UCR College of Arts and Sciences Discussion Update
November 21, 2014

Formation of a College of Arts and Sciences was discussed at a town hall forum on Wednesday, November 12. Subsequent meetings were held with Deans and the Chair of the Academic Senate and with CNAS chairs and directors on November 18. Meetings with faculty and staff in CNAS and CHASS will be scheduled in early December.

The conversations so far have highlighted several issues that need more elaboration. This document attempts to address several of these questions.

How would formation of a College of Arts and Sciences affect faculty?
We can identify at least three significant impacts on faculty. First, a College of A&S embodies a particular academic philosophy, one that matters, or ought to matter, to faculty. This philosophy is that the arts and sciences, for all of their diversity, comprise a common and vital intellectual enterprise. A College of Arts and Sciences finds strength in intellectual diversity and in plurality of subjects and epistemologies. It offers the opportunity for units that formerly saw themselves as competitors for resources to see themselves as partners. These were among motivations for the creation of a College of A&S at Ohio State (see below). At the level of the university, this model sees the university not just as a collection of academic units, but as an organization with a clearly defined academic core.

Second, by facilitating devolution of much authority and responsibility to the colleges/schools and their deans, many of the decisions that affect all aspects of faculty life would be made one step closer to faculty, which fosters greater congruence between decision making authority and responsibility for those decisions. Chairs and Associate/Divisional Deans have considerable access to their Dean; but very little access to the Provost. Third, by pooling resources, a College of A&S would facilitate undertaking promising new areas of inquiry.

How would this actually change decision making?
The goal is to locate the resources (faculty lines, budget) in the same place as the responsibility for addressing our goals and challenges. When problems cut across colleges, they often require decisions by the provost. The more decisions that are vested in the provost, the more the provost must retain control over faculty positions and dollars. It is counterintuitive, but having smaller, more specifically defined colleges actually forces decision-making upward. In terms of decision-making, the virtue of the arts and sciences model is that it gives one dean responsibility for all of the general education/service courses and most of the undergraduate students on campus—even as they change majors. Many more problems can be addressed by this dean, which empowers all the deans on campus and brings decision making closer to faculty, staff, and department chairs. Thus, it is not about reducing the provost’s workload; rather it is about delegating authority in areas where pushing decision making downward is apt
to lead to more informed and accountable decision making, while simultaneously creating more bandwidth for the provost to focus his/her energy on large strategic issues and on those issues that continue to stretch across the colleges.

If the goal is to push decision-making downward, can’t it be done within the current structure? Even if this plan is not adopted, we will endeavor to pass more responsibility and accountability to the deans. However, the current model poses inherent structural barriers to doing so, as described above. To cite one example, several people have pointed out that if coordinating undergraduate advising across colleges is a problem, we could form a university-wide undergraduate advising center. This is true. But if the responsibility of getting students the classes they need sits with a Vice Provost, while the resources to do so (e.g. faculty lines, funding to hire lecturers) sit with multiple deans, then there is a structural misalignment that will be always be challenging to overcome. The dean of a College of Arts and Sciences has both the responsibility to provide general education/service course to the whole university and the resources to accomplish the mission.

Are there examples of peer institutions that have undertaken such a transition? Ohio State University merged five colleges (Arts, Biological Sciences, Humanities, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences) into a single College of Arts and Sciences with 1,100 faculty in June 2010. To learn something about why that change was undertaken, and how it is moving forward, one can read the current strategic plan, at http://artsandsciences.osu.edu/sites/artsandsciences.osu.edu/files/StrategicPlanASC-rev08.01.11.pdf.

What will happen to agriculture?
Forming a College of Arts and Sciences would foster a rethinking of the role of agriculture. Structurally, we can imagine a range options that might be used to increase the visibility and accomplishments of agriculture at UCR.

1. Formation of a separate school or college of agriculture
2. Formation of a division of agriculture within a College of A&S.
3. Assignment of agriculture faculty and staff lines to Arts and Sciences and other colleges, and formation of a university wide agriculture institute.

The latter two solutions would be unique in the nation, as is our current arrangement.