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Faculty Association Review: School of Earth Systems and Sustainability

The program change plan under consideration would create a School of Earth Systems and Sustainability (ESS) by merging the Departments of Geology and Geography.

The FA has long made it clear that we support program and unit changes that are supported by Faculty,¹ so long as those changes follow the contract. The most relevant Faculty for program changes are of course Faculty directly affected by the proposed schools—Faculty in units which would end up, in whole or in part, in the new school. Faculty in Geology and Geography have voted in support of this plan, and this is a powerful argument in favor of this plan.

However, faculty on the Faculty Senate and Graduate Council are also tasked with reviewing program and unit changes, even when those changes have been approved by Faculty in a given area, to judge whether the changes are in the best interest of the university as a whole. Our report is intended to help faculty on the FS and GC conduct their independent review of Article 9 proposals.

Some of the discussion below will point out contractual problems with this plan. We have filed grievances that identify prior contractual violations committed by the administration as it pushed its reorganization proposals through the Article 9 process. This is not the place to rehearse those grievances, which are now on their way to an arbitrator. Instead we emphasize problems that will arise in the future if this plan is approved in its present form.

In section I, we lay out some general problems with this plan. In section II, we evaluate the extent to which this plan satisfactorily addresses the seven contractual components of a “Program Change Plan” as they are laid out in Article 9 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Faculty on the Faculty Senate and Grad Council will find themselves reviewing many documents as part of this process. Each of our reviews will be self-contained, and will therefore contain considerable material shared with other reports. To assist readers in identifying sections that are specific to individual program plans, we will mark sections of school reviews that are particularly relevant to the specific school in question with a marginal line, as is done with this paragraph.

¹ In this document we use the convention by which capital-F “Faculty” are members of the bargaining unit, while the term “faculty” include faculty outside the bargaining unit (including NTT faculty).

The FA would be happy to send a representative to meet with members of the Faculty Senate or Graduate Council to answer questions that may arise about this review.

SECTION I

1. Central features of the plan would violate university policies and the current CBA

The procedures and processes for tenure and promotion that would govern the new school when it is placed under the administrative control of the provost would violate Article 13 of the CBA and university policies for the evaluation of tenure and promotion cases.

The plan calls for Faculty from the former Departments of Geography and Geology to be the only ones to review Faculty formerly in their respective departments for tenure and promotion. Other Faculty in the proposed school would not be involved in reviewing such tenure and promotion dossiers. This procedure would violate the CBA (including Article 13.05a), and it would also violate SIUC policy on tenure. Here is the most relevant language on tenure in university policy:

Basic Academic Unit: In conducting reviews at the basic academic unit level², all tenured faculty shall have an opportunity to vote on a tenure decision, and only tenured faculty should vote on the decision.

The basic academic unit, if this plan is approved, would be the new school; and, if the proposed plan is implemented, all tenured Faculty in the basic academic unit would *not* be afforded the opportunity to vote on tenure decisions within what would now be their basic academic unit.³

The CBA does require that if “guidelines and procedures” for promotion and tenure are changed, Faculty can use the old procedures (13.01.b). But the CBA cannot and does not guarantee that faculty will be evaluate by the same people who were colleagues when they were hire or last promoted. Faculty are not normally evaluated for tenure and promotion by former colleagues. And current colleagues should have the right to evaluate candidates for tenure and promotion. The administration’s interpretation of the contract is presumably meant to reassure faculty by changing as little as possible about tenure and promotion. But this plan would violate the spirit as well as the letter of university policies and the current CBA with respect to tenure and promotion procedures.

²<https://policies.siu.edu/personnel-policies/chapter3/ch3-faps/tenure.php>

³ The administration states that the procedures for promotion and tenure outlined in the plan are subject to impact bargaining, because under the contract the Faculty Association has the right to bargain the impact of any program change. The Faculty Association must point out that this is incorrect in this case, because provisions on promotion and tenure in the CBA are not subject to impact bargaining: there is explicit language in the CBA on promotion and tenure, agreed to by both parties at the negotiation table, and the administration cannot change this language through a program change. Simply put, the language in the CBA on promotion and tenure is beyond the scope of impact bargaining; to change it is to violate the current contract.

2. The plan would leave faculty with little say in the selection of their director

The plan states that interim school directors will be appointed “via search waiver by the appropriate Dean, in consultation with faculty members who comprise the School, and with approval of the Provost” and that Faculty “will be afforded *a clear opportunity to express their preference* regarding possible candidates for the Interim Director Position” (emphasis added). And the plan stipulates that the permanent Director will be chosen according to the following process: “an approved position announcement will be created for the Director Position; a search committee will be approved through the Affirmative Action Office; applications will be solicited; applications will be reviewed by the search committee; approved interviews will be conducted; and, *a hiring recommendation that is informed by faculty* and search committee feedback will be made by the Dean, with final approval by Provost” (emphasis added). The FA has confirmed in communications with the administration that selection of directors for schools would not be subject to faculty vote.

Contrast the current language for the selection of the chair in the operating paper of the Department of Geology :

The Chair shall be nominated by the Faculty of the Department of Geology.

- 1) The process of selection of the department Chair will conform to established University guidelines.
- 2) The Faculty shall nominate one or more tenured Faculty members or external candidates for the office of department Chair.
- 3) *A two-thirds vote of the Faculty is required to elect the candidate to be recommended to the Dean*” (emphasis added).

This change in approach from the current method of selection of chairs in the departments to a top-down approach for selecting a director of the school would severely diminish shared governance at the level of the basic academic unit.

3. The Plan fails to address crucial issues

The plan does not say what impact, if any, the merger would have on recruitment or retention of students. Given the dire situation of our institution at this time, this is a problematic omission.

Nor does this plan nowhere discusses how the Civil Service staff who currently work in the Departments of Geology and Geography would be affected by the proposed merger.

4. Faculty have not been given adequate time to consider recent changes to the plan

The administration made significant changes to plans the plans were presented to Faculty in the respective departments. We note two such changes, in addition to the language on promotion and tenure mentioned above:

a. The original plan included the Department of Forestry, which was removed from the proposed school well after the proposal was submitted to the affected units; the ninety day clock was not restarted after this major change was made.

b. New language stating that “day-to-day management of the school will be guided by applicable provisions of the former department/school operating paper and the former college operating paper” until there is an operating paper produced for it was introduced only in the 04/04/18 version of the plan.

SECTION II

Article 9 of the CBA requires that merger proposals address seven items. In this section, we respond, to the seven sections of the plan, which follow this list of seven required items.

A. Description of the proposed change(s):

- The administrative housing of the resulting new school directly under the provost presents a series of problems. The CBA requires that the college dean participate in the process of the assignment of Faculty workload (8.01.c, which states every faculty member’s workload assignment “shall be subject to the approval of the Dean”). Yet, according to the changes outlined by the plan, the Faculty in the new school would not be part of remaining College of Science nor of the College of Liberal Arts, and would, in fact, not be part of any college, and thus serve under no dean. This issue is not addressed in the plan.
- The plan also fails to address how the absence of a relevant dean will affect annual reviews of untenured Faculty. If such reviews were done by the provost, this would create an unforeseen problem at the time a final tenure decision is to be made by the provost, because the candidate would already have received a provost-level evaluation.
- This plan, as other new school plans, describes the status of operating papers as follows:

During the period of creation of the School Operating Paper, day-to-day management of the school will be guided by applicable provisions of the former department/school operating paper and former college operating paper.

This directive ignores the fact that this new school brings together different departments that not only have different operating papers but come from different colleges with different operating papers. Use of multiple operating papers for the same unit is likely to result in inequitable conditions for Faculty will now be members of the same academic unit (including different provisions for workload assignment, committees, evaluation, etc.).

In this context it is worth pointing out that while current operating papers cannot be unilaterally changed by the administration, the formation of a school would require the drafting of new operating papers, which the administration can veto.

B. Rationale

- The rationale for this particular merger is not unique to this plan, but is instead the same as the rationale for the other merger plans that make up the current restructuring scheme. The main rationale for the merger is “to create opportunities for greater collaboration among students and faculty this plan aligns programs that relate to each other in order to foster synergy and innovation.” This language is common to the other plans for new schools.

The boilerplate language does not help us to understand why these two specific departments should merge—or why the Department of Forestry is no longer a good match for this school. It should be noted that Geography and Geology already share a doctoral program. This makes it difficult to understand how the merger will produce “greater collaboration” than that already achieved by a shared Ph.D. program.

- The plan mentions that this merger will facilitate streamlining of the curriculum. But the curriculum is dictated by the academic programs that are included in the merger, and these programs would remain intact after the merger. Given that the plan fails to mention any specific redundancies, it is difficult to see just where streamlining is possible and practicable.

C. Impact on Faculty lines and Faculty workload (including redistribution of work).

- The most serious impact on Faculty lines is likely to be the natural result of a school formed from departments of different size, and put under pressure by the chancellor to identify a single “top-ten” program. There are no provisions in the plan to guarantee the continued existence of the divisions that would form this school. It is possible that, over time, attrition in the smaller department and prioritization of the larger department (the more obvious candidate for a “top-ten program”) would be a loss of faculty lines in the smaller department. The smaller unit could soon find itself unable to sustain graduate and undergraduate programs and be relegated to a service unit with even fewer Faculty than it had before the merger.

D. Impact on students and the ability to maintain the curriculum

- As noted above, the merger may have a deleterious effect on the existence of some programs, and it may also hinder the ability of Faculty to maintain current curricula. Precisely because of concerns of this type, i.e., the potential of one department being swallowed in slow motion by a larger one in a merger, the CBA specifies that Program Change Plans should explain how Faculty would be afforded the “ability to maintain curricula, particularly in the case of mergers.” Yet, again, there is nothing in the plan on the matter of “the ability to maintain curricula.”
- According to the plan, as a result of the merger outlined by the plan “[Students] will have exposure to a wider range of faculty and will have opportunities to engage in cross disciplinary research, curriculum, and co-curricular activities.” But this statement ignores

the simple fact that combining these departments into one school does not in itself, or automatically, expose students to more Faculty.

This statement also ignores the fact that, in this case, because the departments together already offer an interdisciplinary doctoral program, students are *already* engaging in cross-disciplinary research between these departments.

E. Financial costs

- In this case, beside a school director, there will be two division coordinators and, according to the plan, “Division Coordinators may also receive summer appointments in support of the division.” Thus the savings from not paying the summer salary for the two present chairs could well be offset not only by the expenditure on the twelve month salary for the director but by possible summer salaries for the two division coordinators. Currently, neither one of the two department chairs is on a 12-month salary. It is possible that after this merger the administrative cost to operate the new school would be greater than that to run the two departments separately.

F. Comparison of similar programs at peer institutions

- The Plan states: “The ‘School Model,’ with multiple degree programs housed in the School, is already functioning effectively at SIU in the School of Allied Health, the School of Information Systems and Applied Technology, the School of Art and Design, the School of Music and the School of Architecture.” But these models are not particularly relevant to the merger proposed by this plan, as none of the programs in these schools are a good match for geology or geography.
- The choice of “peer institutions” in the plan seems arbitrary. There are eight so-called “peer” institutions listed. On one hand, there are institutions listed like Sewanee University (that has no graduate degrees in either geology or geography) and Eastern Michigan University (which only has a Master’s in Earth Science Education, not in Earth Science): these institutions have far less research activity than SIUC and, because of their lack of disciplinary graduate programs, are not peers for either Geology or Geography at SIUC. On the other hand, there are institutions listed like Arizona State University, Georgia Tech University, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and Stanford University: these are not peers of SIUC, because they are all “Research 1” institutions that have far greater research activity than SIUC. The remaining two institutions are the University of Alabama-Huntsville and George Mason University. George Mason University has a *department*—not a school—of Geography and Geo-Information Science; moreover, GMU does not offer degrees in geology at either the graduate or the undergraduate level. GMU does not offer any degrees in geography (the two geography courses are taught in the Department of Political Science). The University of Alabama-Huntsville has a *Department* of Atmospheric Sciences that administers a BS and a MS degree in Earth Systems Science, which have some overlap with degrees in Geology at SIUC.

G. Possible consequences to the University's Carnegie status

The Plan states: "The proposed change will have no direct / explicit impact on the University's Carnegie Status. However, one of the goals of the campus-wide re-organization plan (see point B) is to invigorate, enhance and expand Faculty research and creative activity by increasing synergy and collaboration. This includes the goal of expanding extramural grant / contract activity and increasing Ph.D. production. The reorganization plan will contribute to the broader institutional goal of increasing the University's Carnegie Status to R1 (Highest Research Activity)."

These goals are laudable but this section of the plan is devoid of information, evidence, or argument. It would be much closer to reality to state that at this time there is no reason to believe that this merger will have any positive impact on the University's Carnegie Status. A carefully drafted plan would have addressed the actual consequences of this merger.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that there are a number of serious problems with the plan in its present form.

- The plan would run afoul of university policies and the CBA, particularly regarding promotion and tenure;
- The plan would diminish faculty's role in shared governance at the unit level, particularly in the selection of a unit leader;
- The plan leaves many unanswered questions and fails to provide specific evidence that it will produce positive results.

Many of these problems are likely due to the haste with which the plans were developed, and the lack of faculty involvement in their drafting. The chancellor's restructuring plans employ a cookie-cutter approach in which the same plan is applied to every unit on campus, whether it fits or not. We are told little or nothing specific about potential costs, impact on recruitment or retention, or the effect of proposed plans on academic programs and their continued viability.

The plans are not so much specific proposals for actions as general templates for program mergers. They simply do not make an argument for merger of these departments in particular, as they fail to take into account the specific characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of the departments involved. Faculty who are not in the habit of supporting major initiatives without specific argument or evidence may find it hard to support such plans.