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Faculty Association Review: School of Biological Sciences

Note on formatting: faculty on the Faculty Senate and Graduate 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.

The program change plan under consideration would create a School of Biological Sciences by merging the Departments of Microbiology, Plant Biology, and Zoology. According to this program change plan, the newly formed School of Biological Sciences “will be housed administratively, on a temporary basis, in the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs area.” The Faculty Association (FA) has long made it clear that we support program and unit changes that are supported by Faculty¹, so long as these changes follow the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The most relevant Faculty for a program change plan are of course the Faculty directly affected by that plan—Faculty in those units which would end up, in whole or in part, in the new school proposed by this plan.

Faculty in Zoology have voted 12-1 (with 1 abstention) against this plan. In an email to Provost DiLalla, the Chair of Zoology explains that “the Zoology faculty voted that they could not support the proposed RME until it stipulates that (1) the College of Science will continue to exist until the proposed new College is formed, and (2) the College of Science will retain its own Dean until the new College is formed.” Faculty in Microbiology and in Plant Biology have voted in favor of the plan under consideration. Crucially, though, Faculty in Microbiology and Plant Biology have also expressed reservations about the newly formed school being housed administratively in the provost’s area (and outside of the College of Science as well as outside of a not-yet-created College of Agricultural and Life Sciences). According to an email from the chair of Plant Biology to the provosts, the Faculty in Plant Biology “feel strongly that the College of Science continues to persist until the College of Science and College of Agricultural Sciences can merge simultaneously.” Likewise, in an email to Provost Chevalier, the chair of Microbiology explains that the Faculty in Microbiology “would

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).

like the School of Biological Sciences to remain in the College of Science until the college is dissolved.”

The responses of Faculty directly affected by this plan—especially the nearly unanimous vote against the plan by Faculty in Zoology—are, in our opinion, powerful arguments against the adoption of this plan as it stands.

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 required components of a “Program Change Plan” as they are laid out in Article 9 of the CBA.

And as we have indicated in other reviews, the FA would be happy to send a representative to meet with members of the FS or GC to answer questions that may arise about this review.

SECTION I: General Problems with the Plan

1. Central features of the plan, especially features pertaining to tenure and promotion, 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 as well as university policies for the evaluation of tenure and promotion cases.

The plan calls for Faculty from the former Departments of Microbiology, Plant Biology, and Zoology 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*

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

be afforded the opportunity to vote on tenure decisions within what would now be their basic academic unit.³

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

The plan states that the interim school director 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). Moreover, 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 this process with current language for the selection of the chair in the operating papers of Plant Biology, in particular with the language on Faculty voting in the selection of chair in these operating papers:

A secret, written, anonymous ballot for Chair candidate(s) will be conducted by the search committee. Voting will be restricted to the voting Faculty. If more than two candidates are interviewed, the faculty will decide how many of the candidates are acceptable; a run-off procedure will be used to reduce the final list of acceptable candidates to two individuals. *The successful candidate in the last vote must obtain a 2/3 majority.* The Department will submit to the Dean a prioritized list of the acceptable candidates for his/her selection.⁴ (emphasis added)

Contrast it, too, with current language for the selection of the chair in the operating papers of Zoology, in particular, again, with the language on Faculty voting in the selection of chair in these operating papers:

At least two-thirds of the Voting Faculty must approve a candidate [for chair] by secret ballot before the search committee recommends the candidate to the Dean.⁵ (emphasis added)

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.

⁴ http://science.siu.edu/_common/pdfs/operating_papers/plb.op.2012.pdf

⁵ http://science.siu.edu/_common/pdfs/operating_papers/zoo.op.2009.pdf

The change in approach from the current method of selecting chairs in these 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 anywhere discuss how the Civil Service staff who currently work in the Departments of Plant Biology, Microbiology, and Zoology would be affected by the proposed merger.

4. The plan fails to protect the smaller “divisions” within the new school

We revisit this issue below.

SECTION II: The Seven Contract-Required Components of a Program Change Plan

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, 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, like 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 have different operating. Use of multiple operating papers for the same unit is likely to result in inequitable conditions for Faculty who 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, operating papers that the administration can veto.

The plan states: “Each of the (former) academic units that comprise the School of Biological Sciences may have the status of a Division in the School, if desired by the faculty formerly affiliated with the degree programs/departments.” *Yet, the plan does not protect the smaller divisions within the school.* This concern was explicitly raised by Faculty in Microbiology in a Dec. 1, 2017 memo from the Faculty in Microbiology to the provosts et al., which states: “Because of our small size (five non-administrative faculty members in total), we would like to request that a weighted voting model, which gives each ‘Division’ the same number of votes, be implemented before discussions with the other affected units occur. This will be especially important during curriculum discussions and formation of a new operating paper.” Yet, the plan does not give each “division” within the school the same number of votes on matters of curricula and academic unit policies, as was requested by the Faculty in Microbiology in their memo. Nor does the plan guarantee an equitable allocation of resources, including but not limited to graduate assistantships, among the “divisions” that would constitute the new school.

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 plan suggests that a reason for this merger is to enable Faculty in the affected units to develop “future academic programs” such as “Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Bioinformatics.” We note that there already exists an interdisciplinary graduate program in Molecular Biology, Microbiology, and Biochemistry at SIUC; Faculty from the Department of Microbiology and from the School of Medicine’s (Carbondale) Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology teach in this program. We note, too, that “Bioinformatics” is listed as one of the potential areas of expansion in the School of Computing proposal now also being considered by the FS and GC. If boundaries between units restrict interdisciplinary programs, there will still be a relevant unit boundary in the way of bioinformatics.

To the extent that a key rationale for this merger is the “potential” of the merger to enable the development of new programs, the plan should specify precisely why the existing structure prohibits the development of these new programs as

well as how the proposed changes will indeed facilitate the development of these new programs. Yet, the plan fails to do so. Put differently, the plan does not adequately explain why the current structure has prohibited “collaboration and innovation in curricula, pedagogy and scholarship,” and neither does it explain how its proposed merger will “foster” this “collaboration and innovation.”

- The plan mentions that this merger will facilitate streamlining of the curriculum. Yet, 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 (or necessary).

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 sizes, 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(s) 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.
- There is also the afore discussed issues of the plan’s promotion and tenure process; see Section I.1 of this review.

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 or to cross disciplinary research, etc.

E. Financial costs

- In this case, beside a school director, there may also be division coordinators, and, as the plan states elsewhere, “Division Coordinators may also receive summer appointments in support of the division” (see Section A of the Program Change Plan). Indeed, as the plan states in this section, any administrative financial savings that result from this plan “will be balanced against the salary costs associated with appointing an A/P Director on a 12 month appointment, plus any summer salary expenditures committed for divisions coordinators.” Thus, the savings from not paying the summer salary for the three 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 multiple division coordinators.

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 Plant Biology, Microbiology, or Zoology.
- While the plan lists a number of “similarly oriented academic units (some organized as Schools (with some Schools headed by Deans), some organized as Departments)” at seven other research universities, the plan says nothing at all about why these other units stand as an argument for the proposed merger. Indeed, the plan offers no commentary on why these different units have different administrative structures or on why this list supports the creation of a school of biological sciences rather than a department of biological sciences.

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

Faculty in the units directly affected by this plan have serious reservations about a key aspect of it, and one of the units affected by this plan, the Department of Zoology (which is, we should also point out, the largest unit in terms of faculty numbers affected by this plan), has voted overwhelmingly against the adoption of this plan as it stands.

There are also 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;
- The plan fails to protect the smaller "division" and its curricula.

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.