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Comments in response to “Report of the Letters & Science Workgroup on Possible Changes in the Administrative Organization of the College of Letters and Science”, Final Draft dated 13 May 2015

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As an outsider to the UC Davis campus, it is not my place to endorse or dispute the Workgroup’s analysis of the shortcomings of the current Letters and Science (CLS) organizational structure. That analysis is for the faculty of CLS to judge. If the Workgroup’s analysis is correct, however, and for the purposes of this commentary I presume that it is, then it does seem to me that the new structure the Workgroup proposes will allow CLS to address more effectively than at present a set of challenges that undermine both teaching and research within all three divisions of the College.

The report’s central contention I find persuasive: that while current problems with respect to budgets, admissions, the delivery of advising and other student services, course and curriculum development, infrastructure, fundraising, and communications are not specifically caused by the current “headless” divisional structure, that structure does make solving these problems much more difficult, and perhaps even impossible. If, then, the status quo is unacceptable, as the Workgroup believes that it is, then there are really only three alternatives: a structure that devolves power even further by dissolving CLS altogether; a highly centralized model in which a single College Dean assumes responsibility for the entirety of CLS, assisted by a group of associate deans defined by function (personnel, finance, development, etc.); or else a structure in which a single College Dean assumes responsibility for issues pertaining to the workings of the College as a whole, while Divisional Deans continue to administer the workings of their respective divisions. Correctly, I believe, the Workgroup opts for the “hybrid” model as the best of these options.

I should note here that the terminology of Associate Dean or Divisional Dean seems to me less important than the clarity of their responsibilities. The important point is that there would be a Divisional/Associate Deans for each of the three existing divisions of the current CLS; that these individuals would have an overall vision and understanding of the needs of their division as well as of the College as a whole; and that they be prepared to work together with the College Dean for the good of the entire College of Letters and Science.

This Workgroup model, of College Dean with Divisional Deans, is how the University of Washington College of Arts and Sciences is organized, and I believe that this organizational structure has worked well for us. I can see no reason it would not work well at UC Davis also. At UW, however, this model has been in place for quite a long time; as a result, the division of authority between the College Dean and the Divisional Deans work is clearly understood and causes no difficulties. Davis, however, would be instituting such a model for the first time, after a lengthy period during which Divisional Deans have administered their divisions as effectively autonomous entities. At Davis, therefore, careful thought will need to be given to this transition and particularly to defining to the division of authority between the

proposed College Dean and the Divisional Deans at a “nuts and bolts” level, so as to ensure that misunderstandings and potential rivalries do not undermine the new system in its initial years. How budgets will be handled, and who will have final authority to authorize faculty searches and allocate them to departments and/or divisions, will be especially important issues to determine in advance of implementing this new system.

That said, however, the reasons for implementing this new system offered by the Workgroup seem to me persuasive. The issues that remain to be decided have to do with the actual implementation of the new system. None of these are complicated, and I see no reason why making them should delay the transition to the new organization for CLS proposed by the Faculty Workgroup.

I hope these comments will be helpful. I was much impressed by the thoughtfulness and hard work of the Workgroup, and look forward to learning the final outcome of these important discussions.

Sincerely,

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