

CASE STUDY

No Precedent, No Playbook: How Two Directors Built a Reorganization Framework From Scratch at Georgia State University

Institution:	Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions, Georgia State University
Engagement Period:	2010–2012
Role:	Director, Office of Academic Assistance
Services Demonstrated:	Organizational Change Management, Project Planning, Cross-Institutional Coordination, Policy and Process Redesign

9 monthsPlanning &
execution timeline**21**Campus offices
coordinated across**Thousands**Student, faculty &
applicant records updated**2x**Framework adopted for
future GSU reorganizations

THE SITUATION

In fall 2010, Georgia State University announced a major reorganization affecting the College of Health and Human Sciences — one driven directly by the university's 2011–2021 strategic plan, which prioritized strengthening health and medical research and expanding graduate and professional programs.

Three programs left the college entirely:

- Public Health moved to become a standalone School of Public Health, enabling accreditation, a broader range of degree programs, and access to dedicated federal research grants.
- Criminal Justice and Social Work moved to the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, where their policy-focused curricula were considered a stronger programmatic fit.

Four programs remained, forming the foundation of the newly structured college: Nursing, Respiratory Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Nutrition. What emerged became the Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions — a college with a sharper identity but a significantly restructured portfolio, and a community of faculty, staff, and students who had just received news that would change their professional lives.

The announcement came with a nine-month runway before the effective date of July 1, 2011. Nine months was the window. For two directors still managing their full day-to-day responsibilities, every one of those months counted.

THE APPROACH

What made this reorganization particularly challenging was the absence of a formal implementation structure. There was no dedicated committee, no centrally assigned project manager, and no existing institutional playbook for a change of this scale. The work fell to two people who built the plan from scratch while continuing to manage their full responsibilities.

Felisha Norrington, Director of Academic Assistance at the college, and the Director of Academic Assistance at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies — the college receiving two of the departing programs — became the architects of the entire transition.

Building the Framework

Felisha and her counterpart built two separate but coordinated project plans: one for the Nursing and Health Professions programs and the transition of Public Health, and one for Criminal Justice and Social Work moving to the Andrew Young School. Each plan tracked every action item, the responsible contact at each campus office, required dates, completion dates, and running notes.

The categories alone tell the story of the scope: college codes, program codes, course prefixes, CIP codes, CAPP curriculum programs, course scheduling updates, catalog revisions, Crystal and data warehouse reports, CRM and admissions application updates, graduate admissions supplemental forms, tuition waivers, GRA and GTA assignments, scholarship and award transfers, website and academic guide updates, and student and faculty notification.

The first combined version of the plan was 18 pages long. Over nine months, it was streamlined to two pages. The amount of work did not change.

Every category had downstream complexity. Updating a college code, for example, had to cascade through Banner, CollegeNet, Hobsons, GA411, TouchNet, and other systems — and had to be tested and verified before the summer census date. IS&T alone logged more than 80 hours of work across multiple staff members just to support the college code creation — a single line item in a plan that had dozens.

Decisions that seem simple required deliberate choices with real downstream consequences. Even something like 'how far back do we update student records?' required careful thinking across current students, newly admitted students, summer graduates, inactive students, and denied applicants. Every decision had to be right before fall semester began.

Coordinating Across 21 Offices

Executing both plans required coordination across virtually every functional area of the university. Over nine months, Felisha and her counterpart engaged 21 campus offices — including Undergraduate Admissions, Financial Aid, the Registrar, Institutional Research, Information Systems & Technology, Student Accounts, the Graduation Office, Career Services, Study Abroad, International Scholar and Student Services, Athletics, Honors, New Student Programs, and the university's Marketing and Communications office — ensuring each understood what was changing, what they needed to do, and when.

A complicating factor running throughout: faculty college codes could not be updated until July 1 under HR policy — meaning course scheduling and faculty record updates had to be carefully sequenced around that constraint,

even as the rest of the plan moved forward.

Every one of those offices showed up. Their responsiveness and professionalism reflected the culture that made working at Georgia State meaningful.

MANAGING THE HUMAN SIDE

Behind every row on that spreadsheet was a person.

The announcement landed differently for different people. Some were energized by the possibilities ahead. Others faced real uncertainty about what the changes meant for their roles, their relationships, and their sense of belonging within the institution.

Felisha and her counterpart understood from the beginning that managing the logistics and managing the people were not two separate workstreams — they were one. Both had to happen simultaneously, and letting either slip would undermine the other.

What Managing the Human Side Actually Looked Like

- Sharing useful information consistently throughout the process, even when the full picture wasn't yet clear — because silence creates more anxiety than uncertainty does
- Acknowledging that people would be worried about their jobs, their workflows, and whether things would ever feel normal again — and treating those concerns as legitimate rather than obstacles to manage
- Engaging senior administrators alongside front-line staff, because the people closest to the daily work consistently identified implementation details that leadership would have missed
- Addressing resistance with grace and urgency — being patient with people navigating change while ensuring that resistance didn't slow progress for everyone else
- Pointing out wins along the way, because a nine-month reorganization is a marathon, and teams need evidence that the work is moving forward

Organizational change in higher education affects culture and people's lives, not just reporting structures and systems. Institutions that treat the human component as secondary to the operational component — or skip it entirely — often find themselves managing the consequences long after the effective date has passed.

THE RESULTS

- When fall semester 2011 began, students were in their classes and were not negatively impacted by the reorganization — the clearest measure of success for any student-facing institutional change
- Thousands of student, faculty, and applicant records were successfully updated across university systems, with only minor glitches resolved quickly with the help of campus partners
- 21 campus offices were successfully coordinated across a nine-month timeline with no major breakdowns in communication or execution

- The project plan framework was later adopted as a model when similar academic offices were established in two new colleges at Georgia State — evidence that what they built was not just functional, but replicable
- The reorganization experience directly informed Felisha's approach to the inevitable operational and human capital challenges of the subsequent Georgia State–Perimeter College consolidation — one of the largest institutional mergers in Georgia public higher education history — providing a tested framework for managing both the systems and the people through large-scale institutional change

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR INSTITUTION

Organizational change in higher education is no longer the exception. Mergers, reorganizations, program eliminations, and organizational restructuring are happening at institutions across the country — often with tight timelines, limited dedicated resources, and significant human stakes.

What this case study illustrates is that the difference between a reorganization that works and one that leaves lasting damage often comes down to two things: a rigorous operational plan and a genuine commitment to managing the human side with the same discipline.

Resilience + Hope Consulting brings both. Not just the spreadsheet — but the understanding that behind every row is a person who needs to know what's happening, why it's happening, and that someone is paying attention to more than just the systems.

“Change management isn't just about getting the logistics right. It's about helping people navigate uncertainty while the work is still being done. Both things have to happen simultaneously.”

— Felisha Norrington, LMSW | Founder, Resilience + Hope Consulting

Is your institution navigating a reorganization or structural change?

Let's talk about what thoughtful planning and change management could look like for your institution.

Schedule a complimentary discovery call at resiliencehopeconsulting.com