

MICHIGAN STATE
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To: Kim A. Wilcox, Provost
From: Julie Funk, Chair, University Graduate Council
CC: Karen Klomparens, Dean of the Graduate School
John Powell, Chair, Executive Committee for Academic Council
Date: 12/16/2010
Re: UGC recommendation on the proposal to realign the Shared Basic Sciences Departments.

In response to the Provost's request for advice regarding realignment of the Shared Basic Sciences Departments (Biochemistry, Microbiology & Molecular Genetics) Pharmacology & Toxicology, and Physiology) in the Colleges of Natural Sciences, Human Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, the UGC requested information from the Provost and the impacted graduate programs associated with the proposed realignments (see memo dated 10/21/2010). A sub-committee was formed (Daniel Bronstein, Julie Funk, James Jackson, Shelagh Ferguson-Miller and John Wang) to review the requested information and to develop a recommendation to the Provost (This recommendation was reviewed by the UGC on 12/13/2010).

Based on the submitted documents the UGC has the following comments:

1) The primary concern is that administrative processes are being prioritized over academic programs and that this would be detrimental to the primary mission of the university. Although the UGC can appreciate the challenges of managing a complex organizational structure, at the faculty and graduate student level this complex structure is seen as a strength to academic programs, not a weakness. The interdisciplinary nature of these shared departments is "ahead of the curve" as far as societal needs and, not inconsequentially, federal research funding initiatives. Dismantling a structure that is ahead of its time for administrative convenience seems short-sighted and out of step with current societal trends.

2) Responses from graduate program directors, graduate studies committees and Associate Deans for Graduate Studies report neutral to negative impacts on graduate studies. The neutral reports primarily originate from graduate programs that are administrated entirely within one department. Detrimental impacts are predicted for those graduate programs that are interdisciplinary or are dual Professional/MS or PhD degree programs. An administrative change that, on the balance has neutral to negative academic outcomes is difficult to support.

3) Commentary was solicited from graduate students in the College of Human Medicine and College of Osteopathic Medicine. Graduate students in the College of Veterinary Medicine were represented by their Graduate Studies Committees member. Graduate students in CHM are supportive of any effort that will increase their capabilities to meet educational and research objectives. While a more efficient structure is viewed as potentially improving the educational and research opportunities of CHM graduate

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students, COM and CVM students see the realignment as likely to be less advantageous to them as members of “minority share-holder” colleges.

4) Significant efforts over several years have gone into developing interdisciplinary research teams within the shared department structures. These are now starting to reap rewards (e.g. the NIH supported ERIN grant lead by Dr. Linda Mansfield and BEACON, which had some of its origin and impetus from the intercollege Quantitative Biology Initiative). Although oversight of research funding *per se* is not a role of the UGC, research funding certainly impacts graduate studies. Increasingly society is demanding interdisciplinary trained scholars and interdisciplinary research groups to tackle the “big problems”. The University itself is requesting faculty pursue “Big Wins”. These will require interdisciplinary approaches. Although it is the ideal that faculty motivated by their disciplinary interests will seek out expertise and collaborations, there is merit to decreasing the barriers to such interactions. Proximity to colleagues is a strong facilitator of interdisciplinary work. Without an incentive structure (such as academic units that are interdisciplinary by nature) there will be less opportunity for casual interaction among faculty and less incentive for faculty to pursue these efforts. Perhaps the call for interdisciplinary approaches from funding agencies is sufficient motivation, but it is unclear in the alternate plan how barriers to interdisciplinary interactions will be lowered in the more linear organizational structure.

5) The Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, which are “minority share-holders” in the shared departments in the proposed realignment, will be significantly weakened from the standpoint of research and graduate studies at the university, national and international levels. Without direct faculty hires, there is little to incentivize faculty appointed in other colleges to align with the goals and visions of COM and CVM for teaching and research. Furthermore, the proposed realignment will weaken these colleges in national rankings and will impact accreditation for professional programs.

6) Although the promotion and tenure of faculty is not within the direct oversight of the UGC, there is concern regarding how it may impact graduate student advisory committees. Colleges strategically hire in disciplines critical to their needs, including graduate student education and advising. Changes in college appointments will impact promotion and tenure reviews, making them more narrowly focused. Alteration of college affiliation and promotion and tenure processes may alter the make-up of faculty, and as a result, the composition of graduate student advisory committees.

Based on these findings, the UGC does not support the realignment as proposed. Consideration of alternative models to mitigate the administrative challenges that do not diminish interdisciplinary graduate study and research are recommended.