

One CALS Academic Planning Council

6201 Microbial Sciences Building

November 15, 2022, 1:00-2:30 p.m.

Attendees: Bradley Bolling, Todd Courtenay, Jed Colquhoun, Noah Feinstein, Mehdi Kabbage, Jamie Nack, Patrick Masson, Francisco Peñagaricano, Sean Schoville, John Shutske, Michael Thomas, Thea Whitman, Michael Xenos

Absent: Glenda Gillaspy, HuiChuan Lai.

Ex Officio: Karen Wassarman

Guests: Patrick Krysan, Chris Kucharik, and Alfred Hartemink

Meeting called to order by Karen Wassarman 1:03pm

1. November 1, 2022 meeting minutes for approval.

Minutes were approved and will be posted on the APC website.

2. Agronomy/Horticulture Department merger discussion

The Chairs of the Departments of Agronomy and Horticulture, Patrick Krysan and Chris Kucharik, discussed the proposal to merge these two departments into a new Plant and Agroecosystem Sciences Department and discontinue the current Agronomy and Horticulture Departments. They stated that the Horticulture Department has voted to move forward with the proposal with the first to create the new department and the second to dissolve the current department. The Agronomy Department will vote on similar motions tomorrow (November 16, 2022). Next, the chairs elaborated on this initiative and addressed the council questions.

Question:

Can you explain the difference between the current academic programs and the proposed programs in planning? How will the programs be accessible to people outside the department (especially the graduate programs)?

Answer: Graduate programs in Agronomy and Horticulture are departmental and they train students in applied plant sciences, but historically have had low enrollment numbers. There has been a push from administration to make changes to address low enrollment programs, and as a response our departments are proposing to merge the two programs into one with focus in applied plant sciences.

Other interdepartmental programs, like Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics (PBPG), will have a stronger base by being associated with the new department rather than CALS as department. This graduate program will continue to be interdisciplinary with trainers both from within and outside the department.

Question: Will a new graduate program in Plant Sciences still be a departmental program or interdepartmental?

Answer: It is thought as a departmental ‘thing’ that combines two separate departments into one. If there is interest around campus for something broader, it would be a good conversation to have but the motivation is to merge the two departmental academic programs in question to deal with the low enrollment problem. It does not make sense for the new merged department to maintain the current Agronomy and Horticulture graduate programs independently.

Question: How is the morale of department members with the merger discussions?

Answer: People are excited and realize that the status quo with the present names and restricting disciplinary boundaries cannot continue. However, change is hard so for some people it is harder. Administration staff has already coalesced and there are no doubts that people will be behind this broader vision with interdisciplinary scope to captivate students with the idea of solving grand challenges that the world is facing.

Question: Are there differences in how the two departments collaborate with external stakeholders that need to be considered when merging?

Answer: Both departments have relationships with the industry and external groups. There will not be notable changes in these relationships and communications with stakeholders as industry relations (outreach and research level) are between faculty and industry and will not be influenced by departmental structure. However, notifications are ongoing.

Question: What will the future hiring process look like? How will decisions around hiring be made?

Answer: Keeping in mind that “refilling positions” is not going to be the same process going forward due to college-level changes, we will make a process to identify gaps to fulfill the mission. This could include faculty hires, instructional staff, more support for graduate programs – conversations are underway, but we are not there yet with all the details.

Question: What is the vision explicitly for the undergraduate program?

Answer: This has been a difficult point; some people feel that the Agriculture Ecosystems major may not provide enough core training for students who want to continue in graduate programs such as Plant Breeding & Plant Genetics. These opinions are being acknowledged yet specifics about what a Plant Sciences undergraduate major have not yet been explicitly discussed. We have found it difficult to talk about the undergraduate programs before the merging of the departments is done.

Question: Has there been a discussion about a potential certificate?

Answer: The idea of a certificate has not come up specifically, but it is another option to consider.

3. Soil Science Academic Programs Review (second discussion)

Alfred Hartemink, the Chair of the Department of the Soil Science answered the questions generated from the first discussion in the following order:

Question: How does the low number of students in the Soil Science major impact course offerings?

Answer: Course offerings have changed due to the newly developed master's program, and the broadening of programs.

Question: What are the department plans to continue to engage with undergraduate students in courses and majors into the future? Is the department looking to offer more courses in the Environmental Sciences major? Other majors?

Answer: As stated earlier there is intention to engage with students by offering more courses and broadening the programs.

Question: Has the department considered a certificate to capture the current soil science undergraduate students?

Answer: Yes, the answer is on the report (page 4).

Question: Was the decline of Soil Science majors over the past 10 years a result of the opening of the Environmental Sciences major?

Answer: We do not know this and cannot answer this question.

Question: Please comment of what is being done to address elements of the graduate programs highlighted for improvement in the review committee report.

Answer: We have not addressed the comments in this report yet. They will be addressed in the final discussion with the faculty after the review is completed.

Question: Have the graduate programs considered removing the GRE from admissions consideration to align with recommendations of the Graduate School? In particular, such a change is intended to remove barriers to recruitment of a more diverse pool of student applicants.

Answer: Yes, already the Soils graduate program has removed GRE requirements.

The APC members followed up with more questions.

Question: In the discussion about the graduate program, students raised a lot of issues. Will those issue be addressed?

Answer: Absolutely, the report highlights unclarities, confusions, and the areas that can be improved including course requirements, course work, and improving the student handbook.

Question: How does the requirement for master's degree to enter the PhD program compare to other institutions? Do you miss out on student applicants because of this requirement?

Answer: I don't know about all the other programs; I think they have similar requirements, and I don't think we miss out on students because of the requirements. We get very good students who go on to jobs. We also have as many students as we can afford to support so are not seeking more students (and feel our current students are very strong).

Question: Where do your doctoral students come from - Are the master's degrees offered around the country sufficiently strong enough to provide you with doctoral students or do the majority of your PhD students come from within?

Answer: When we have good master's students and we have funds, the preference is to keep them. We also see students coming from other disciplines and those are students that enrich us but the only disadvantage for them is taking more courses related to Soil Sciences. I would say most of the students come from outside, but a quarter come from within.

APC members continued the discussion of Soil Science Programs review by making recommendations to the Dean. A list of the recommendations made is provided below:

- Improve the effectiveness of the student handbook and other lines of communicating key elements to graduate students so that students fully understand the program and what is expected of them.
 - o Make the student handbook more transparent and accessible.
 - o Update student handbook and website (consider using the updated template from Graduate School)
 - o Add highlights to important information in the handbook
- Point out the gaps and challenges that have been identified in the review, compared to peer institutions.
- Due to the small size and no impact on course enrollment, APC recommends the discontinuation of the Soil Science BS program.

Jamie Nack made a motion to consider the program review complete and Mehdi Kabbage seconded. APC unanimously voted the Soil Science Academic Programs review complete.

Discontinuation of the L&S Microbiology major

Associate Dean, Karen Wassarman, explained that the Microbiology major historically has been offered in both CALS and L&S. However, this major is administered by the Department of Bacteriology, a fully CALS department, and instruction, advising and support is their responsibility. Consequently, there has been confusion among students and others about why the major is offered in both colleges. Therefore, the Department of Bacteriology requested to close the L&S major allowing students in the future to pursue this major through the CALS option. Karen also noted that this item is just informational for CALS APC since the governance process flows through L&S to campus without a formal governance role for CALS.

This discussion continued with Q&A and comments related to:

- o The discontinuation will start with suspension of admission and time to allow completion of major for students currently declared in the L&S major
- o Advising of undecided/undeclared students in L&S
- o Other majors offered in two different colleges

Meeting adjourned at 2:28pm.