

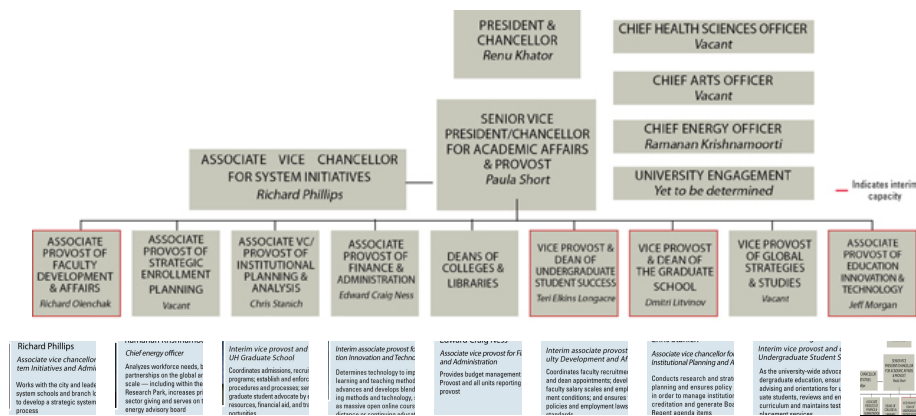
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Administration August 26, 2013 // by Natalie Harms // 1 Comment

Sorting out the Office of Academic Affairs



You wouldn't know it from the outside, but the Ezekiel W. Cullen Building — home to most of the administration — has one of the most renovated offices on campus. Even though no carpet was torn up and no hammering took place during the summer, the Office of Academic Affairs has been subject to significant structural improvements.

As everyone was wrapping up the spring semester, President and Chancellor Renu Khator wasn't preparing for a summer vacation. Instead, she and then-Interim Provost Paula Short were preparing a reorganization of the Office of Academic Affairs with the goal of enhancing student success.

The reorganization was constructed by an outside consulting firm, Pappas Consulting Group Inc., the chancellor, the provost and members of the department. The provost said all the changes will be finalized by Dec. 1.

The report, which was commissioned on Aug. 28, 2012 and concluded May 3, aimed to fine-tune areas within the academic world of UH, such as providing more training and resources for faculty.

"We're looking at, in particular, faculty development and faculty affairs. We're looking at developing a center to support our faculty to be innovative in their teaching and to be really effective instructors in the classroom," Short said.

"We've hired 298 faculty since 2008, and they have produced \$43 million worth of external funding. That means we've been doing a good job hiring faculty."

While faculty is a key focus in the reorganization, part of ensuring student success after graduation is creating and nurturing relationships with major industries in the Houston area. This inspired the creation of three positions responsible for this task: the chief health sciences officer, the chief arts officer and, most notably, the chief energy officer.

"It's really to increase our footprint in this incredible city of Houston in the area of energy. It's to connect the University and its faculty, its research and its students to the industry that's here in the No. 1 energy capital in the world," Short said, "and also to address workforce development needs, to conduct research and to develop research out of that."

Short said the office is working on new degree programs for all three categories, with recent progress in health sciences. With UH located so close to the Texas Medical Center, Short said the excitement is tangible and it's only a matter of time before UH steps out as a health science leader.

On Aug. 5, Short made a huge stride in this reorganization: She created the UH Graduate School.

UH has had stand-out graduate programs for years, but what the University lacked was one central system.

"That's where the establishment of the Graduate School comes in. ... That's done so that we can begin to have better coordination in graduate education, both in terms of policy, student support, student voice, ensuring continuous quality of dissertations, of admissions — we're automating admissions of graduate students," Short said.

The consistency and cohesiveness of the graduate school will help the individual programs grow, she said.

With all this tucked under their belts, the chancellor and provost have much left to tackle by the end of the semester. There are still four vacant positions within the Department and four individuals serving in interim positions.

"Part of (what's left) is me making a decision on whether or not to permanently appoint the interims or whether or not I want to do an external search," Short said. "And I do have searches going on actually for two: the strategic enrollment planning and the global strategy."

All of the plans and changes have been made with students in mind, and Short said she wants students to be able to look back and see how all these changes affected their experience.

"If you really look at every one of these things and you coil it down to its essence, it's to improve the experience of our students, both at the graduate and undergraduate level," Short said. "If we're not successful in giving you what you need, both educationally and in all ways, then we really haven't succeeded as a Tier One institution."

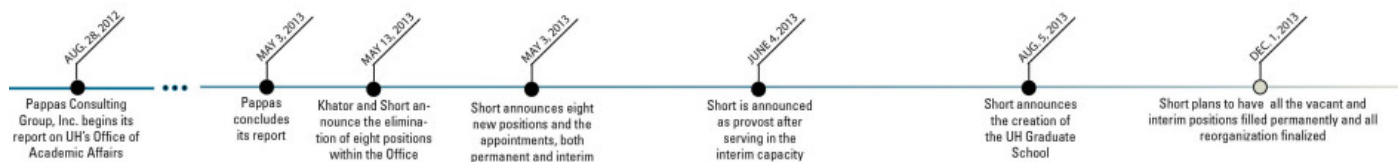
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PROVOST'S PUNCH LIST

The Pappas Consulting Group Inc.'s report included a multitude of suggested changes, tasks or goals for the University, and specifically the provost, to complete.

The Office of Academic Affairs and the provost will:

- ☐ Create and monitor strategic initiatives supporting UH's academic goals
- ☒ Realign duties of the previous office to fit the new organization of positions
- ☐ Ensure decision support systems and services exist to guide system-wide decisions
- ☐ Meet the personnel and training needs of the faculty
- ☐ Focus on undergraduate programs and activities to enhance student success
- ☒ Establish a graduate school that coordinates admissions for the University at the graduate level and makes sure resources for financial support are available
- ☐ Organize a Universitywide enrollment management plan that works with deans and department chairs on the undergraduate level
- ☐ Develop a plan for global activities for students, faculty and staff
- ☐ Encourage innovation and introduce technologies that advance learning and teaching
- ☐ Regulate administrative and financial practices that support deans, department chairs and business administrators of different colleges
- ☐ Maintain the goals of the Office as suggested by the report, including: thinking strategically, being service oriented in its day-to-day interface with students, academic administrators and faculty, working in a transparent and nimble manner, being timely and clear in its responses that require decision-making, and holding deans and the staff accountable.



Tags: [Office of Academic Affairs](#), [paula short](#), [provost](#), [Renu Khator](#), [reorganization](#), [University of Houston](#)

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