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Faculty Association Review: School of Computing

This program change plan would formally eliminate the Department of Computer Science and create a School of Computing in its place. In essence, this program change plan effects a name change for the Department of Computer Science. This proposal is unique in only affecting the Faculty in a single current department, and thus “elevating” a single department to the status of a school. It thus avoids certain questions while raising others.

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 Computer Science have voted unanimously 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 these plans. 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 are in violation of University Policy and the current CBA.

Given that the School of Computing would be made up only of current faculty in the Department of Computer Science, the transition from the current promotion and tenure system to the system under a school should be less complex than that in other units. (See our other reports for the complications in those cases.) There is still, however, a problem that while university policy and the CBA guarantee all tenured faculty in a basic academic unit the right to vote on tenure decisions (and all full professors the right to vote on promotional decisions) only current tenured/full professor faculty would have that right under the proposed plan.

2. The Plan reduces shared governance at the unit level.

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.

By contrast, the current language for the selection of the Chair in the Department of Computer Science Operating Paper includes the following provisions:

- 1) The election of a search committee consisting of Voting Faculty members.
- 2) The approval of the position announcement by Voting Faculty.
- 3) The selection of a single finalist by majority vote (internal candidate) or two-thirds vote (external candidate) of the Voting Faculty.

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.

It is the FA’s position that “elevating” the Department of Computer Science to the School of Computing 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. Thus the current operating paper of the Department

of Computing ought to remain intact. Despite the provisions stated in the administration's plan, the CBA would therefore require that changes to the selection of the administrator of the newly designated academic unit be subject to the amendment process in the Operating Paper of the Department of Computer Science and Sections 5.04-5 in the CBA. The same would be true for any other changes to the departmental operating paper.

3. The Plan fails to address crucial issues.

The plan does not say what impact, if any, the change would have on recruitment or retention of students. It also makes no claim to produce savings. Given the dire situation of our institution at this time, these are problematic omissions.

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

Significant provisions were added to the plan after the Faculty discussion process was completed. These include the placement of the school under the provost's office instead of within a college and the role of members of the former College of Science in promotion and tenure decisions.

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 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 are 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.

B. Rationale

- Despite the fact that this plan is unique in applying to a single academic department, there is no explanation of how elevation to the status of an academic school "positions the School for assertive and innovative growth of academic programming and scholarly research in the broad and diverse area of computing" or why we are to "anticipate that the

School of Computing will be a focus for innovative multi-disciplinary program development and research that will foster affiliative engagement with faculty from across the campus.” Why would this not be possible if Computer Science remained a department? The Plan goes on to list areas for possible new programs, but also acknowledges that no new programs are included as part of this plan. Must Computer Science become a school in order for the university to invest in its programs and its faculty?

- The plan also fails to address the issue of why Computer Science, alone of all 42 departments on campus, should be “elevated” to the status of a school, where other departments are expected to merge to produce synergy and collaboration.

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

The proposal would presumably have little to no impact on Faculty workload, given that Computing would remain an autonomous unit.

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

According to the plan, as a result of the change from department to school “[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.” Yet, this statement ignores the simple fact that including the very same Faculty in a school instead of a department will not expose students to more Faculty.

E. Financial costs

The current plan would not produce any savings. Indeed, given that the unit would be led by a director whose position in the administrative hierarchy would be comparable to leaders of larger, merged units, the director of the School of Computing might well be paid more than the current chair, costing more money.

F. Comparison of similar programs at peer institutions

Programs at other institutions are listed with few details besides the use of “School” in the name. There is no attempt to distinguish these from programs where the unit is called a department.

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 plan will have any positive impact on the University’s Carnegie Status. A carefully drafted plan would have addressed the actual consequences of this plan.

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.

In the case of the School of Computing, the cookie-cutter approach raises particular problems, as the arguments for synergy and collaboration made for other schools do not apply here. Indeed, one could suggest that the greatest advantage to be had from this particular plan is the fact that computer science students and faculty would not be forced to merge into a school with other units that have little interest in computer science programs. This argument for the School of Computing is of course an argument against every other proposed school.