

# Two Scenarios for the University of Arizona in 2025

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## Introduction

The University of Arizona is facing major choices because of the deteriorating external financial conditions. Once the financial crisis is over (assumed to be several years) there still remains the need to make choices about how a university should function in a changing world. Addressing these choices is not a simple task. While there is a great deal of information available, and it should be consulted, there are also many uncertainties.

Scenarios are “stories” about the future and are useful in dealing with these types of uncertainties. The value of scenarios is to identify new perspectives and to stimulate new thinking. This paper includes two scenarios, both of them representing extreme cases rather than predictions of the future. Additional related information is available on the web:

- Selected Futures Studies: Case Histories and Scenarios (international, national, and Arizona), January 2009. 19 pages.  
<http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/selected-futures-studies.pdf>
- Higher Education Futures: Learning from Others (views of university presidents and formal higher education studies), January 2005, 15 pages.  
<http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/learning-from-others.pdf>
- A New Framework for Anticipating the Future (driving forces of change, new era), 1/25/09, 3 pages.  
<http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/decision-framework-1-25-09.pdf>
- A Suggested Enhanced of the University of Arizona Transformation process, 11/12/08, 2 pages.  
<http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/transformation-enhancement.pdf>

The two scenarios below were developed by reviewing the above references, reviewing the vision statements of the ABOR and three universities, and reviewing past University of Arizona approaches to planning.

## Preamble to the Two Scenarios

As impacts of the economic recession that began in 2007 took hold in FY 2008-9, the primary initial response by the UA was transformation effort. Once the legislative reductions were made for the remainder of FY 09 and the budget for FY 2009-2010 was relatively clear, actions had to be taken on an emergency basis and on a scale never seen before. Prior to the emergency actions, the UA goal was to be in the top 10 public U.S. universities and to do this by continuing past policies – hire the best faculty, increase research funding, and celebrate the gains made by individual departments.

These two scenarios were written prior to the final 2009 legislative actions for FY 09 and FY 10 and were designed to stimulate discussion. What is done under emergency conditions or under planned conditions in the next year or two will impact the UA for years to come. This is the time to think in new ways and these scenarios are one method to stimulate new discussions.

The scenarios are not predictions and are written from the perspective of 2025 (16 years). One scenario focuses on maintaining traditions and using traditional approaches to budget changes; the other assumes the changes in the university are so great that it resembles a metamorphosis process – the university of the future does not look much like the university of today.

## **Vision Statements of the Three Arizona Universities**

Vision statements are more than an entry in a report; *they reflect the future of the institution as seen by senior leaders and transmit this view to others in a formal way.* The vision statements of the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) and the three universities are listed below as background to reading the UA scenarios.

### ***The ABOR current (2020) Vision is:***

“A top-performing state university system, nationally recognized for excellence in academic and research pursuits that support and stimulate a growing vibrant economy and a high quality of life for Arizonans.”

### ***The current UA vision is:***

The UA does not have a current vision statement. This is the vision from the previous strategic plan:

“As a premier land-grant university, The University of Arizona plays a vital role in building a thriving state. The University offers the highest quality education, excels in creating new knowledge that has worldwide impact, and provides leadership and collaboration to address the challenging issues facing Arizona, the nation and the world.”

The current strategic plan includes this additional guidance:

“Our strategic planning is guided by a commitment to a tradition of Shared Governance. That tradition is founded on the assumption that faculty participation and consultation are essential to

- maintaining an outstanding University with sound academic programs,
- promoting research that significantly advances the mission of the University,
- recruiting and retaining a distinguished faculty,
- cultivating institutional diversity, and
- preserving academic freedom.”

“Our strategic planning is rooted in the traditions of Arizona’s land-grant university and guided by the expansive vision of the researchers, scholars, and artists whose preeminence has made The University of Arizona one of the top public universities in America.”

### ***The current ASU vision is:***

“To establish ASU as the model for a New American University, measured not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include; pursuing research and discovery that benefits the public good; assuming major responsibility for the economic, social, and cultural vitality and health and well-being of the community.”

### ***The current NAU vision is:***

“Fast-forward to 2020: Student population at the Flagstaff campus is 20,000, with another 15,000 at statewide sites—35,000 total. Charged with distinct missions, the campuses in Phoenix, Yuma, Prescott, and Tucson exercise significant curriculum autonomy and benefit from separate faculty governance, making them well equipped to meet the needs of the diverse populations they serve. Our environmental and organizational sustainability practices are a model for universities nationwide. Curricula across all campuses are issue-focused and synchronized with the regional needs, allowing the university to grow master’s and doctoral programs, increase research activities, and partner with agencies. Our community engagement is a boon to the economy. We are advancing technological solutions for clean energy and producing a new generation of accomplished educators, scientists, and health care professionals. The academic calendar of 2007 is now obsolete, and classroom design and technology affect learning more than ever before.”

### **UA Scenario 1 – Celebrating Tradition (prepared January 28, 2009)**

*This approach is basically one of maintaining traditional values and approaches while doing what is necessary to survive the present; the future is assumed to be a series of relatively consistent incremental changes and a continuation of the current vision.*

The scale of the 2009 budget reductions by the legislature could not be met by normal means, as these means had largely been maxed-out through previous budget reductions. The primary sense of urgency on campus came from the publicity surrounding the Transformation Plan that sought advice from the campus as a whole, and news reports about potential legislative action. But the transformation plan exacerbated the financial problem by delaying more serious discussions and providing too little near- and long-term budget savings, although the changes in the general education requirements were productive in the long run. The strategic plan continued to go through its annual revision process (including updating data and changing goals) although it did define 9 areas for future emphasis.

In early 2009 a blue ribbon committee was established to determine a new approach for dealing with longer term changes in the university. But by then it was too late for easy solutions and major budget cuts were taking their toll on UA programs. In an extraordinary effort, the Committee reported in just 3 months; the report included a summary of what had happened (cause and effect of the budget reductions) and what options should be considered for the future. Their report read eerily similar to the story of the big three US auto manufacturers and the suggested corrective mechanisms were just as similar – modify what we are doing but no fundamental changes. The Committee recommended the UA continue its long traditions and projected its desires for preeminence, assuming this approach would be best in the long run even at a time when the world had changed. The Committee emphasized the university should maintain its historic approach to teaching (minimizing hybrid courses) and the role of faculty in governance of the university, in the way the UA does its faculty-based strategic planning, and in the way it works with ABOR. But, the Committee also found there had been warning signals from within the university and from other higher education studies, but those too had been ignored in the race to become a top 10 public research university. The Committee solutions were the equivalent to an industrial bankruptcy – declare an emergency and begin a forced and rapid restructuring. Steps included additional personnel layoffs (including faculty, a step avoided by most other universities), elimination of certain departments, increasing out of state undergraduate enrollment, and increasing the instructional workload of faculty. The UA was also made subject to oversight by ABOR during the “bankruptcy” recovery period.

Within five years, the UA was a smaller institution in faculty and about the same number in students, teaching was done much differently (more personalized, more varied, and fewer lecture format classes), and the UA was well on its way to paying off its debt. The UA was still in the top 25 public research institutions and was still defining its new niche. This resulted in a not-so-gradual loss of the top faculty and some resulting redirection on focus and vision. At about this same time, the UA was participating in the ABOR plan to reorganize the three state universities into the Arizona University System. Unfortunately, the UA was in a weak negotiating position and did not come out well in the reorganization.

By 2025, the UA was transformed and functioning well, but was unrecognizable when compared to the old 2009 version of UA. It has lost part of its land grant status (the ABOR also designated ASU to have land grant status in 2015), lost its medical school to the new Arizona Health Sciences University, lost its branch campuses, and had been forced to become more cooperative with the other universities in addressing state problems. But the university had gained in efficiencies with the ABOR restructuring to a system format in 2015, where policies were carried out by a Chancellor, with presidents of the 5 universities (AHSU, NAU, ASU Tempe, ASU Glendale, UA). Concurrent with the change in the Arizona University System, the new Arizona Comprehensive Plan for Higher Education of 2015, where the community colleges, the universities, and the new category of state colleges was approved. Initially it was managed by ABOR and would have additional governance models as it matured.

Looking back from 2025, it must have been difficult for the UA to acknowledge it needed to make major changes and to have an external group guide those changes. However, it was a classic case of not watching the environment and how that environment was changing. In the long run everything worked out but the UA was a very different institution. That is not to say it was better or worse – it was just different.

### **UA Scenario 2. Organizational Metamorphosis (Prepared January 28, 2009)**

*The path taken in this scenario recognizes the world has changed and the university needs to make major changes in both the short-term (driven by financial constraints) and the long-term (guided by strategic choices).*

The budget reductions of FY 09 and those anticipated for FY 10 were sufficient to shock the university administration and many faculty and staff that the UA needed to make permanent changes as well as handle the immediate financial problem. The new guideline was to be *flexible, agile, innovative and responsive* to the signals of change. By 2025 this resulted in a university that was substantially changed from its historic format both in structure and activities.

The immediate changes in 2009 were very significant and resulted in fewer faculty, staff, programs, and administrative units. The most significant change, however, was a change of mindset. Two important choices were made: 1) a strategic plan was written for actual use by the university (rather than as a requirement by ABOR and the State of Arizona), and 2) after an analysis of appropriate future-oriented university structures was done, the UA swallowed its pride and adopted the basic structure of the ASU “New American University” (with minor modifications). The methods for planning and assessment were moved to an administrative unit that used faculty and staff for advice but was operated by experienced professionals. This allowed a realistic “blueprint” to be established to reposition the university.

A “guidance council” was established to oversee the change process, which ended up taking 5 years. The first year focused on damage control from the economic realities and reviewing the literature of higher education futures-oriented studies in the U.S. and other countries, with a focus on evaluating what other innovative institutions had done. The second year marked the first time that ABOR no longer allowed the three universities to pretty much operate as they wanted (which was based on the Changing Directions Policy of 2002). It was also the beginning of discussions to structure all Arizona universities into a single system (e.g., the California model). This single system model was in sync with the results of the special commission organized by the Governor’s preK-20 Council. That council recommended a way for educational coordination in Arizona to include public K-12, community colleges, and universities. The study allowed for the universities to establish a new type of “state college” on the campuses of the community colleges, similar to the original NAU 2+2 program. The guidance council that gave direction and oversight to the UA changes, fortunately, was well structured, efficient, and effective.

The change process also made use of information technology in a way similar to what President Barack Obama had done in his 2008 presidential campaign – everyone that wanted to be involved was involved; this two-way communication avoided the vested interest influence of most change projects and allowed the process to be completed very rapidly. After just five years the results were evident and measurable, many people had been involved, a great deal of data were analyzed, and important choices were made. It turned out to be a great learning experience (both as an understanding of what universities do and as a technique for doing other studies) for faculty and students as well as business leaders and legislators. It could not have been done without the impetus of the economic crisis, the availability of communications technologies, the leadership of the president, and the willingness of faculty, staff, administrators, and citizens to work together in a very short time frame.

The overall restructuring of the system enabled the important things that universities do to still be done. The UA is still a land grant university but so is ASU. The UA still has a medical school, but so does ASU (the former Phoenix Biomedical Campus). Universities still have learning, discovery, and engagement as

their basic functions, but the way each of these is now implemented has changed drastically. The most significant change related to the way information technology was used to communicate with all parties – citizens, students, alumni, and others. Because of the Arizona University System structure, students could take classes from other Arizona institutions, allowing specialization by each campus.

Many of the digital natives (students raised in a digital world so that world seems normal to them - those born after about 1980) learn differently than historic students. They study alone or as a group, in café settings or in their dorms or other places in town, on-line with people in any country – they don't need a classroom to learn. This resulted in some physical changes - the library physical collection was reduced by half to add more space for group meetings and studying, there were café's established in many parts of the campus and surrounding the campus, the classrooms made vacant were used for increased enrollment, and all this was done with minimal capital investment (and those investments were focused on more student unions or cafes and group meeting places). Of course, all this totally restructures the curriculum and how learning is measured and how the university is administratively organized

The interesting thing about the way the university functions in 2025 is that many of the “new and innovative” ways of 2010 are now common place but even “newer” ways are emerging. The old ways of lecturing 3 times a week to a passive audience are long gone and the interaction with other students around the world is common place. Research has continued its two major approaches – working individually and in large and small groups – the basic research continues but in new ways and the public problem-solving research has surpassed the effort in basic research. Public problem solving got a big boost when the federal government allocated substantial sums in 2011 to a revived 1970s NSF program – Research Applied to National Needs. This of course was related to the need for addressing the economic issues as well as many other issues relating to demographic change and aging, health and social security, global climate change and resource limits, and the need to improve globalization and security on a world-wide basis. There was a similar funding program from the state, where studies on state problems were worked on by the universities.

Interestingly, the Arizona Legislature responded positively to the UA changes (after the state was back on a good financial footing). They were impressed with the moves for efficiency and effectiveness, the ability of the universities to handle more students, and the role played by the universities in addressing state-related problems. This appreciation was expressed in increased university budgets.

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