



Summary Analysis

CHANCELLOR-PROVOST COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE FEASIBILITY FOR A RUTGERS SCHOOL FOR NONTRADITIONAL LEARNERS

“With shifting demographics and evolving student needs, higher education is at a crossroads. Institutions like Rutgers–New Brunswick can’t just be braced for change, they must create it in order to thrive in the 21st century.” – Chancellor-Provost Francine Conway

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I. COMMITTEE CHARGE

Demographic forces in the US will change the higher education landscape. High school graduation classes will decline steadily as the downward slope of the Baby Boom echo moves through its college years. Indeed, national enrollment statistics reveal that the age composition has skewed older such that the nontraditional adult student has become the majority population in higher education. As the age of careers lengthens (Wall Street Journal – [“Here Comes the 60-Year Career”](#), Feb 12, 2023) even the highest value “traditional” degrees – from engineering to marketing to medicine – can become outdated before the “traditional” graduate turns 35, and second and even third career options become available and even necessary. Most importantly, the number of “nontraditional” learners is growing ([“The Number of US Adults with Some College with No Degree Keeps Growing”](#), Chronicle of Higher Education, April 25, 2023). Combined, these trends dictate that the declining pool of “traditional” students will be gradually displaced by the lifelong learning demands of “nontraditional” or “post-traditional” students seeking affordable pathways to degree completion, competency-based learning, flexible learning schedules, and rapid retooling of skills. [How is Rutgers addressing these trends?](#)

Committee Charge: The committee’s charge is to investigate the feasibility, need, and scope for a new Rutgers–New Brunswick school for nontraditional learners —a group that may include veterans, working students, part-time students, returning students who seek to change majors/careers, students who took time off to work or volunteer, professionals, and/or others. Currently, it may be difficult for such students to attend, follow, and/or complete the traditional undergraduate or graduate curricula, which may be largely geared toward the in-person traditional undergraduate experience. Nontraditional students may encounter obstacles related to the availability of evening/online classes, the academic and career advising structure, and/or current extracurricular offerings.

Committee Deliverables: The committee met 4 times during Spring 2023 to review all previous research and previous reports that are relevant to the charge. Documents were collected in a box account that is linked below. Some especially relevant documents include: the RU-NB 2018 Report on Nontraditional learners (which does discuss particular recommendations on how a school should be set up), a full comparison of other universities’ online and nontraditional (NT) bachelor’s and master’s programs, and several reports on degree completion. The committee produced a SWOT analysis looking at the positives and negatives of setting up a new academic unit at Rutgers. The summary of our discussion and the analysis is presented in this document (it is not a formal report, but a summary analysis). The committee did not make any decisions regarding the particulars of a new school (faculty type, size, majors, etc.) although many of these issues were discussed in our meetings and are described in previous task force reports. We are including some recommendations in this document. [While the details are important, we felt it should be left to the administration and faculty of the new school \(if approved\) to determine the exact particulars.](#)

Committee Conclusion: We feel that Rutgers New Brunswick should pursue a new academic unit (*new-school*) based on innovation and adaptability and targeted towards nontraditional learners (bachelors, masters, etc.) and for the emerging needs of lifelong learners. It should provide support for our rapidly changing student body, especially nontraditional students seeking to complete a degree or enhance their professional standing. It should be a disruptive force within the institution, but one that we expect to bring needed change and cooperation within and across Rutgers. It should foster and incubate new ideas for academic innovation. We leave most of the details and particulars of the structure and formation of the *new-school* to its administration and faculty. Some high-level issues that will have to be addressed include faculty governance, online learning at Rutgers and especially at Rutgers NB, and collaboration with other units. The goal of the *new-school* should be *educational innovation* and the development of academic programs that are not currently offered at Rutgers to support the needs of lifelong learners across New Jersey.

II. RATIONALE FOR A NEW SCHOOL @ RUTGERS

- *Serving nontraditional learners:* Rutgers is currently not serving nontraditional learners effectively. There have been numerous committees over many years investigating this issue, and they have recommended starting a new-school to focus on the NT learner similar to our peers.
- *Land Grant:* Rutgers' mission as a land grant institution and as the state university is to focus on the local workforce needs of NJ, this includes creating degrees that respond to workforce and future workforce demands.
- *Pathway Completion:* While Rutgers has scattered resources for nontraditional students (offices & centers), there is no mechanism to address any systemic pathway problems (students can't graduate, no online courses, majors are not targeting nontraditional learner demands, etc.).
- *Research & Marketing Unit:* When developing a nontraditional major/degree/graduate degree there are many steps including conducting market research to understand labor trends, reaching out to industry, creating degree pathways, creating high-level online courses to compete in today's competitive marketplace, and most expensive, marketing and advertising. No unit on campus can help existing schools and departments do this work; there are no units that can help seed-fund this effort; and there are no units that can even provide the basic research necessary for these efforts. A *new-school* could fill in this gap with a fair financial incentive.
- *New Students:* The *new-school* could attract students that are currently not at Rutgers (and out of state). Recent articles attest to the growing NT population (Chronicle, 3/25/23) and the benefits of completing a bachelor's degree ("*Pursuing a bachelor's degree made more of a difference than any other decision that researchers analyzed.*" -WSJ 5/2/23: "[For a Good Job by 30, Do This in Your 20s](#)") There are many students who started Rutgers NB and never finished that could be recruited initially.
- *Peer Institutions:* Many of our peer institutions are way ahead of Rutgers in degree completion, online bachelor's and master's degrees, and certification options.
- *NB Academic Plan: Pillar III (Student Success) and Pillar IV (Community Engagement):* Create a welcoming, equitable, and supportive learning environment for all students; Expand high-impact learning opportunities to best prepare students for future success;

II. RATIONALE FOR STATUS QUO

- *Expense:* Starting a new school is expensive and time-consuming. Perhaps resources would be better put to use to expand current support in the existing schools for nontraditional students.
- *Existing Programs:* The new-school may compete with existing departments and existing units that offer bachelor's and master's degrees at NB and within Rutgers. Some of the professional schools already have degree completion programs (like HRM), and there are other online BS/BA degrees at Rutgers (for example, there is the online BBA from Rutgers Camden).
- **Complexity:** Rutgers is big and complex. Getting things started and completed here is overly complicated, putting together faculty committees and getting consensus is hard, and modifying and updating any administrative system is painstakingly slow. It could take a very long time to start a new-school and the process will be bumpy.
- *Internal Competition:* Other units may see this new unit as competition for students, and new programs.
- *Risk:* A new-school is a big and public venture. Is there tolerance at Rutgers for the risk involved in starting a venture of this size?
- *Prestige:* Will the new-school add to Rutgers' prestige or be viewed negatively?

III. IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE FORMATION OF A NEW SCHOOL:

- **Faculty:** What will be the faculty governance structure? To ensure smooth integration within the existing Rutgers infrastructure, the new-school should try to include faculty from existing departments at Rutgers supplemented with some of its own faculty (NTTs? Some TT?) – similar to graduate programs with graduate faculties and outside advisors. The focus of the school will be teaching and advising. The issue of how this new faculty will be integrated within the bargaining unit also needs to be addressed.
- **The incentive to work with existing units:** The goal is to expand Rutgers’ offerings without creating a competitive landscape, and to enable all units at Rutgers to share in the new-school’s growth. This is key to ensuring the success of the new-school and some sort of operating procedures/financial incentives will need to be established. This could include financial arrangements brokered between the new-school and existing schools and departments, faculty joint appointments (with salary), sharing “student ownership”, and investments to help departments start new programs through the new-school without detracting from existing programs. Many other universities have a model where costs and profits are shared.
- **Online Degrees:** Currently, Rutgers does not have any unit in NB that has faculty oversight of online programs (undergrad/grad). This new-school could provide this with its faculty. The new-school could also set up a foundation to support further development of online and other technologies/platforms for nontraditional learner degrees and work with existing units as part of its mission (see above point). Because online learning transcends boundaries, the new-school will have to work closely with Rutgers Newark and Camden to come up with policies and procedures so that Rutgers can move forward and succeed as a whole.
- **Innovation:** The new-school should focus on innovative and out-of-the-box pathways for degrees, courses, semesters, etc. With the correct infrastructure setup, it could be an engine of innovation for the rest of the university. The goal would be for the new-school to innovate and eventually help inform how we serve traditional learners as well as NT learners. *“Unique to Rutgers - Unique at Rutgers”*

NT DEGREES & PATHWAY FEATURES:

- **Focus on nontraditional majors and degrees** - (undergraduate and graduate) that may not necessarily be offered at Rutgers currently. This includes *“Workforce-based and Competency-based education and curriculum.”* In serving nontraditional students, the new-school should offer degrees that provide high-demand skills for NJ employment. The degrees/majors/minors need to be streamlined and processes will be needed for adding and revising degrees and courses to flexibly respond to the changing needs of the market that recognize the existing knowledge among nontraditional students.
- **High-demand pathways** - should be readily accessible to students. The students need to be aware of these pathways, with courses offered for timely completion. A full survey of the current NT population at Rutgers could help inform some of these choices.
- **Availability to traditional students** – The line between traditional and nontraditional students is blurring. Many traditional students may also need more flexibility. It is important to handle this in a way that encourages collaboration and not competition.
- **Flexible, accelerated and intensive scheduling** – For many adult learners, time may be the most daunting challenge preventing their pursuit of higher education. A new-school should strive to include a flexible class schedule that recognizes that time, even more than money, may be the scarcest commodity in the lives of many students seeking to add college course loads to the demands of full-

time jobs and family obligations. Examples may include: weekend intensive classes, shorter year-round terms (7 or 8 weeks long), online courses, hybrid courses, weekend courses, etc.

- **Online & hybrid course delivery** – Online, hybrid and asynchronous distance learning technologies are key to nontraditional learning.
- **Experiential Learning pathways – Internships**, coops, externships, etc. can all be used to provide valuable hands-on experience to students and motivate completion.
- **Tight integration with local industry** - and employment opportunities. This can also provide an incentive to work with funding agencies (for example the new NSF Chips initiative).

IV. UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ISSUES THAT A NEW-SCHOOL @ RUTGERS MAY WANT TO CONSIDER:

- **Portfolio assessment.** Nontraditional students build knowledge, skills, and aptitudes through a wide variety of formal non-credit classes, independent study and research, on-the-job training, military services and countless other avenues. A student portfolio is a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects. The collection should include evidence of student reflection and self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, and criteria for judging the quality of the work. Process and product portfolios represent the two major types of portfolios. A process portfolio documents the stages of learning and provides a progressive record of student growth. A product portfolio demonstrates mastery of a learning task or a set of learning objectives and contains only the best work. Several major online platforms exist to facilitate the creation, storage, and dissemination of portfolios.
- **Prior Learning Assessment.** Through the New Jersey Prior Learning Assessment Network (NJ PLAN), a consortium of New Jersey colleges and universities partner to provide the opportunity for their students to earn credit toward their degrees through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). (This is also known as credit for prior learning - CPL). Prior Learning Assessment is the process by which students can earn college credit for the college-level knowledge they have acquired outside the classroom and without the need to take a course to acquire competencies they have already mastered. This process allows qualified students to shorten the time it takes to earn a degree while lowering costs and increasing access and retention. Recent studies conducted by the [Council for Adult and Experiential Learning](#) indicate that students who earned credit through PLA had higher and faster graduation rates and persistence than students who did not earn credit through prior learning assessments. *If pursued, this needs to be investigated carefully so it is not utilized as a shortcut to a Rutgers degree.*
- **eBooks & nontraditional learning tools.** For adult nontraditional students, content must be – and should be – portable to accommodate anytime, anywhere learning. Open Educational Resources (OER) would also be promoted as a way to lower costs for learners with free open resources through the OER Commons.
- **Affordability Pathways.** The new-school will need to reduce the total cost of earning degrees and certificates. Tuition reduction methodologies will need to be investigated. Other methods through which this could be accomplished include (1) using Prior Learning Assessments, and (2) eliminating the time and expense of travel to class through online and hybrid delivery.
- **Convenient entry points and application process.** Many adult and nontraditional learners follow non-linear educational paths and the new-school will need to provide easy “on-ramps” for students to begin, or renew, their educational journey. These entry points include expanding the number of credit course options available for non-matriculated students, “rapid response” review of transcripts and applications for an instant decision, and late deadlines that enable last-minute, just-in-time

application, admission, and enrollment. The best practice model would also include “credit aggregation” that will honor credits that adult students have accumulated from multiple institutions and will create a pathway to completion and graduation that incorporates competency testing and a capstone experience.

- **Expanded and targeted student support.** Recognizing that nontraditional students confront a wide range of financial, academic and emotional challenges that differ widely from the proto-typical undergraduate student, the new-school will need to provide student support targeting the “whole student” (holistic advising) with career, family and financial responsibilities. Faculty/TA support after-hours will also be important. (Some of this exists in the Office of Transfer and Nontraditional Students.)
- **Expanded and targeted career service and job placement.** As a group, nontraditional students bring an infinitely wide variety of prior experience, accomplishments and expertise that present both a challenge and opportunity for career advisors: mid-career professionals, adults re-entering the job market, displaced workers and career changers.
- **Strong student support for returning students.** Recent research has reported that students who re-enroll in college after spending at least one year away complete their degree only 33.7% of the time, compared to 54.1% for first-time students. Coaching and retention advisors should be used to help students stay with their studies.
- **Pre-start acclimation.** Most universities have a program to help nontraditional students acclimate back to college (Columbia U has a very good program).
- **Flexible GPA and entrance exams.** Alternative admission criteria and selection methods are successfully used by many other institutions across the country. Creating better assessments to see what courses the students may need and what they can skip would help with completion.
- **Pathways between non-credit CE and credit-bearing programs.** There are many more opportunities to blur the boundaries between high-quality, intensive continuing education programs and degree programs (one Rutgers example: Mini-MBA and the MBA and MBS). Creating stackable credentials to degrees could make degree attainment manageable and within reach.

V. GRADUATE ACADEMIC ISSUES THAT A NEW-SCHOOL @ RUTGERS MAY WANT TO CONSIDER:

- **Workforce research** (for both undergraduate and graduate degrees): Currently, no unit at Rutgers handles general actionable labor trends and workforce research *relating to* academic degree offerings at Rutgers. Applied degrees, both undergraduate and graduate, need rapid creation and continuous updating. Data on relevant skills are also required to be competitive. A general research unit is needed and could be hosted by this new-school (e.g., using current commercial tools like [Lightcast.io](#), and incorporating Rutgers workforce research [see here](#)).
- **Collaboration:** The new-school will need to work with existing units to rapidly develop competitive professional programs for part-time students.
- **Marketing:** Graduate degrees (and undergraduate degrees) are expensive to market as there are quite a few competitors (and in some fields, it is a winner-take-all market). A flexible marketing unit needs to be created to handle the marketing and this would encourage other units to work collaboratively.
- **Online:** Professional graduate degrees are increasingly online to attract students outside the commuting radius.

VI. POTENTIAL NAMES

The committee felt that the name of the new-school should signify its commitment to innovation and change. Here are some that were discussed -

- School of Professional Education/Studies
- School of Applied and Professional Education/Studies
- School of Professional Studies and Online Education
- School of General and Professional Studies
- New School of Professional Education/Applied Learning/Professional Advancement
- Rutgers New School of.....
- School of Professional Advancement
- Rutgers School of Interdisciplinary and Professional Studies
- Continuum College
- Hub College, University College, Capstone College, Lifelong College...

VII. SOME EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AT RUTGERS

Will the new-school develop all of its own infrastructure or will units/degrees that already exist be moved over? These determinations are left to be decided if/when a new school is formed. Below, we list some of the divisions/entities that are related to a new-school effort.

- Rutgers Statewide: Structured partnerships with New Jersey's community colleges – Recruiting and serving nontraditional students will require active, productive working relationships with community colleges. The Division of Continuing Studies (DoCS) has developed the structure, and symbiotic agreements with five community colleges around New Jersey, and has the capacity, experience and expertise to expand those relationships to all 19 community colleges in the state. <https://statewide.rutgers.edu/>
- Bunting Program <https://swc.rutgers.edu/resources/bunting-program>
- Office of nontraditional students: <https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/advising/current-students/nontraditional-students>
[https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/images/Nontraditional/Resources for Nontraditional Students.pdf](https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/images/Nontraditional/Resources%20for%20Nontraditional%20Students.pdf)
- Office of transfer and nontraditional students (former UC) <https://transfer.rutgers.edu/staff-0>
- Division of Continuing Studies (DoCS): DoCS has a lot of infrastructure that can serve a school for nontraditional students including marketing, coding, and many non-degree certifications.
- Office of Veterans and Military <https://veterans.rutgers.edu/>
- Bloustein <https://bloustein.rutgers.edu/undergraduate/nts/>
- Education and Employment Research Center <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/faculty-research-engagement/education-employment-research-center-eerc>
- Rutgers Online – Rutgers Online currently is the formerly Pearson Managed programs. DOCS manages the marketing for these programs. <https://lifelonglearning.rutgers.edu/online>
- SMLR online bachelors <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/academic-programs/undergraduate-programs/online-bs-labor-and-employment-relations>
- Rutgers Camden online BBA <https://business.camden.rutgers.edu/undergraduate/online-bba/>
- Health: School of Health Professions: <https://shp.rutgers.edu/online-programs/> . Online RN to BS in Nursing: <https://nursing.camden.rutgers.edu/RN-to-BSN>
- Online master's programs: LSER, HRM, RBS, SCI, PSM

VIII. APPENDIX: DOCUMENTS COLLECTED AND AVAILABLE IN THE BOX ACCOUNT

The box account is [available here](#). Documents include:

- **RU-NB Final Task Force on NTS Report** – Task Force report from 2018 on Nontraditional Students. This is a complete analysis and the report explains in detail many of the suggestions mentioned in this document.
- **ComparisonProfSchool.pdf** - A comparison spreadsheet of different university professional schools, the mission, degrees offered, number of students, etc. across the country (committee research)
- **DistanceLearning Completions** - A comparison of majors for distance learning vs in person for 2021 (committee research)
- **EABReport-Adult-Degree-Completion** - Report from the Educational Advisory Board
- **GreenEconomyRoadmap** - Employment and education for the green economy
- **LuminaFoundation** - Report on college attainment in NJ
- **Newark Educational Partnership Impact** - Report was done by Rutgers Newark
- **NTS-ENrollment** - A set of questions from enrollment management for the committee to consider
- **RU-NB Student-Parents Working Group Report** - Report on Student-Parents
- **SCND_Report** - Report from Bloustein (M. Van Noy) on nontraditional students
- **SWOT-Analysis** - Link to a Google doc for committee SWOT analysis (committee research)
- **TechEmploymentNYNJ.pdf** - Report on Tech employment in NY/NJ done for Rutgers Newark