

REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC STRUCTURE COMMITTEE

A. Procedure

Shortly after the beginning of the Fall Term 2003, Provost Barrett invited the Faculty Councils of the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Science to elect faculty and academic staff representatives to serve as an ad hoc advisory committee on the possible merger of the two colleges. The resulting Academic Structure Committee met with Provost Barrett on September 24, 2003, at which time she gave her charge to the Committee to study the issues involved. She explained to the Committee that she favored such a merger because it would unite the fundamental disciplines that form the core of the University and create a powerful spokesperson for the core educational mission of the University in the person of the dean of the combined college. She indicated that the opportunity to consider the matter had arisen at this time as a consequence of the resignation of Lawrence Scaff as Dean of Liberal Arts and the willingness of Dean Robert Thomas of the College of Science to take on the additional responsibilities as Interim Dean of Liberal Arts and his availability to serve as the initial dean of the combined college were the two colleges to be merged. The Provost asked the Committee to invite input from the University community, conduct hearings, and explore all issues that might be involved with such a merger.

Following the initial meeting, the Committee Chair, Paula Wood, Dean of the College of Education, issued a notice to all faculty and staff within the University soliciting their input relative to the merger issue by encouraging them to either send e-mail messages to the Committee (or its individual members) or to attend one of two open hearings scheduled for Tuesday, October 7, 2003, and Monday, October 13, 2003. Several e-mail messages were received by various members of the Committee. Only a few individuals attended each of the open hearings, and even fewer offered comments. The turnout suggests considerable indifference on the part of most individuals concerned.

Several current or former University administrators appeared before the entire Committee. These individuals were selected because they had either been in the Dean's Office or been departmental chairs prior to or during the division of the original College of Liberal Arts. The following were interviewed:

Richard L. Lintvedt, former Chair of the Department of Chemistry (subsequently the Associate Vice-President for Research)

Claude L. Shochet, former Associate Dean of the combined College of Liberal Arts

Robert L. Thomas, current Dean of the College of Science and current Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts

John P. Oliver, former Associate Dean and then Acting Dean of the College of Liberal Arts during the division process (subsequently Associate Provost and Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs; and currently Vice-President for Research)

Arthur Marotti, another former Associate Dean of the original comprehensive College of Liberal Arts spoke at one of the open hearings, and five of the members of the ad hoc Committee itself (three from Liberal Arts and two from Science)) were former chairs or associate deans with experiences under the different college organizational formats. Committee Chair Wood also conducted a personal interview with Alice M. Young, current Associate Dean of the College of Science in charge of research programs. This latter interview was aimed particularly at gaining information as to how research grant applications and grant administration are currently handled within the College of Science.

In addition to the input obtained from the foregoing procedures, the Committee gathered historical information related to the original proposal for splitting the original comprehensive College of Liberal Arts and the actual division that took place in 1993. Information was also gathered on the current composition of both the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Science in terms of numbers of students enrolled, degrees granted, number of credit hours, number of faculty, and general fund contributions and expenditures. In addition, the Committee obtained data on the administrative structure of comparable universities in the Big Ten and in the

Urban 13. Summaries of this information are appended to this report. The Committee decided that it was neither necessary nor appropriate to conduct a plebiscite on the matter.

B. General Considerations and Concerns

Both Wayne State's historical experience and experiences at universities elsewhere suggest that both unified and divided college structures have worked in an effective and responsive way. The survey conducted for the Committee of the Big Ten (+1) and comparable urban universities (as represented by the Urban 13 (+ 8)) found that 13 have separate science colleges and 19 have unified colleges. This diversity, as well as the experiences under both types of structure of persons at Wayne State, suggests that there is nothing inherent in one structure or the other that makes one more or less manageable. Nor do there appear to be substantial economies to be realized through one as opposed to the other. What seems to matter most, regardless of structure, is the quality of the leadership in the Dean's Office and the presence of able and ample support staff.

Based on the input it has received and the impressions of its members, the Committee's assessment of sentiment among faculty and staff regarding the possible merger is that there is some strong support but also some wariness with respect to the possible change in both Colleges, more so among the Dean's staff in the College of Liberal Arts and especially so among the faculty in the College of Science. The concerns of staff seem to revolve around possible dislocations, the modifications that would have to be made in administrative systems, and possible job losses. These are legitimate concerns, and there can be little doubt that there would be some short-term dislocations occasioned by a merger of the two Colleges. With respect to staffing, there might be some **efficiencies gained** through the redeployment of staff in a merged college, but current staffing in both Colleges has been depleted and stretched to the point that it is difficult to imagine that the staffing needs of a combined college would be significantly less than the combined staffs of the two current Colleges.

Among the faculty in both Colleges, but especially in the College of Science, there is some concern that a merger might result in an administrative structure less appreciative of the distinctive characteristics of their disciplines and less sensitive to their needs. Evaluative processes (e.g., promotion and tenure and selective salary adjustments) are a particular source of concern to some, although such evaluative processes were not regarded as problematic in the original comprehensive College of Liberal Arts before it was dismantled and do not seem to be problematic in more comprehensive colleges elsewhere.

In general, the attitude of the faculty of the current College of Liberal Arts seems to range from indifference to strong support of a merged college. There is some support for a merger among the Science faculty, but the general sentiment seems to range from indifference to strong opposition. Among College of Science administrators who were consulted by the Committee, the concept of a merged college was received more favorably than by the Science faculty at large. Support for the merger is predicated on both practical and philosophical grounds. Practical matters like facilitating the operations of the honors program and the development of international programs are important to some, but for many the most compelling reasons for reuniting the Colleges is philosophical; viz., to unite the fundamental disciplines that represent alternative ways of knowing and [comprehending](#) the world and to foster greater mutual appreciation and support.

Opposing views in the Sciences tend to be more concrete and narrowly focused. The major reasons cited by various Science faculty for opposing a merger tend to relate to their perception that there are special needs in the science disciplines that have been addressed reasonably well within the current College of Science. They fear that some areas of special need will be less well served in a unified college in which the Dean's attention may be diverted by the special needs of disciplines outside of the sciences. Thus, the refrain that echoes in the background of many of the opposing arguments is "If it isn't broken, why fix it?"

In sum, it is the Committee's assessment that among the faculty of the two Colleges, there is some strong support, some strong opposition, considerable ambivalence, and substantial

indifference. Those who are most skeptical about a possible merger have raised legitimate concerns. Accordingly, we will attempt to catalogue those concerns as well as the potential benefits that might result from combining the Colleges.

C. Major Issues

The major issues that were expressed by members of the Committee and from outside sources relative to the merits and disadvantages of merging the two colleges are summarized below.

1. Benefits That Might Result from the Creation of a Unified College

- a) The dean of a combined college would have more administrative clout within the University. The combined college would have a general fund budget comparable to the School of Medicine. It would be a net contributor to the general fund and generate a large portion of the University's tuition revenue.
- b) Having responsibility for most of the departments in which students take General Education courses and which generate most of the University's undergraduate credits, the dean would be in position to be a powerful spokesperson for undergraduate education.
- c) Having responsibility for departments with a large and varied array of graduate programs, the dean of a combined college would be a powerful voice with respect to graduate education.
- d) The creation of a single enlarged budget would afford the dean's office greater flexibility in responding to budgetary contingencies.
- e) The scope and diversity of responsibility and attendant power of the position might attract stronger candidates for the deanship.

- f) A unified college could facilitate the development and maintenance of a more sustained focus on undergraduate education and curriculum development. The University is in the process of revisiting its General Education requirements and needs to do so more regularly. A college housing the core departments of the University would or should be centrally involved in this process. A unified college could also facilitate a more regular review of the curriculum requirements over and above the University General Education requirements that the separate Colleges have shared since they were split but have not revisited since.
- g) A unified college could facilitate the improvement of various aspects of the University's undergraduate education program including: (i) General Education requirements, (ii) the Honors program, (iii) undergraduate academic advising, (iv) interdisciplinary programs, and (v) international programs. Strengthening and enhancing undergraduate education could contribute to the University's efforts to increase undergraduate enrollments and retention and to recruit more full-time undergraduate students. Success in these endeavors is important both in terms of the University's reputation as an educational institution and in terms of the financial health of the University in an era of diminished state support and growing demand for tuition restraint.
- h) A unified college might facilitate interdisciplinary communication, teaching, and perhaps research by reducing the isolation and insularity fostered by separate college structures. It could help to foster greater mutual appreciation of different disciplinary cultures among the faculty and facilitate the development of such an appreciation among undergraduates. A merger could foster additional interdisciplinary research, especially among the social and behavioral sciences, within the combined college.
- i) A unified college could provide greater encouragement for beginning students to explore domains of knowledge and ways of knowing to which they have previously had little or no exposure before deciding on a major or type of major.

- j) Faculty in non-science and non-laboratory science departments could have access to better resources in connection with applying for and administering external grants. As a result of this and the example set by the laboratory sciences, faculty in these departments might take an enhanced interest in seeking external grant funding. The current College of Liberal Arts provides no support and little encouragement for grant seeking. This is a concern especially with respect to the social sciences and needs to be addressed even if the Colleges are not merged.

2. Concerns About and Disadvantages That Might Result from the Creation of a Unified College

- (a) It may be difficult to identify and hire a dean who has sufficient understanding of all of the individual disciplines incorporated into a unified college. The science departments, in particular, have special needs in terms of laboratories for both teaching and research, shop facilities, funding of graduate students, set-up funds for new faculty, etc. It would be imperative that the dean of a unified college understand these needs and be attentive to them to preserve the health of these disciplines.
- (b) The dean of a combined college might be less accessible to department chairs and individual faculty due to the essential doubling of faculty and departments under his/her jurisdiction. This is of special concern to the Science departments because timely access to the dean can be important to meeting their special needs.
- (c) Research grant applications are now handled efficiently in the College of Science. There is concern that this might suffer in a unified college if current capabilities are attenuated to serve more departments.
- (d) Unlike Liberal Arts, grant overhead funds that are returned to the College of Science are substantial. They are used primarily for set-up funds for new faculty, and they are vital to the operations of the College. There is concern that these funds might be siphoned away by the needs of non-science departments to the detriment of the Science departments in a combined college.

- (e) There exists a real cultural difference between the sciences and the non-sciences, and there is little reason to believe that the interests of either would necessarily be better served by a combined college administration. The laboratory sciences share a common culture different from the non-sciences and non-laboratory sciences. In this sense, the faculty of the Science departments have more in common and are more likely to engage in interdisciplinary research with faculty from the College of Engineering and the School of Medicine than from the College of Liberal Arts
- (f) Alumni may identify more closely with a more specialized college than with a broader, less homogenous college. A combined college may then be an impediment to alumni development.
- (g) The Dean of the College of Science has recently established a Board of Visitors to help guide program development within the sciences. Such a specialized Board might not fit well into a unified college structure.
- (h) The dean of a combined college might have less time to devote to development. This could undermine the prospects of maintaining, let alone improving, developmental success. Were the Colleges to be combined, additional development personnel might be needed to offset any diminished attention the Dean could devote to such things.

D. Discussion

Based on the Committee's evaluation of the arguments that have been put forth both in favor of and in opposition to the creation of a unified college, there would appear to be no clear consensus for either choice. Arguments can be and have been made on both sides of this issue. The major concerns that have been expressed for maintaining a separate College of Science in terms of addressing the special needs of the laboratory sciences could be addressed within a unified college and, in fact, were so addressed when the colleges were combined. There is little evidence to suggest that these issues have been addressed in a more advantageous fashion within the separate College of Science during the past eleven years.

The serious concern that a dean of a unified college will be less accessible to individual department chairs appears to be counterbalanced by the cogent argument that such a dean could be more effective in pressing the needs of all departments concerned due to the considerably greater weight that s/he would wield within the University administration. Given the priority that the University attaches to attracting more full-time, beginning students and increasing undergraduate enrollment more generally, a combined college would seem to be better suited to addressing some of the major issues relating to undergraduate education at Wayne State.

When the College of Science was split off from the College of Liberal Arts in 1993, the social sciences and humanities departments that remained retained the College of Liberal Arts name. Were the colleges to be recombined, the new college would need a new name to reflect the change and acknowledge the prominent role of the laboratory sciences in the new arrangement.

E. Conclusion

The Committee concludes that the creation of a unified College, as proposed by the Provost, is a reasonable administrative structure that could serve the University well.

Appendices:

1. College Structures in the Big Ten and Urban 13 Universities.
2. Inventory of Historical Documents Collected and Reviewed.
3. Arguments Made For and Against Academic Reorganization in 1984-85.
4. Summary of Arguments from the 1992 College Split.
5. General Fund Budget Allocations (current dollars) by college from FY88 to Present.
6. General Fund Budget Allocations (constant dollars) by college from FY88 to Present.

7. FTE Full-Time Faculty by college from FY88 to Present.
8. Headcount enrollment and credit hour enrollment Fall 92 to Fall 02.
9. Degrees awarded in 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002.
10. FY 2002 General Fund contributions and expenditures.