

Chemistry Department Response to Provost Reorganization Queries

In general, the primary concerns the department identified to questions about reorganization is that of funding, which is a quantified expression of support for the department and its students, and a concern about transparency of process and soundness of decision-making. The following responses heavily feature those concerns, and so we preface our responses with a set of four questions that we would appreciate careful consideration of:

- 1. What evidence (prior studies, etc.) is being used and considered by the administration as they weigh these decisions? Can those studies and considerations be shared with the faculty and staff?**

If the answer is that there is no concrete evidence from other institutions and prior cases being considered, we note that this sets multi-million dollar, multi-year decisions to a standard well below the level of rigor that we would expect to earn a passing grade from one of our students in an undergraduate classroom.

- 2. In addition to the academic reorganization changes proposed, there is massive staff and administrative reorganization occurring, particularly in academic support services. Will faculty and staff similarly get an opportunity to weigh in on these reorganization efforts? Are these efforts guided by evidence-based methods?**

Changes in academic support, although not housed in a college, can have more dramatic impact on our programs than the collegiate structure, and we would appreciate the chance to help guide those processes.

- 3. What level of funding transparency should we expect? What are the anticipated financials (in terms of departmental and college support, overhead to administration, current vs. proposed comparisons, etc.) in these proposals?**

We note that in the absence of this data, we cannot truly make informed decisions. When faculty present proposals (such as a new major program) to the university, we are expected to provide anticipated costs, challenges, and timelines, as well as supporting evidence. We encourage the administration to hold their proposals to a similar standard of rigor, so that such proposals can be evaluated in a meaningful manner.

- 4. What efforts is the administration undertaking to build faculty and staff trust in this process? Will the impacts be clearly and fairly articulated?**

The efforts to solicit feedback are trust-building in and only in the case that faculty can have faith that the feedback will be used in a meaningful fashion. Campus climate surveys have identified long-standing trust issues between senior administration and faculty; these issues may be exacerbated during reorganization. The use of data and transparency (as discussed above) would be strong recommendations to help build this trust; in particular, we appreciate efforts to find 'the cost of education', and to decentralize budget management to the lowest level; we make our best decisions and gain trust when we are able to see evidence that the administration is making sound decisions. We note that faculty have been disappointed by lack of transparency in financial matters before, such as changing the order of application in salary formulas for cost of living vs CUPA minimums, or changing calculation of summer overhead from a percentage of profit to a, much larger, percentage of revenue; changes that were non-transparent and significantly hurt faculty morale.

1. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department – both positively and negatively – in terms of the following enrollment-related topics? Please explain.

- a. Student recruitment

A STEM-focused College could conceivably devote more resources to recruitment efforts for our department. However, we lack case studies or evidence to support this conjecture, and if the resulting STEM college is under-funded, it could in fact be worse for recruitment.

- b. Student retention

We do not foresee significant changes in student retention from these proposals.

- c. Student graduation rates

We do not foresee significant changes in student graduation rates from these proposals.

2. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department – both positively and negatively – in terms of the following identity-related topics? Please explain.

- a. Professional recognition

A STEM-focused college would afford a Dean and support staff more fully focused on promoting science, which would help provide better recognition of our department and its efforts. Given increased fundraising efforts at the Dean's level, this could lead to greater community professional recognition (assuming the Dean is funded and staffed to enable such efforts).

- b. Department reputation/image

We do not foresee significant changes in department reputation from these proposals.

- c. Department revenue

We are concerned that the proposed reorganizations are resource costly, and may separate our discipline (which is, frankly, expensive to run due to lab consumables and instrumentation) from 'money-making' units that have fewer materials requirements (such as English or Psychology). **We feel unsure about the impact on our revenue, and would appreciate if the administration could provide a clear picture of the financials, with projected revenue / expenses / profit for current units vs. proposed units. This is due diligence to make an informed decision.**

d. Program accreditation

We do not foresee significant changes in program accreditation from these proposals.

3. How do you think an academic re-org, like the ones in the graphic, would impact your department in terms of the following internal university topics? Please explain.

a. Voting representation (such as on Faculty Senate and Council of Chairs & Directors)

We do not foresee significant changes in voting representation from these proposals.

b. Collaboration with other departments

We see potential for increased collaboration with engineering and the health professions in the proposed reorganizations; although being housed in different colleges currently doesn't stop such collaboration, being at the 'same table' (such as at Chair's meetings) can help foster new synergy, and that would be a clear benefit. We would hope to not lose existing collaborations, even if they were in other units.

4. Are there current projects or projects in the planning stages that you feel would be disrupted by an academic re-org? Please explain.

We do not foresee significant impact to ongoing projects from these proposals.

5. Are there specific policies or procedures that your department uses that reference or use the current school/college structure? How would they be impacted by an academic re-org?

We do not foresee significant impact to policies or procedures from these proposals.

6. Does your *department* currently engage in external fundraising? Do you think an academic re-org into smaller colleges (such as the 7 shown in the graphic) would impact fundraising for your department? How about for your college?

We currently solicit funds for one departmental scholarship, and have pursued scholarship funds through grants and partnerships. **However, our external fundraising is very, very low; we are not trained in this area, nor do we have the time and resources to perform this function.**

A STEM-focused college would afford a Dean and support staff more fully focused on fundraising for the expense disciplines of science (assuming the Dean's office is funded and staffed to enable such efforts).

7. Using the graphic re-org as a point of discussion, how would your department feel about being in the 5-college version? In the 7-college version? Should MSU Denver continue down the path of collegiate restructuring, where do *you* think your department belongs?

We see advantages in both of the proposed models (5-college and 7-college), and do not oppose them. In both, we are appropriately paired with related disciplines, and see potential synergies. At the same time, we see synergies in our current alignment. We would need additional data to make a considered decision.

However, we strongly suggest that instead of moving resources into restructuring efforts, those monies could instead be moved down to the lowest level decision makers (Deans and Chairs / Departments), to enable transformative change at the grassroots. Our department identified a number of initiatives where we feel funding and energy could be more usefully applied:

- **Increasing supplemental instruction (SI), learning assistant (LA), tutors, and other peer mentoring functions.** These programs have a large base of solid, published evidence that they increase student retention and success.
- **More professional advising staff.** We have terrible ratios for students:advisors, and this impacts our retention, recruitment, and student success.
- **Teaching loads in line with peer standards.** In a 2015 study conducted by the Faculty Senate Welfare Committee, it was identified that the majority of our CUPA peer institutions have faculty on the equivalent of a 3/3 teaching load; the current 4/4 teaching load for the majority of campus (while below CUPA peer average pay) is negligent, and results in faculty with less time for working intensively with students, involving students in research, fostering prestige and funding through research, and leads to burnout and loss of talented faculty.
- **More research support.** It is a 'chicken and egg' problem that in order to get external funding support, which enhances our prestige, and involves students in research projects (an evidence-backed method for increasing retention), start up funds and continuing, internal grant programs (with meaningful funds) are required. At many of our CUPA peer institutions, faculty startup funds range from \$50K to \$100K. There are currently \$0 in university supplied start-up funds; our department supplements this with Summer revenue.
- **Offer more funding opportunities for students, to make career paths.** Financial barriers are huge for our student body; offering paid internships, stipends for student research, and additional scholarships for students who do not qualify for federal or state aid would increase recruitment and retention better than a reorganization. These experiences guide students on career paths.