

LUMCON UPDATE

BACKGROUND

The Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON), created by state law, is a statewide entity with the primary function of conducting research and promoting education in the marine sciences and marine technology on the Louisiana Gulf Coast. LUMCON is established under the authority of the Board of Regents (BoR), and is administered by its governing authority, the LUMCON Executive Board. The Executive Board reports to BoR on all fiscal and programmatic matters. LUMCON's operations are headed by its Executive Director, who is hired by and reports to the Executive Board.

For over five years, BoR has been concerned about LUMCON's operational and financial model, as evidenced by BoR's report in response to House Resolution 50 of 2011. Independent of and in addition to the severe fiscal and other challenges that postsecondary institutions face in Louisiana, LUMCON has had its own difficulties indicative of a lack of consistent collaboration between LUMCON and the member universities. Even after the recommendations of BoR's 2011 report, LUMCON had not engendered the level of collaboration and networking with and among the member universities that is necessary to fulfill its role as a consortium. For instance, LUMCON the Executive Board had met only once during a two-year period between 2012 and 2014. The Five-Year Master Plan required by law to be submitted by February 1, 2013 was not submitted until August 2015, over thirty months past the statutory deadline. To address these continuing problems, a comprehensive business plan was deemed essential to put LUMCON on a path toward a viable operational and fiscal model and improved collaboration among the member universities.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUSINESS PLAN

At the Executive Board's August 19, 2015 meeting, Commissioner Rallo and Regent Lipsey urged the Executive Board to develop a strategic plan to build a self-sustaining financial model for LUMCON, with the member universities and LUMCON mutually supporting each other's research and educational efforts. Dr. Ramesh Kolluru of ULL, a member of the Executive Board offered to lead the effort, with the assistance of business and management faculty from various member universities. The plan, attached as Appendix A, was developed in about two months and was adopted by the Executive Board on October 29, 2015.

The major recommendations offered in the Business Plan are as follows:

A. Budgeting and Cost Accounting

1. Define cost center framework for managing finances across various areas of operation with appropriate levels. Align the existing chart of accounts with cost center structure, so it becomes clear if each functional unit is losing or making money.

2. Develop a policy and a shared governance model to allocate a portion of carryover funds and annual state budget towards investments in areas that are strategically important.
3. Develop periodic (e.g., quarterly) financial statements and audit reports that includes detail at the Revenue /Cost Center level.

B. K-12 Education Programs

4. Re-evaluate K-12 education and Teacher Training programs. Leverage K-12 partners to serve as a feeder to high-value programs.
5. Develop high-impact programs for niche audiences.

C. University Education Programs

6. Hire a full-time University Education Coordinator to develop MOUs with universities, to grow the program
7. Engage member & universities; focus on expanding market penetration; new curriculum; timing alignment; and delivery methods.
8. Address issues of out-of-state fees; need for a host university & course articulation with non-member schools.
9. Engage clients in public and private sectors; work with BTNEP & LCTCS to use IWTP and establish a training program.

D. Research

10. LUMCON must re-evaluate current & future resident-faculty effort loads to place greater emphasis on funded research to grow the Center.
11. Hire a full-time Univ. Research Coordinator and use SEAC to fill vacant resident faculty positions to create greater synergies. Leverage resources for joint-hires between the Center & members.
12. LUMCON conducts a cost analysis of its research support to member & non-member universities to make sure loaded costs (direct plus marginal indirect costs) are fully recovered.

E. Community and Industry Engagement

13. Identify and prioritize such organizations based on mission match and potential for value creating relationships. Identify organizations that fund solicited and unsolicited grants.
14. Explore the possibility of establishing broad-based synergistic linkages between LUMCON and BTNEP, as constrained by their missions, funding, and governing bodies. Develop a plan that defines the collaboration, clarifying roles and expectations.
15. Even if broad-based links can't be established, implement the current BTEF Agreement to charge a staff member with Outreach /Community Engagement jointly on behalf of LUMCON & BTNEP.
16. LUMCON doesn't have to do it all by itself. Develop a "Citizen Science" Plan to engage enthusiasts & volunteers in initiatives. (e.g., America's WETLAND Conservation Corps).

F. Organizational Structure

17. Leveraging members of the Business Plan Task Force, develop a Business Advisory Council (BAC) to provide oversight, assist in annual performance evaluation of Executive Director, and on-going evolution of the Business Plan.
18. Develop a charter for SEAC and a Handbook for SEAC members on promoting the consortium and assets of the Marine Center on their campuses for instruction and research. Host meetings of SEAC at the Center twice a year.
19. Develop “*Consortium Member Participation Policy*” to encourage active participation by members in research and educational activities using the Marine Center. Revise the Bylaws of LUMCON, if needed, to adopt the Policy.

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

The Business Plan discusses the executive leadership needed for LUMCON to succeed as a consortium and to meet its mission of excellence in research and education in marine sciences. In considering the recommendations of the Business Plan, the Executive Board expressed sincere and unanimous appreciation for the extraordinary achievements of Dr. Nancy Rabalais, a research scholar of international eminence, LUMCON’s current Executive Director and the 2012 recipient of the MacArthur ‘Genius Grant.’ The Executive Board unanimously felt that the role and responsibilities of the Executive Director are significantly different from the current arrangement, starting with the job description, allocation of time, priorities and skill sets needed to take on the initiatives outlined in the Business Plan. The consensus of the Executive Board was that someone with significant research commitments cannot invest the time and effort necessary to also undertake the initiatives expected of the chief executive of LUMCON. The Executive Board voted to authorize a search for a new Executive Director for LUMCON. Dr. Rabalais is expected to continue to be an integral part of LUMCON as a researcher, but will not continue in her current capacity after June 30, 2016. Dr. Rabalais is expected to be affiliated with one of the member institutions as an endowed chair, and the process required for such appointment is currently ongoing.

A job announcement has been placed in leading Higher Education journals and some venues specific to Marine Sciences. A search group led by Dr. Neal Weaver of Nicholls University will review the letters of interest received in response to the announcement.