Sample Shared Services Frequently Asked Questions

From Department and Faculty Leaders

▶ **Is shared services just a ploy for the central administration to gain more power?**

Shared services is not the same as centralization. Through governance boards, service-level agreements, and data-driven continuous business process improvement, shared services centers remain accountable to customer units.

▶ **How will central providers keep up with department demands, much less scale to anticipated growth?**

Current data on unit-level transaction volumes will determine shared service center staffing needs. This ensures that departments are neither under—nor over—resourced, as is often the case. In fact, shared services will better meet department needs since service will not be interrupted when key staff are absent or depart. Furthermore, through increased automation and by leveraging economies of scale, we will be able to meet increased research, teaching, and service ambitions—without adding additional staff.

▶ **Is shared services worth the upfront investment?**

The current financial climate makes administrative restructuring an unavoidable necessity as our institution is forced to "do more with less," continuing to advance ambitious research agendas and serve growing faculty and student needs despite budget cuts and declining student enrollments.

▶ **My department administrative support staff know my needs. Why should I give that up?**

Staff migrated to shared service centers typically still work with their previous home departments, only now with the greater support, training, and resources needed to provide even higher levels of service. Institutions that have implemented shared services have been able to provide faculty not only better, but also more services than before at no extra cost. Furthermore, customer liaisons will ensure shared-services centers understand unit needs.

▶ **Is shared services just a precursor to academic department consolidation?**

Administrative consolidation is not equivalent to academic consolidation. Freed from the administrative and financial burden of providing back-office support, departments will be able to re-direct existing resources to mission critical needs, such as research and instruction. Departments may also receive a percentage of shared services savings to reinvest themselves.

> **!** *The specific responses to these sample questions should be tailored to your campus's shared services model and implementation strategy.*

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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From Unit-Based Staff and Supervisors

▶ **Is my job in jeopardy?**

Given the large wave of retirements expected in coming years, the institution's priority is to rely on natural, rather than involuntary, attrition to achieve administrative consolidation. Using both historical trends and predicted retirement data, the shared services implementation team is forecasting natural attrition for the next few years. This data allows the university to determine how many roles can be consolidated without downsizing. In case turnaround falls short, a standing committee will regularly review open positions and match them with internal staff.

▶ **The faculty in my department rely on my personalized knowledge of their needs. What will they do?**

Administrative staff migrated to shared services centers still typically work with their home departments, only now with the greater support, training, and resources needed to provide even higher levels of service. Customer service liaisons will be utilized to ensure a smooth transition.

▶ **Specialist jobs sound less interesting and rewarding. Will I have to process the same transaction all day?**

Through increased process simplification and automation, shared services centers help staff focus on higher-value-added activities by eliminating unnecessary manual steps and paperwork. Furthermore, shared services center positions will provide improved training, better compensation, and more attractive career paths. Staff take an active role in using transaction data gained from ticketing software to re-engineer processes, and regular collection of performance data helps staff see clear areas for career development and advancement.

▶ **Will I have to learn new computer and IT systems?**

Technology competency assessments will help match individuals to appropriate positions, with training available for interested staff. Those uninterested in these positions will have the opportunity to apply for more customer-service oriented roles.

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From Vice Presidents, Deans, and Directors

▶ **What if my unit migrates first but others at the institution do not follow?**

Early adopters will be the first to benefit from the shared services migration. We promise that, at the very minimum, additional services will be provided at no additional cost. Furthermore, a tangible portion of shared services savings will be provided for department and unit heads to reinvest in their own core needs. Even if the entire university does not migrate to shared services initially, participation from a few units will create the economies of scale necessary to see improved service at a lower cost, and early participants will be able to help develop governance structures and implementation plans that meet their needs. Finally, service level agreements (SLAs) are designed to protect customer units, who will be able to raise concerns if baseline service requirements are not met.

▶ **Will some units have to contribute more than others?**

Through governance board and implementation team representation, units will be involved in the creation of equitable policies for chargeback mechanisms. Typically, these differ based on service provided (e.g., based on transaction volume versus student enrollment versus transaction types).

▶ **How will the shared services center be able to meet my unit's complex research administration needs?**

By including academic units in the redesign of processes absorbed into shared services and soliciting academic input in the design and implementation of the shared services model, we will be able to incorporate academic needs into service offerings from the very beginning. Unit-based staff migrated to shared services centers bring knowledge of academic department needs, and governance boards and SLAs will be used to ensure that shared services centers remain sensitive to the complexities of research administration.

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