

January 25, 2016

To: Jose Wudka, Chair
Riverside Division

From: David Lo, Chair
Graduate Council



RE: Proposal for the Reorganization of CNAS

On January 21st, the Graduate Council had a chance to discuss the CNAS reorganization proposal in some detail. I am forwarding here a summary of the main points from our discussion.

- *The overall rationale for the reorganization is neither clear nor well justified.* The long history of discussions on the reorganization of CNAS has had many different origins, directions, and intentions, many of which are absent in this latest version. This reorganization proposal is now down to what can be distilled into a simple shifting of a few of the CNAS faculty from one department into another, with an accompanying name change in two affected departments. The movement of faculty from one department to another generally would not require the wholesale disestablishment of departments and establishment of new departments, especially since a large number of faculty will remain in present associated groups of faculty in related research areas. Thus, the rationale for such significant efforts for likely minimal effect is not clear.

- *Department reorganization does not have intended benefits to new faculty recruiting.* The new names associated with the newly established departments take one step forward and another back. The new EEOB department would be home of the EEOB graduate program, currently a departmental program within Biology. However, the new MCSB department would essentially lose the department-level prominence of a major research area – Neuroscience - that is a successful graduate program (and undergraduate major). Although Neuroscience as a discipline is associated with a newly described “emphasis area” within MCSB, it is not an actual formal administrative or academic unit with a chair or assigned resources, and it can be disbanded on a simple faculty vote. The argument had been presented that the five new emphasis areas would be helpful to new faculty recruiting in each of the emphasis areas; however, the absence of any formal administrative or resource commitment to any emphasis area would in fact be as likely to be a disincentive for any prospective faculty recruit due to uncertainties in departmental commitment.

Similarly, the creation of an emphasis area in Microbiology and Immunology will suffer from the absence of senior faculty leadership to drive new faculty recruitment. Indeed, depending on the unknown numbers of microbiologists to move to this group from the existing department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology, there will be confusion over how new microbiology faculty recruiting will be balanced between these two groups. This lack of detailed information on actual faculty moves in this proposal also leaves significant confusion over the significance of the reorganization on existing faculty distributions, making it difficult to evaluate the impact and value of the proposed reorganization.

- *The reorganization of the departments has potential negative impact on the Biology undergraduate major and potentially creates similar problems in other undergraduate majors.* Over the past decade the Biology department could not hire in the areas of molecular and cellular biology. This decision, combined with retirements and administrative moves, left Biology as a defacto EEOB department. Indeed, they renamed the departmental graduate program as EEOB a decade ago. That Biology exists not as a full-spectrum department but instead as one focused in the areas of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology means that they require support from other CNAS departments to provide teaching faculty to cover the curriculum in the undergraduate Biology major -- by far the largest major in the College -- but without administrative or structural commitments from these other departments to insure adequate teaching coverage. The renaming/creation of a new EEOB department fails to address this problem, as the proposed MCSB department remains administratively separate without a way to insure adequate commitments to the undergraduate Biology curriculum. The potential redistribution of Microbiology faculty between Plant Pathology and MCSB (Microbiology and Immunology emphasis area) creates a similar problem of faculty commitment to supporting the undergraduate major. We suggest that a poll of the CNAS faculty or a clearer listing of prospective faculty moves be provided before the impacts of the proposed CNAS reorganization can be fully assessed.

- *Known issues in CNAS are not addressed by this proposal.* While it would be well beyond the scope of this note to discuss many of the concerns within CNAS that led to the original discussions on reorganization years ago, there are problems with more ongoing and significant impact that call for discussion at this time. For example, we note that in nearly every graduate program review by Graduate Council in CNAS-based programs, there have been concerns about the selection of students for Teaching Assistantships, especially regarding the need for a more equitable distribution across programs and departments in support of undergraduate teaching, as well a need for more transparency in the process of selecting students. These are not addressed by this proposal, and the redistribution of faculty among departments and remaining concerns about department coverage of undergraduate curricula has the potential to confuse the question even more. As for the graduate programs themselves, programs sponsored by CNAS departments as well as interdepartmental programs within CNAS are not likely to be dramatically affected by these changes, but some of the department-sponsored programs may be negatively affected by shifts in department faculty. Finally, graduate programs that might have benefitted from reorganization or mergers are also not likely to see any attention paid to their issues, and may also suffer from adjustments in administrative support.

- *Reference to a new Institute for Materials Science and Engineering.* Although the proposal aims to be forward-looking in research initiatives, the reference to a new Institute for Materials Science and Engineering seems particularly inappropriate in view of the existing interdisciplinary program in Material Science and Engineering in the Bourns College of Engineering. Cross-college collaborations are certainly to be encouraged and have been strongly supported by existing Institutes, such as the IIGB, but this reference seems very much out of place at the present time.

In sum, the proposal for reorganization of CNAS, while aspirational in its aims, appears to be only the residue of much larger goals. For example, it leaves all of the existing "Ag" departments as is; only grouped into a new Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The resulting proposal involves significant and disproportionate shifts in two departments, but leaving what appears to be only a minimal impact on research and educational programs. Moreover, many of the potential impacts are not in a positive direction, and they present a frustrating picture of undirected activity without addressing many known issues within CNAS.