Chiang talked with Dr. Harper, the ex-chair of the department, and everyone agreed with it. The BA program, going very well, had a lot of enrollment, both local and international; QF program, not much, since no one knows about it, and local job market doesn't need it. I believe, though, in two years, with some minor marketing effort, we can grow QF program very fast. As the alumni of the first-year QF program, all of our international students got a job before graduated. That is phenomenon comparing to other programs at TU, other universities as well. Unfortunately, TU decided to cut this program. A program, that just started, going great, and being cut. No advanced degrees related to finance will exist anymore when professors need help on their way to get their research done. As a former graduate assistant, I know the importance to get help in research. It's a chain that will influence so much long-termly, if you think about causation. Without MSF & MSQF students/graduate assistants, no one would help with professors doing research. More and more professors pursuing their tenures may leave, when Finance department is lack of professors with tenure. As a result, program quality will decline, and people would like to choose our competitors such as OU, OSU, ORU..... This is just an example. Some other decisions are not rationale either, such as, some PHD programs. It will hurt TU in its teaching quality, and eventually, make enrollment worse, and there will be another budget problem.

I've read about how PPRC conduct the “analysis” and I think it can be better. I can't believe I read PPRC “dedicated the time necessary to understand the data at the most nuanced level” in “TU Reorganization”. I'm not saying that what they did is wrong, but it could be better, much better. That's why we have deans in each school, we have chairs in each department, and we have people in this school for so long, who have already noticed the root. Their voices weren't heard. After all, at the end of the day, they are not part of the decision. After all, at the end of the day, they are not important in executives' view. Shouldn't students and faculties be the most important stakeholders since the decision is about university – an education institution? I can't imagine what the future will be like without students and faculties support

this decision, and benefit from the decision. It's a hard time for TU and we would like to concur it, but in a better way, that involves faculties, and students. Let their voices to be heard. Don't keep executives in a small box with 13 committee members. Don't be a frog at the bottom of a well.

If you skipped the paragraph above, best wishes to TU. Don't get me wrong, it doesn't mean the end of the world. We have more problems to solve here:

Problem 1: "I'm sorry, but we've never done this before."

I've heard it so many times on campus and I'm so tired of it. Improving University of Tulsa requires so many forces involved, such as HR, professors, students, finance..... We need to try to catch up with the trend, the era, the world.

When I was still in undergrad school at TU, I talked with International Student Service saying I knew some people that can help promote TU in China. They are studying-abroad agents and they don't charge the school anything for doing it. They will promote the school to their students, help them apply for TU, and they can help mention TU in conferences. It was a great opportunity. All I got was, "I'm sorry, but we've never done this before". Two years later, the international student enrollment rate declined. I was asked by three staffs what we can do to make it better. It was too late.

I got an opportunity to work for a fortune 500 company as an intern. I was so happy and went to the International Student Service asking if I can enroll in an internship class and get my CPT approved so that I am authorized to work in Spring semester. I didn't think it would be a problem, because all of my friends from different schools never had a problem apply for Spring semester CPT. Got the same answer, "we've never done this before". Getting an internship in the U.S. is extremely hard for international students. That's why we work so hard for that opportunity. A decent internship can lead us to a good job. Otherwise, it will be extremely hard to find a job after graduation. Working in Spring semester with CPT approved is completely legal and feasible.

International Student Service is just an example. I've heard it so many times in other offices/departments as well. We talk about innovation, we talk about being creative, but I didn't see anything creative going on in the past 4 years. TU is a very conservative school in its managerial style. You do need your "style" being consistent, meanwhile, you need to make changes to fit the dynamic world.

What causes this problem?

1. People are not willing to take the risk.
2. Changing means more efforts, and people don't want to take extra efforts.
3. A lot of people don't have the right to change rules/current status.

How to change it?

1. Encourage employees to bring ideas in meetings and different channels.
2. Build different channels for people to discuss new ideas/issues that's going on.
3. Give more rights to proper people.

4. Assign extra helper to help, if it's too much for one person to do the extra work.

5. "Own it". It's OK to take the risk. If it goes wrong, we learn it, and everyone will support to reduce the risk.

Problem 2: "I'm not sure. Ask XXXXX."

This is somehow related to "I've never done this before". Putting responsibility on others is a way to avoid risk and extra effort.

I've been in the condition that a department asked me to go to another department and solve problems there, and the other department asked me to go to another office to solve the problem. I had to make appointments three times for the same thing with different departments (which took days), and eventually the office sent me to the first department I visited. I was mad, and I asked the office to call the first department, and it was solved easily in two minutes. It wasted their time, and mine. Again, not only once. I thought it was American culture or something. Until I started working at my current company. Even though they don't know how to help, they contact the person who could help me, and make sure that I got helped. If neither of them could help, they'll get together, and see how to solve the problem for me.

I seldom see that on TU, even though most of them are not busy. Working attitude is important to TU. People cannot be lazy anymore. Working hard doesn't simply mean taking orders. It also means people need to "see" the work and work smart. Just like my story I told above, only one phone call, could save students' time and three department's time.

What causes this problem?

1. People are not willing to take the risk.
2. People don't want to take extra efforts.
3. The role of each position is not clearly stated.

How to change it?

1. Create a platform for students to recognize people who helped them solve a problem.
2. Let people know that avoiding efforts can cause more work later.
3. Encourage people work together across departments.
4. Gather department/office chair and let them speak if they need help from different department, or if they can make a process easier together.

Problem 3: Who's in charge?

If you are/were in Finance program, you should have heard a theory called "Agency Theory". Basically, it's a theory talking about relationship between shareholders (in this case, board), as principals, and company executive, as agents. For example, if I am the president of University of Tulsa, I would like to

do something that people will remember me in a short time, instead of being blamed for slow growth (even though it's sustainable and best for the future) by the board. I don't know any of the board members at TU personally. Apparently, they failed in supervision. There were signs, a long time ago, that there are severe problems in this school. For example, the declining of international student enrollment, the school spending, cancellation of GA position in summer terms.....

Well, I bet many people had noticed these years ago.

TU did nothing while other schools were holding University Tour in Asian countries, Europe, and Africa. TU did nothing while other schools were promoting their online degree programs for adults. TU did nothing while other schools provide incentives to new professors. TU did nothing while other schools used data to analyze the school operation and students to help everyone have a better studying experience. Oh, forgot to mention, the data analysis that TU did to make this decision, is not scientific, at all. As a student of Professor Richard Gebhart (1956-2015), a fan of data (both him and I), feel bad. RIP Professor Gebhart. I know if he were here, we would have discussed about what method to use to make it better.

So, back to what I wanted to say.

Who's in charge?

No, not only board members. No, not only president. No, not only provost. And no, not only them.

Everyone should be involved. Everyone should be asked. Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance. Students didn't have the chance. Staffs and faculties didn't have the chance. Especially for this decision, that everyone is involved, everyone is impacted.

People's opinions vary and doesn't necessary to be adopted but hearing to different voices can make the decision process more comprehensive.

What causes this problem?

1. Management simplify the problem too much.
2. Management team want to maximize short-term accomplishment instead of sustainable growth (agency theory).
3. Lack of comprehensive thought from different group stakeholders.
4. Board members' neglect of warning signs.
5. Lack of scientific data analysis.
6. Over confidence of the board and management.

How to change it?

1. Weigh stakeholder's importance and widely listen to all stakeholders' opinion.
2. Restructure TU board committee.
3. Change the structure of executives' incentive mechanism.
4. Use outsource consulting. We are not going to adopt everything they would say, but to capture the factors that we can't capture as an inside.
5. Involve in more data analysis/analytics in operations.
6. Cross-sectional meeting regularly (departments should work together to accomplish goals).