

Arts & Sciences Academic Planning Task Force Final Report Summary

3 November 2009

TO: Kent Fuchs, Provost

FROM: Peter Lepage, Harold Tanner Dean

RE: A&S Academic Planning Task Force Final Report — Summary

Here is a brief summary of the principal recommendations and conclusions from the *ad hoc* committee I appointed to develop long-range academic options for the College of Arts and Sciences as it deals with budget cuts that are both substantial and effectively permanent. Cuts this year (FY'10) amounted to approximately \$9.4M or 7% of the college's income from all sources, including our general purpose allocation, and investment and Annual Fund income. These cuts came from, among other things, a permanent 5% reduction (24 positions, through retirements, etc.) in the size of the tenure-track faculty, a 15% reduction (18 positions) in the number of lecturers, and a 6% reduction (14 positions) in nonacademic staff.

The committee's recommendations and conclusions were detailed in a 51-page report. Major results from that report are:

- 1) Almost all top-ranked universities have a college of arts and sciences, and the reputations of those universities are highly correlated with the quality of their college of arts and sciences — more so than with the quality of other sorts of colleges within these universities. This observation was based upon an analysis of data concerning the 20 universities with the highest reputations according to the most recent US News and World Report survey. Further cuts in the size of the professorial faculty threaten not just the college but also the reputation of Cornell as a whole.
- 2) The committee advocates against significant reorganizations within the college, but strongly asserts that budget cuts and, later, new resources should not be distributed uniformly across all departments. The committee developed a conceptual framework for prioritizing departments, based upon two characteristics: a) the impact of a department upon the reputation of a college of arts and sciences; and b) the current quality of that department at Cornell. They found, among peer colleges at other universities, that a college's reputation is most highly correlated with the quality of its departments in: Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Government, History, Literature (both English and foreign), Mathematics, and Physics. They recommend, therefore, that any reconfiguration at Cornell should strive at least to maintain our current strength in these areas. They also recommend that we strive to maintain quality in our highest-quality departments, whether or not they are among the high-impact departments. Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences is smaller than most of its peer competitors, and has fewer departments, but the college has nevertheless been highly competitive in the Ivy+ group of universities. The college should maintain that position.

3) The college should renew its focus on faculty productivity in teaching and, especially, in research. The committee made several recommendations for enhancing research productivity at all stages of a faculty member's career.

4) Departments should optimize their curricula to minimize the impact of cuts on undergraduate teaching, with a particular focus on the balance between large and small courses. In some departments, there is a need to provide some small courses, especially for majors, for obvious reasons. In others the imperative is to create a series of popular, well-taught larger courses, particularly for first and second year undergraduates. One purpose of new optional large lecture classes is of course to find a way to absorb an increased undergraduate student body with a smaller instructional staff. A corollary here is to prevent an increase — and, ideally, to produce a decrease — in the burden on some already-stressed departments, individual faculty members, and the students they teach. Another purpose, however, is more directly intellectual. It is to balance the range of courses students (in and out of the college) actually take. This goal is consonant with the college's commitment to educational breadth. Of course, one challenge here is finding the resources to support such courses with a shrinking budget.

5) The college should promote more cross-college collaboration in a variety of contexts. For example, the issue of small faculty size is especially acute for some of the social science departments in the college where significant numbers of faculty can be found in other parts of the university. Another example concerns budget models. The committee argues against broader use of tub-like models like those currently used in the contract colleges, suggesting that these inhibit cross-college collaboration with unfortunate consequences for everything from undergraduate education to our multidisciplinary graduate fields to the development of very large-scale scientific infrastructure (for which Cornell is currently famous).

The college's administration has not yet decided how it will respond to the committee's recommendations, in part because a full response is impossible until more is known about the college's budget for next year and beyond. The college hopes to have a plan for the FY'11 budget outlined by January, and longer-range plans for each department, specifying faculty size and other resources, by the end of this academic year.