

January 27, 2016

To: Jose Wudka, Chair
Riverside Division

From: Richard Arnott, Chair
Committee on Research



RE: Proposed CNAS Reorganization

The Committee on Research discussed the proposal for the reorganization of CNAS at their January 15th meeting. The proposal is nicely crafted and superficially elaborates several possible advantages to the College. However, the proposal is rather one-sided because it downplays or neglects to mention at all a number of serious disadvantages. The Committee has the following major concerns with the proposal relevant to the establishment of two new departments "Molecular, Cellular and Structural Biology" (MCSB), and "Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology" (EEOB):

1. Recent campus planning documents have emphasized the importance of maintaining and/or building on current areas of strength. However, this proposal would likely do the opposite: it would moderately to potentially catastrophically decrease the strength and breadth of several nationally and internationally acclaimed departments in the cause of creating a new department, which may or may not become an "instant" center of excellence.
2. The original motivation for forming a new department by reorganization of existing departments came from a small minority of the faculty within the college, 35 of whom signed the original letter of intent to form a new department. That proposal, however, was in the context of a radically different plan calling for complete abolishment of all life sciences and replacement by four large departments, one of which would have been the proposed MCSB department. Many of the signatories to that letter are dissatisfied with the current plan, and it remains entirely unclear whether those faculty would indeed leave their current departments. Recent conversations with faculty suggest that at least some are seriously reconsidering, not least because of the catastrophic effect that the reorganization could have on current departments. Under those circumstances, the new

department would not achieve its goal of consolidating all faculty with similar research interests into one department.

3. At least some of the affected departments have made careful efforts spanning several decades to maintain a continuum from very basic science that incorporates state of the art ideas and techniques through to applied science that addresses immediate issues. These efforts have been very successful, with departments like Botany and Entomology being recognized as among the best in the world. For example, in the case of Entomology, in the most recent 5-year review of their graduate program, the review committee specifically noted that Entomology's balanced structure was a model that similar departments should follow. Removal of a few to many of the faculty with strong molecular biology and related interests from these departments would undermine these long-term efforts to maintain both breadth and strength within these departments, and would have a significant to substantial deleterious effect on the breadth and quality of the research emanating from those diminished departments.

4. Another major college goal, cited in the proposal document, is "capitalizing on synergies to propel UCR as a leader in translational agriculture". However, the proposal would seem to encourage the opposite, by separating faculty involved in basic science from those doing more translational and applied science. Thus, instead of basic and applied scientists being commingled in departments where interactions and collaborations are catalyzed, they would be segregated into groups which would be much less likely to interact.

5. The Committee considers the argument that the reorganization would encourage new collaborations to be specious, for several reasons. First, numerous faculty with similar interests already collaborate across departments and colleges, and this is further encouraged by interdepartmental programs, centers, and institutes. Second, whereas reorganization might increase interactions among the small minority of college faculty who will form the new department, it will definitely decrease interactions between those faculty and the departments from which they came. Furthermore, the interactions within the faculty in the new department would be "like talking to like", instead of the much broader cross-fertilization that occurs in current departments which commingle a full continuum of basic and applied scientists. Lastly, many researchers who do not plan to join the new MCSB department are using similar methods and exploring similar questions to those proposed for the new department, so the decentralization of research interests and techniques will persist anyway.

6. The reorganization plan does nothing to address the decades-long issue of the hard sciences being dissatisfied with the current college structure.

7. The Committee would not recommend a divisional structure within the new department because this would simply lend itself to intradepartmental competition for scarce resources. For example, historically, Entomology had a divisional structure, and abolition of the divisions in the 1980s produced a much more cohesive and collegial department, which persists to this day. In addition, it is not clear how the different proposed divisions of the new proposed MCSB department would be administered or how they would interact with other departments that lack such divisional structure, but that have ongoing research in areas that overlap with those divisions.

8. There are numerous issues, such as maintenance or reorganization of undergraduate teaching, graduate programs, and space and relocation of faculty to form a cohesive new department, which the proposal does not address.

Because of the serious concerns described above, the Committee recommends that the reorganization of CNAS does not go forward as described in the proposal.