

Report of the Task Force on Interdisciplinary Reporting Lines

11 June 2010

Charge. In a letter of 11 February 2010 from EVC and Provost Scott Waugh and Chair of the Academic Senate Robin Garrell the task force was charged to make recommendations for new reporting lines for interdepartmental, cross-disciplinary units at UCLA. This charge included consideration of the very different sorts of units that might be involved—Centers for Interdisciplinary Instruction (CIIs), Interdepartmental Degree Programs (IDPs), and possibly others—provision for their administrative support, and management of costs.

Need for new reporting lines. The call for new reporting lines derives ultimately from the widespread recognition that the discipline-based departmental structure of the University is not well suited for addressing many pressing issues in the larger world or new opportunities for cross-disciplinary synergy in the University itself. More pithily, the problems and opportunities of the world do not come in disciplinary boxes. This recognition has led to the creation of a wide variety of cross-disciplinary units: IDPs, ORUs, CIIs, and others. But no adequate administrative meta-structure yet exists for the higher level governance of these units, leaving them somewhat adrift. Thus there exists a need, strongly felt by some of the largest and most wide-ranging of these units, notably the Institute of the Environment (IoE), Center for Society and Genetics (CSG), and International Institute (II), for an advocate at the administrative center of the university, whose purview would extend across the entire campus, including all divisions of the College and the professional schools. The new administrative structure should be dedicated and robust, able to support creative collaborations with the various academic deans across multiple departments and units.

Proposal for a Vice Provost and Dean, Interdisciplinary Studies. The task force began with a proposal for a Dean, Interdisciplinary Studies (hereafter, the Dean) who would be a sitting Vice Provost (most likely through reshaping the position of Vice Provost, International Studies and appointing a separate Director of the II). This proposal derived from previous explorations by the College Governance Committee (report of May 2008), the Council of Vice Provosts, and meetings among center directors, deans, and the EVC. We also considered the major alternative proposal that had been explored by these groups. The alternative envisaged a “lead dean” (or similar) who would be one of the existing deans of the College but with additional responsibilities. The advantage of this scheme would be that the lead dean would have a close working relationship with the other divisional deans in the College and would have available the infrastructure required for managing personnel actions, budget oversight, and academic programs. The disadvantage, which we think decisive, would be limited purview over multiple divisions and professional schools and divided responsibilities between regular decanal duties and the rather special needs of cross-disciplinary units (not to speak of excessive work load).

We are recommending that the proposal for the Dean be adopted and we have worked to define the position more fully. The directors of the IoE, II, and CSG all strongly favor this recommendation.

Units reporting to the Dean, Interdisciplinary Studies. The task force discussed at some length the question of which units should report to the Dean (aside from the IoE, CSG, and II). The question for IDPs is especially pertinent because they are so many and so various. If all were included they would swamp the Dean's capacity. We considered the possibility of limiting the reporting IDPs to those that cross two or more Divisions or Schools, but a listing of faculty advisory committees shows that this would again include virtually all IDPs. Mere size also does not supply a useful criterion because some of the largest IDPs either do not need such a reporting line (Mathematics/Economics) or do not want it (Neuroscience). The most practical solution seems to be to treat the characteristics of a CII as a benchmark, not in a rigid way, nor requiring that a candidate unit actually become a CII, but only that the unit exhibit the basic characteristics of CII as currently understood (following the lengthy process of establishing the IoE and CSG). These characteristics rest in the first instance on holding significant resources: faculty FTE, staff FTE, and an operational budget, which implies a considerable degree of autonomy. CII also have a cross-campus scope and ambition exceeding that of virtually all IDPs. And in addition to their teaching programs, CII's sponsor cross-disciplinary research and seek to exploit the synergies that naturally arise between research and teaching. CII should actually be called CIIRs: Centers for Interdisciplinary Instruction and Research. Most importantly in intellectual terms, CII's are not discipline-based. They are committed to maintaining a strong cross-disciplinary perspective in order to address complex problems in a comprehensive way and to preserve the flexibility required to respond to changing conditions in a changing world.

These characteristics describe existing units that are already quite robust (including such potential additional units as Demography). They do not address another crucial area of interdisciplinary studies, namely, nurturing newly emerging areas. An example is human rights. The subject cuts across divisions and schools and is of great significance, yet the University has very limited mechanisms for fostering such initiatives. We strongly support the idea that the Dean should be an advocate for cross-disciplinarity in a broad sense, fostering a generative attitude toward promising new areas of broad interest, both in teaching and research. The term "incubator" found repeated expression.

The status of the many IDPs that would not be included in this structure would remain unchanged. They would continue to report to their current Divisions and Schools, at least until the new reporting structure has time to stabilize. At that point, a new task force could undertake a full evaluation of the status of IDPs.

ORUs, which normally do not have degree programs, would also not be included initially in the new reporting structure, although particular cases may merit review.

We note that the CNSI, in the view of its director Paul Weiss, does not wish to change its current reporting status.

Responsibilities and Opportunities of the Dean. The new Dean would have the primary responsibility of providing an administrative home for the CII-like units described above. Equally important would be dedicated leadership for cross-disciplinarity as an intellectual goal and interdepartmental teaching and research as a means of achieving it. Because UCLA's administration and faculty are committed to these goals, the Dean would have the opportunity to realize a large and stimulating vision for an important component in the future of the University. The position should therefore attract a person of great foresight and energy.

The position will require, first and foremost, the capacity to foster collaborative agreements among deans and departments. Areas requiring particular attention include: complicated cross-campus hiring cases; long-term planning for coherent growth in teaching and research; allocation of resources (FTE, budget, TAs, space); coordination of teaching needs across departments and schools (with resolution of the problem of course buyouts); and strong advocacy for cross-disciplinary work. Thus communication and coordination across multiple units and competing interests would be the first-order business of the Dean. Regular meetings of a council of deans regarding interdisciplinary studies could greatly facilitate this process. More mundane but also critically important roles would involve oversight of personnel actions and budgets. Finally, we envisage an active development program as an ever more important component of the Dean's role.

Resources required. In order that the position be attractive to highly qualified individuals who would want to realize a vision for interdisciplinarity, and in order to be effective in serving the needs of cross-disciplinary units, the new Dean would have to control significant resources. The resources would support long-term structural planning for both teaching and research within these units (e.g., faculty FTE, TA FTE, and space), broader interdepartmental and interdivisional teaching arrangements, including the fostering of new initiatives. In addition, the Dean would require a regular staff for personnel actions, budget oversight, and development. But where will all of these resources be found in the current climate?

(a) Reclaim Institutional FTE. For faculty FTE, the most promising source in the intermediate term may be recovery of existing institutional FTE that were originally intended to support interdisciplinary work and have passed through various deans and centers to departments. Such FTE should revert to the Dean,

Interdisciplinary Studies when faculty leave the university or change their departmental affiliation. For example, approximately twenty such FTE have passed through the II. Their status can be tracked but the timing of their eventual vacancy and transfer to the new Dean is unpredictable.

The Dean's recovered FTE would serve two distinct purposes. First would be faculty hires for new initiatives. At the moment the IoE and CSG are in a relatively good position in this respect because they have a few FTE that are not yet filled (though they will be as soon as planned searches are approved). The II is working toward a sustainable balance, which involves a several step process of regaining the teaching resources of existing FTE to meet the needs of current II teaching programs and only then to address research and teaching needs newly emergent in international programming and requiring new appointments.

The second role for recovered FTE, in this case left unfilled, would be to supply funds for teaching needs. The IoE and CSG currently use their unfilled FTE for this purpose, because their initial budgets did not include funds to establish teaching programs. Both units, however, are anxious to fill their positions with regular faculty in order to realize their basic missions. Their unfilled FTE, therefore, do not supply a sustainable source of teaching funds. FTE recovery by the Dean, left unfilled, could help to supply at least a teaching buffer. The II is already working toward such a model but will first need to reach a budgetary equilibrium point at which II teaching needs can be met through II faculty resources. (The II's unusual situation with regard to FTE and teaching needs is a consequence of its having passed through the majority of its FTE to departments during the period prior to the development of II teaching programs.)

Closely related to these considerations, because also derived from unfilled FTE, are the returns on summer teaching, a fraction of which goes to administration and could help to provide the Dean with flexible funds. Summer teaching should be expanded wherever possible.

It will be apparent that these measures—unfilled FTE and summer teaching—while helpful, do not adequately address the need for sustainable funding of educational programs in interdisciplinary units nor for fostering new initiatives. It is imperative that the University find other means to move into the future of interdisciplinarity.

(b) Replace Course Buyout System. The current “course buyout” model for obtaining faculty for interdepartmental teaching at UCLA has proven to be too expensive, even for highly successful programs, such as the GE Clusters. And in a time of shrinking budgets and faculty, departments are increasingly reluctant to release their faculty for interdepartmental teaching. This problem extends throughout the university, far beyond the units with which we are primarily concerned. We are aware that some UC campuses do not employ the course buyout model but we have not been able to explore the range of alternatives they

employ nor whether they would be applicable at UCLA. Such an evaluation remains a critical desideratum. Nevertheless, the task force endorses the general view that a systematic means of recovering or allocating a fraction of departmental teaching budgets for interdepartmental education is necessary for the continued health of the University. We support the restructuring of faculty teaching requirements to recognize that service to other units furthers the educational mission of the University and should be viewed as an educational “public good.” Teaching in other units should thus “count” toward fulfilling faculty teaching loads. Of course limits would have to be set to protect departmental needs. Perhaps one course per year would be reasonable for the humanities and social sciences and something less for the natural sciences.

(c) Increase External Funding. Concerning general funding for the activities of the Dean and reporting units, we expect that the most promising source will be new development opportunities. The interdisciplinary units have considerable attractiveness for such development, as yet not fully realized. More concerted action, coordinated by the Dean, could well produce better results.

A second source of general funding would certainly be indirect cost recovery from contracts and grants for research, just as for other deans. Sharing agreements for cost recovery will have to be worked out with the units concerned.

The Dean and the reporting units should perhaps consider additional Masters Degree programs, similar to those in the professional schools, as another source of revenue. Existing MA programs, such as those of the II, could also be reconfigured to facilitate greater cooperation and collaborative programming with the professional schools.

(d) Consolidate and Reapportion Existing Personnel. The question of staffing for personnel action, budget oversight, and development may be resolvable in large part through consolidation of existing staff among the larger interdisciplinary units, such as the II. This will require, however, considerable planning and negotiation among the units and the Dean, since local and centralized functions have different utilities and the tradeoffs require systematic discussion.

Conclusion. The task force is enthusiastic about the prospect of UCLA becoming a leading institution for the development of fully cross-campus, cross-disciplinary teaching and research under the guidance and vision of a Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies. We believe the CIIs (better, CIIRs), which have evolved at UCLA over some years, offer an excellent model for organizing such work. They do, however, require a new reporting structure in order that their administrative needs be fulfilled efficiently and in order to provide leadership and fundraising for what is still a new enterprise. In our view, these functions could best be fulfilled at the level of a Vice Provost and Dean, who would be able to operate as an honest broker across the many divisions and schools of the

University and would be able to carry out effectively the many coordinating roles required.

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