

**Department of Economics
Dissenting Opinion on Campus Reorganization**

to be included in the

Program Change Plan

Under the reorganization plan, the Department of Economics will merge with the Department of Finance and Information Systems Technologies (IST) to form the School of Analytics, Finance, and Economics in the College of Business.

The faculty in the Department of Economics respectfully oppose from this planned merger. Our specific concerns fall into three general categories:

- Opposition to merging with IST
- Opposition to moving from the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) to the College of Business (COB)
- The presence of an alternative restructuring that would do more to promote the mission of our department as well as that of the university.

We discuss each of these broad concerns in greater detail below.

Opposition to Merging with IST

Our unanimous opposition to a merger with IST stems from two factors:

- A) An overestimation by the administration as to IST's capability in providing a rigorous Data Analytics program
- B) The Goals, Content, and Mission of our department greatly differs from that of IST.

Specifics for each are as follows:

- A) Deficiencies as to the type of Data Analytics Program IST could provide

The nascent field of "Data Analytics" is no doubt a growing. The term "Big Data" is prevalent. Businesses increasingly want to hire graduates with such skills. Offering a Data Analytics program within COBA appears straightforward as does wanting to merge Analytics with two other highly quantitative and mathematically based fields such as Economics and Finance. However, after studying the details of this case we lack any confidence that such a merger will work in allowing for the types of Data Analytics programs found elsewhere.

Data Analytics programs at other institutions focus on advanced statistical and computer programming skills. Ohio State University (OSU) and the College of Charleston (CoC) both offer Data Analytics Programs. Both require calculus and linear algebra courses as either prerequisites for the program or as requirements once one enters the program. OSU requires six courses in statistics including one – just to provide an example – in “Bayesian Analysis and Statistical Decision Making”. CoC requires four, including a “Statistical Methods II” course that examines nonparametric statistics. These topics go far beyond what any introductory statistics course covers. Both programs require computer programming courses that cover numerical algorithms that solve sophisticated optimization problems.

Conversely, the current IST Analytics program at SIU takes a different route in that it does not require the same level of statistical and programming knowledge. The mathematical content and requirements are far less stringent. We do not argue that IST’s analytics program does not benefit a certain set of students. However, it is not a program that will provide the highly technical skills that employers will obtain when hiring graduates from other programs. It is not a program that has the resources to compete with intensive Data Analytics programs elsewhere.

The College of Charleston Program:

http://catalog.cofc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=7&pooid=1465&returnto=299

The Ohio State Program: <https://data-analytics.osu.edu/major/core-curriculum>

B) Differing Content and Missions

- 1) We strongly emphasize our graduate program, both the master’s and doctoral levels. IST does not have a graduate program but entirely serves undergraduates.
- 2) We have nine faculty members (including the chair), all with Ph.Ds. Although we have used NTT’s in the past, they have comprised a small share of our faculty. Conversely, IST has 18 lecturers and 7 associate or full professors. However, three of these seven faculty members designated as “associate professors” or “full professors” do not have a Ph.D. Such differing compositions will limit benefits from merging:
 - a) Having few Ph.D’s limits opportunities for IST faculty to help serve on our students’ dissertation committees and help guide doctoral research.
 - b) Under a combined structure, faculty without Ph.D.’s (to a large extent) and with little (or no) experience operating a doctoral program will help direct the economics doctoral program.
- 3) In meetings with Drs. Chevalier and DiLalla, we were informed that part of IST will

likely go to Computer Science. We were also told that at least two of those with PhDs: Drs. Chung and Wang will likely head to computer science thereby leaving an even larger percentage of lecturers to remain in our school.

- 4) None of our current faculty conducts research relating to topics of the internet, cybersecurity, computer networks, etc. Therefore, we do not see any natural research synergies with IST. Without economists working in such areas, we believe that attracting economists who do work in these areas would prove difficult.
- 5) Currently, no economics students are required to take IST courses nor are they generally advised to do so. We understand that no IST student is required to take our courses. We infer from this lack of requirements across programs a lack of synergy between us and IST.

We stress that the two general objections to merging with IST are not unrelated. Faculty specializing in sophisticated statistical and programming techniques could greatly complement research in economics, including in advising graduate students. Such faculty could also be useful in attracting scholars to SIU. Like the chancellor, we want a strong economics program at SIU. Unfortunately, the merger with IST will prove detrimental to this mission given the large number of lecturers, the absence of a graduate program in IST, and the lack of overlapping research interests with current economics faculty. **Simply put: this merger will not enhance the reputation for our economics programs nor will it attract high quality faculty.**

One counterargument that we have heard is that programs can still be kept separate much like how departments are currently viewed as distinct units within a college. In this sense, Economics could still run its programs with little input from IST and vice versa. However, we believe that one cannot keep the two separate. Decisions on resource allocation or where to create new hires directly impacting one unit would also directly impact the other. We see programs in a school as more tied together than are departments in a college, especially considering that the proposed name of the school specifically lists its individual units. More importantly, operating the two programs separately with little interaction undercuts potentials for synergies.

Opposition to Moving to the Business School

- 1) As stated above, a current strength and priority of our mission is our doctoral program. Although at one time the College of Business had strong doctoral programs, a loss of faculty has necessitated that their doctoral programs be suspended or greatly scaled back. In fact, the College of Business website stated (on 2/15/18) that the college was NOT taking applications for the Accounting, Finance, or Marketing Ph.D. programs. We fear a similar occurrence should we move there.

Namely, resources over time will be directed towards programs the College more greatly prioritizes and the Department of Economics will at some point no longer be able to support a doctoral program. Note: we do NOT suggest that such a redirection of resources arises from any conscious desire by anyone in the College of Business to terminate our Ph.D. program, merely that a discordance in priorities will likely lead to this result.

- 2) For example, the Department of Finance and the Department of Accountancy must retain a certain number of faculty to remain accredited. Such priorities could very well cause faculty lines in economics to diminish in order for the College of Business to re-allocate resources to accredited programs.
- 3) The Department of Economics was once housed in the College of Business but moved to COLA in the 1960's in order to protect its Ph.D. program. This is not an isolated occurrence as other economics programs in the U.S. have left Business Schools due to concerns regarding future support for doctoral programs.

Because of these concerns the faculty in a straw poll voted 6-2 against moving to the College of Business and merging with the Department of Finance. (A unanimous vote against moving to the College of Business would have arisen if the proposal had also included moving to the College of Business AND merging with IST).

We want to stress that our doctoral program is a strength for the university. According to the 2011 report of the external reviewers of our department:

“The Department of Economics at Southern Illinois University provides the state of Illinois excellent value for the resources used. The department is very small (and barely large enough to support its Ph.D. program) yet produces on average 6 Ph.D. graduates each year. This is a rate of production that would normally be supported by a department twice this size. In addition, the Ph.D. graduates are apparently well-trained in light of a high rate of publications in refereed journals subsequent to their graduation.”

Please also note that the preservation of the doctoral program is crucial for other aspects as well. The Department of Economics has the only fully endowed chair on campus, the Vandever Chair (with a \$4.6 million endowment) currently held by Sajal Lahiri. The purpose of this chair is to promote the research and graduate mission of the Economics Department. Attracting an eminent scholar when a vacancy arises becomes crucial for the success of our department. Unfortunately, weakening the graduate program or eliminating it will make it extremely difficult to attract world renowned scholars to come to SIU.

Alternative

Our dissent from the current plan does not imply that we support the status quo. Faculty from various programs in the Social Science and Humanities have proposed forming its own school. We see this alternative as offering greater benefits for our department as well as for the university. Consider:

- i) Economics is universally recognized as a social science
- ii) Recent papers from economics faculty examine issues overlapping with political science, sociology and criminology. Research synergies are readily available
- iii) Likewise, graduate students write dissertations whose subjects overlap with those from other social sciences and so would benefit from greater collaboration with social scientists outside of economics. Similarly, graduate students in other programs writing theses and topics in areas related to economics could benefit from our insights
- iv) Such potential for collaboration could also help attract faculty who work in overlapping fields
- v) Many social science programs such as Anthropology, , Political Science, and Sociology also have Ph.D. programs providing for a common mission in terms of the types of programs we provide

Concurring with this dissent are all faculty members in the Department of Economics

Professor Sajal Lahiri
Professor Kevin Sylwester
Professor Alison Watts

Dated: May 4, 2018