



SIUC Faculty Association

IEA – NEA

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FA Review: School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences

This Faculty-initiated¹ Program Change Plan (“the Plan”) would eliminate the Department of Mathematics and create in its place the School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences. In essence, the Plan effects a name change for the Department of Mathematics. The Plan is Faculty-initiated and stands as an alternative to the administration-initiated proposal for creating a School of Physical Sciences that would include the Department of Mathematics as one component.

The FA has long made it clear that we support program and unit changes that are supported by Faculty, 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 Mathematics have voted overwhelmingly 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.

As the originators of the Plan, Faculty within in the Department of Mathematics have been involved from the beginning and have avoided contractual grievances with respect to the Article 9 process. We focus this review on the content of the Plan itself and its consistency with contractual requirements.

In section I, we examine some general issues that have arisen in campus reorganization proposals with special attention to how these issues are handled within 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).

Our review will find no serious flaws in the Plan and, given strong Faculty support, we therefore recommend that the FS and GC vote to support it.

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

1. The Plan remains consistent with University Policy and the current CBA with regard to tenure and promotion procedures.

The Plan would preserve the current operating paper of the Department of Mathematics, with only minor changes necessary to change the name of the unit and titles of administrators. This is consistent with the FA's position that the change from the "Department of Mathematics" to the "School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences" does not fall under the requirements of Section 5.03 in the CBA, and thus does not require the drafting of a new operating paper. The current tenure and promotion guidelines and procedures will remain in effect and the tenure home of current Faculty will remain with the basic academic unit. The Faculty who vote on tenure and promotion will continue to be all tenured Faculty of appropriate rank within the School. The Plan does not include any proposal regarding the reorganization of colleges and simply retains the unit in the College of Science or places it in the appropriate successor college if college reorganization were to occur first. The Plan does not place the School under the direct administrative control of the Provost as in several administration-initiated program change proposals. In these ways, the Plan avoids the provisional procedures for tenure and promotion found in other proposals that would violate University Policies and Article 13 of the CBA.

2. The Plan retains shared governance in the selection of a school director.

The Plan would retain the department operating paper and apply the chair selection procedures therein for selecting a director. On an interim basis, the department chair who was selected by the Faculty would serve as school director until the operating paper procedures could be applied to the selection of a school director. Changes to the process for selecting a school director could be changed through the operating paper amendment process.

3. The Plan reduces avoids disruption of student programs following from the merger of several units and consolidates current Department of Mathematics programs into one organizational unit.

The Plan makes minimal changes to the operations of the unit and the unit would be able to hit the ground running if the Plan is approved. The plan documents make a case that this will serve students with continuity of current programs and improved recruitment of new students and development of programs due to the consolidation of mathematics and statistics programs in one academic unit and college. (Currently, the academic programs in the Department of Mathematics are distributed over three different colleges.) These are the strongest arguments that the improvement of recruitment and retention will result from the change from department to school.

4. With this Plan uncertainty remains concerning the transitional and permanent location of the School within the university college structure.

The Plan allows for the School's specific college home to change during reorganization of colleges within the university. The direct transfer of the unit from one college to another would provide the unit and college structure with respective director and dean as required to implement several processes within the CBA. Nevertheless, the provisional placement of the School directly under the Provost's Office is still a possible outcome of college reorganization and this could

lead to the problems in implementing existing policies and contractual requirements that the FA has pointed out in its reviews of other program change proposals.

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)

- As noted already, the Plan provides details of both the transitional and permanent changes. These are particularly simple since there is little change aside from the change from designation as a department to designation as a school. The Plan envisions all of the current programs in the Department of Mathematics to be assigned to the new unit and all to be assigned to a single college.
- The implementation of the transitional phase could be complicated if the College of Science is eliminated without the designation of a new college home for the School.

B. Rationale

- The Plan makes a reasonable argument for retaining a single unit that consolidates mathematical and statistical programs (including pure, applied, and interdisciplinary fields and mathematics education); the diversity of disciplines that interact with mathematics and statistics across a variety of potential schools in different colleges support the independence of the unit from any other single potential school.

This suggests several questions. Couldn't other disciplinary units make some or all of these claims? Why wouldn't these benefits be possible if the unit is organized as a department? Must Mathematics become a school in order for the University to invest in its programs, its faculty, etc.?

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

- The Plan would presumably have little effect on Faculty lines and workload. Consolidation of programs could produce an incentive for some Faculty to transfer to the new unit and the creation of new programs might be supported with new hires, but these are not specific proposals or requirements for the implementation of this Plan.

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

- The Plan does not directly result in the "exposure to a wider range of faculty," but an indirect increase in exposure may result from improved opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration. This holds in particular if the Plan fosters collaborations with a wider range of disciplines. Consolidation of programs within one unit and college could make it easier for students to transfer between programs and specializations within the broader category of mathematical and statistical sciences.

E. Financial costs

- It is not anticipated that the Plan itself will result in additional financial costs or savings. There is some concern that the university might spend more money on the salaries of directors as opposed to chairs.

F. Comparison of similar programs at peer institutions

- Examples are given of peer institutions that include various combinations of pure mathematics, applied mathematics, mathematics education, methodological and applied statistics, and actuarial sciences in a single unit. No examples are given of units using “School” in the name. The Plan does discuss the distinction between units that use “Mathematics” as opposed to “Mathematical Sciences” or “Mathematical and Statistical Sciences.” As noted elsewhere in the Plan, there are no examples of peer institutions with mathematics and statistics programs embedded in a School of Physical Sciences as in the competing Administration proposal.

G. Possible consequences to the University’s Carnegie status

- The Plan states that the change from Department to School is not likely to affect the University’s Carnegie status. The Plan does raise a concern that burying mathematics Faculty and programs in a School of Physical Sciences would reduce visibility and could have a negative impact on the unit’s reputation.

CONCLUSION

We have raised several questions about this plan.

- Is it necessary to change this unit from a department to a school in order to meet the objectives given in the rationale for the Plan?
- Couldn’t the argument for not merging with other units be applied more widely to every other merger proposal?
- How would the ultimate placement of the proposed school in an appropriate college be achieved and what would replace college functions during the transitional period (whether the unit reports directly to the Provost or is part of a new college without an operating paper)?

The last two questions are, however, beyond the scope of this particular Plan and its required documentation. Within the narrower scope of the proposed Plan, we find that the Plan itself is consistent with the requirements of the CBA and that implementation of the Plan as written would not introduce violations of the CBA.

Finally, we note again that Faculty in the affected unit have expressed overwhelming support for the Plan and, in the absence of serious flaws in the Plan, we believe this should be the deciding factor. We accordingly advise the GC and FS to vote to support this Faculty-initiated Plan.