

Provost's 2/5/14 Update on CFANS-CBS Task Force

Dear CFANS and CBS Faculty, Staff, Students, and Friends of the University,

Earlier this week I received the report of the Provost's Advisory CFANS-CBS Task Force, a 19-member faculty/student committee I convened fall semester to examine the potential creation of a new college spanning agriculture, natural resources, environmental and life sciences.

The possibility of a combined college had been under discussion for some time by Dean Elde and former Dean Levine, a conversation driven principally by the direction of the life sciences and by trends in research and higher education in agriculture and in biological and natural resource sciences. Deans Elde and Levine saw great potential in a closer alignment of CBS and CFANS. Adding to the urgency of a wider discussion was the fact that both deans were planning to step down.

As you know, a leadership transition in a college always requires some sustained reflection on the direction of a college, so the leadership transitions in both the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) and the College of Biological Sciences (CBS) made this a particularly appropriate time to pause to examine the academic and structural alignment between the two colleges. I convened a task force to examine whether a consolidated college would further advance the excellence of the University's research and teaching; benefit students; enhance our partnerships with agriculture and other key stakeholders; and strengthen opportunities to address critical challenges in agriculture, biology, environmental and natural resource sciences, and medicine. The task force was assured there were no foregone conclusions, and they were asked to consider as many perspectives as they could gather in the course of a few months.

The task force has worked diligently to advance broad discussion and a fair and full vetting of opinions. Based on wide-ranging input from listening sessions and other consultations, the task force has advised against the formation of a new college derived from a consolidation of CFANS and CBS. The members of the group were in agreement that "a merger focusing on just these two colleges" would fall short of what is needed to realize the scientific promise and societal implications of the "new biology" and, given the current climate and culture, could potentially compromise some of the distinctive strengths of the two colleges.

The task force also, however, identified "important opportunities to more closely integrate resources of both colleges, to enhance teaching, to improve diversity and inclusivity, to build long-term research collaborations, and to bring diverse ideas and challenges together for innovative science and problem-solving." They made a number of concrete suggestions about how we might "build on and enhance existing strengths (and core values and commitments) in both colleges, while also leveraging other strengths and assets of the University."

The task force's careful and thoughtful recommendations are valuable both at this transitional moment for CFANS and CBS and in the context of broader University planning. President Kaler and I also discussed the prospects for a new college with external stakeholders, including many from agriculture and agribusiness, and while we found the reactions expressed on those occasions to be quite supportive—much more favorable than those conveyed in the stakeholder listening sessions—I have

concluded that it would be counterproductive at this time to proceed with a merger of CFANS and CBS. The task force recommends against a merger, and I accept that recommendation.

The alternate approaches suggested by the task force, including multi-college research cooperatives and other options, are, however, well worth concerted exploration. I would not want us to lose sight of the constructive suggestions that have emerged from this examination of the colleges. The recommendations of the task force, and the discussions they have elicited and conveyed, should guide further consideration of how best to position the work of the colleges and the University for the 21st century. We will move immediately to make these recommendations part of the strategic planning process under way on the Twin Cities campus.

We will also continue to ask for broad stakeholder involvement in these ongoing conversations. We want to build on the current strengths in CFANS and CBS, to ensure the fulfillment of our commitments to agricultural research and education and to research and education in the basic biological and natural resource sciences.

I offer heartfelt thanks to the task force, co-chaired by Professors Gary Muehlbauer and Michael Sadowsky. They worked diligently on a tight schedule to weigh relevant issues, to engage stakeholders through listening sessions, surveys, and direct consultation. I also thank all of you who took the time to share information and perspectives with the task force to ensure the discussion was as full, frank, and thorough as possible. (The full report of the task force is posted on the provost's office website at www.academic.umn.edu/provost/cbs-cfans).

I do understand that this process created a period of uncertainty for the CBS and CFANS college communities. Thank you again for continuing to advance the important work of both colleges while these discussions have unfolded. I will be back in touch in the coming weeks to discuss next steps in college leadership planning. I want to consult with both the task force specifically about their recommendations and all the faculty and staff more generally to determine leadership needs for the colleges. I'll provide updates to all of you as we proceed.

We will need to work constructively on that task and collaboratively as we consider the recommendations of the task force. I look forward to continuing to work closely with all of you.

Sincerely,

Karen Hanson

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Sent by Provost Hanson on 2/5/14 to faculty, staff, and students in the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and the College of Biological Sciences and to select external stakeholders.