

**ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE  
ACADEMIC PRIORITIES COUNCIL  
FOR  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2003-2004**

**Presented at the  
634<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate  
November 18, 2004**

**COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

**Arlene Avakian  
Michael Begay  
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Edward Golding  
Stephen Harris  
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Anne C. Moore  
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Corrado Poli  
Monroe Rabin  
James Rinderle  
Jonathan Schaffer**

**Academic Priorities Council Annual Report  
2003-2004**

The Academic Priorities Council met 10 times during the 2003-2004 academic year. The Council dealt exclusively with four departmental consolidations proposed by Provost Seymour in a memo to Secretary of the Faculty Senate Ernest May.

In the early Council meetings, attention was given to what issues concerning the consolidations fell within the domain of Academic Priorities. In the middle meetings, for each consolidation, information was obtained in meetings with the affected faculty in the various departments with emphasis on their views concerning whether or not the consolidations would change the academic programs involved and how the faculty felt about the proposed consolidations. In one case, it was felt necessary to interview one of the deans. At various stages, decisions were reached concerning the four consolidations.

The decision and the rationale reached by the Academic Priorities Council are given for each case in the following:

**Proposal to form a new Department of Plant, Soil, and Insect Sciences from the existing departments of Plant and Soil Sciences and Entomology.**

**The Decision**

In response to the request of the Rules Committee that the APC consider Provost Seymour's proposal to form a new Department of Plant, Soil, and Insect Sciences from the existing departments of Plant and Soil Sciences and Entomology, the APC voted 11 - 0 to approve the proposal.

**The Rationale**

In response to invitations issued to all faculty in the affected departments, two faculty members attended the March 29, 2004 meeting of the APC. They both voiced support for this consolidation. No negative impact on academic programs involved in the proposed consolidation of Plant and Soil Sciences and Entomology was apparent. On the contrary, the faculty who communicated with the APC about the consolidation supported it and voiced the belief that the change definitely would be beneficial for academic programs in both departments in terms of enhancing teaching and research.

**Proposal to form a new Department of Communication from the existing departments of Journalism and Communication.**

**The Decision**

In response to the request of the Rules Committee that the APC consider Provost Seymour's proposal to form a new Department of Communication from the existing departments of Journalism and Communication, the APC voted unanimously to approve the proposal.

**The Rationale**

In response to invitations issued to all faculty in the affected departments, three Journalism and Communication faculty members attended the February 23, 2004 meeting of the APC. They unanimously voiced support for this consolidation, while also noting that it involved the re-location of the Journalism faculty out of the College of Fine Arts and Humanities and into the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

No negative impact on academic programs involved in the proposed consolidation of Journalism and Communication was apparent. On the contrary, the faculty who communicated with the APC about the consolidation expressed support for it and voiced the belief that the change definitely would be beneficial for academic programs in both departments. The faculty noted that discussions were already underway concerning areas of common interest and new such areas were being discovered.

**Proposal to form a new Department of Public Health from the existing departments of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Community Health Studies, and Environmental Health Studies.**

**The Decision**

In response to the request of the Rules Committee that the APC consider Provost Seymour's proposal to form a new Department of Public Health from the existing departments of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Community Health Studies, and Environmental Health Studies, the APC voted 7 - 0 to approve the proposal.

**The Rationale**

In response to invitations issued to all faculty in the affected departments, one faculty member attended the April 5, 2004 meeting of the APC. He indicated his support for the consolidation, and that this support was shared by the great majority of faculty in the three consolidating departments.

No negative impact on academic programs involved in the proposed consolidation was apparent. Although there had been some concern on the part of some faculty that consolidating the departments might be a step backwards from departments to divisions, there was also a realistic sense that one or more programs might be lost altogether if the consolidation did not occur. There were also some concerns about how the consolidation might affect accreditation, but reassurances were in place that there would be no detrimental effects so far as accreditation was concerned. There was the expectation that limited resources would work better under the new structure, new multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to research were likely, and freeing up some of the faculty administrative roles would permit the development of new courses.

**Proposal to form a new Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures from the existing departments of Asian Languages and Literatures, Comparative Literature, French and Italian Studies, Germanic Languages and Literatures, and Spanish and Portuguese.**

**The Decision**

In response to the request of the Rules Committee that the APC consider Provost Seymour's proposal to form a new Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures from the existing departments of Asian Languages and Literatures, Comparative Literature, French and Italian Studies, Germanic Languages and Literatures, and Spanish and Portuguese, the APC voted 10 - 1 to approve the proposal.

**The Rationale**

All faculty including Department Heads from the affected departments were invited to the first meeting. Dean Lee Edwards, Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, was invited to the second meeting. The Provost's proposal emphasized that "... no changes are proposed to the programs

themselves ... " The APC took as its primary task the question of whether unanticipated changes might nevertheless occur, and, if so, how to evaluate their consequences for the affected programs. The APC considered the cases for and against both the likelihood and the consequences of such changes.

Six faculty came to the first meeting and the Council received two e-mails from faculty who could not attend. The chair invited the attending faculty to express their responses to the proposed consolidation and indicated that the special interest of the APC was in how it would affect the various degree programs. Although it was clear that at least some of these faculty had a variety of concerns, some of which were about the motivation for the change, the choice of which departments would be consolidated, why certain other departments had not been included, whether this might somehow be punitive toward some departments, there was almost no comment on how programs might be affected. The comments that did surface were concerned with how the appearance of the programs to those outside UMASS Amherst might be affected. Specifically, there was some concern about how faculty recruitment might be affected and whether graduate admissions might suffer if the consolidation were viewed as a downgrading of the programs, and that these consequences might, in fact, have very real and perhaps damaging effects on at least some of the programs.

At the second meeting, Dean Lee Edwards offered the APC her perspective on the consolidation and replied to some of the concerns expressed at the previous meeting. She asserted that there would be zero effect on existing programs in the short term. Long-term changes would depend largely on decisions taken within the new department and on financial conditions which could not be predicted.

Dean Edwards denied that there was any punitiveness involved in the selection of departments to be merged. She asserted that there was rather a concern for protecting the continued existence of the departments by moving them all away from the brink of possible elimination due to financial exigencies. She mentioned, in particular, the programs in Comparative Literature and German which were at risk but could now be sustained in the new department which will be the largest in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. She pointed out that there has been a long-term discussion of such a consolidation prior to the recent financial problems and that the motivation over the long term had been her conviction that disciplines have moved in interdisciplinary directions and that the kind of change in conversations between faculty in different programs that will result from the consolidation would further the interests of all. She suggested a Ph.D. program in Translation Studies as one program that would likely arise from this consolidation.

Dean Edwards argued that, far from the consolidation having a negative effect on recruiting, a large number of "outstanding job applicants" had applied for jobs that had been recently searched with the clear indication that it was likely the position would be in the new department

With respect to Classics and Judaic and Near Eastern Studies not being included, she stated that the former did not deal with living languages and did not at present need help. The latter was having very successful fundraising as a separate unit and its teaching was more a matter of culture than language, but might well join the new department at some later date if they were so inclined.

The APC concluded that, without this consolidation, some of the programs would have been in danger of elimination and, furthermore, there would not be significant and immediate changes to the academic programs involved. Therefore, the APC supported the consolidation proposal.