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Memorandum

Date: 5 November 2010

To: All Faculty, Staff and Students in the Faculty of Arts and Science

From: Meric S. Gertler, FRSC
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Goldring Chair in Canadian Studies

Re: Academic Planning Update

I am writing to provide you with an update on recent developments concerning academic planning.

As promised in my last memo to the Faculty (see <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/faculty-staff/academic-planning/pdfs/consultation-on-academic-planning-10sept-2010.pdf>), we have been deeply engaged in wide consultation concerning the recommendations contained in the Academic Plan document released in July. We have held two well-attended town hall meetings, and have also devoted substantial time at the October and November meetings of Arts & Science Council to discussion of the plan. I have also continued my visits to individual departments and programs, and my meetings with interested faculty, staff and students.

This consultation process has provided an important opportunity for an exchange of information and perspectives. While I have received positive feedback on many aspects of the plan's proposals, I have also heard criticisms and concerns with respect to a number of recommendations, particularly those that proposed major structural or organizational changes. This consultation phase has also been helpful in soliciting suggestions for constructive alternatives to such changes, and I am heartened by the positive spirit in which such discussions have taken place. In the light of these conversations, some of which have been the subject of recent media reports, let me take this opportunity to update you on the current status of our proposals.

School of Languages & Literatures:

Consultation on the recommendation to establish a School consisting of the programs associated with five departments and the Centre for Comparative Literature has raised many concerns from faculty, staff and students in the affected units. Recent meetings with the heads of these units have focused on the exploration of alternative pathways that would allow the Faculty to achieve four key academic goals: (i) increase undergraduate enrolments in those units that have the capacity, while providing some relief to other departments in the humanities and other sectors of the Faculty that are experiencing severe enrolment pressure; (ii) stimulate greater cooperation and collaboration across departmental boundaries in the teaching of languages, literatures and cultures, in order to enhance the learning experiences of students in relatively small departments, take advantage of creative synergies, and make more effective use of teaching capacity; (iii) encourage the sharing of best practices between these units with respect to graduate recruitment, admissions, scholarship applications and program management to foster stronger graduate programs and greater student satisfaction; and (iv) explore opportunities for reorganizing administrative support to improve levels and quality of service. I am pleased to report that the department chairs have brought forward promising, concrete proposals that address some of these objectives, and have indicated their willingness to expand the scope of their proposals to encompass all four goals. In light of these recent discussions, it now seems likely that the Faculty will be able to achieve its academic objectives without proposing the creation of a School, leaving the six units intact as standalone departments/centres, but with much closer working relationships than before. Further reports will be forthcoming as these discussions progress. Administrative staff will also be invited to participate in those future discussions that affect them.

Ethics education across the Faculty:

The plan had proposed to close the Centre for Ethics, and to redeploy its budgetary resources in the service of the Faculty's need to support the teaching of social and ethical responsibility as part of its Curriculum Renewal process. Recent discussions with the leadership of the Centre have explored ways to redefine the Centre's mandate to include a role in support of undergraduate education, while also reducing its operating budget substantially. The savings from this move will be directed towards ethics education in other units across the Faculty.

Graduate and research-based centres and undergraduate programs:

In line with the principles set forth in *Towards 2030* and strongly endorsed by members of the Faculty, the plan recommended that graduate- and research-based units be brought into closer relationship with undergraduate programs in the same or related fields. Discussions are continuing between Woodsworth College (Criminology, Employment Relations) and two graduate centres (Centre of Criminology, Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources), between University College (Drama) and the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, and between Victoria College (Literary Studies) and the Centre for Comparative Literature. At the same time, plans are moving ahead for the integration of the Centre for Biological Timing and Cognition into the Department of Psychology, to enhance research opportunities for a wider population of students and faculty alike. Along the same lines, the research activities of the Centre for International Studies will become an integral part of the Munk School of Global Affairs, which is now home to both graduate and undergraduate programs.

Furthermore, discussions with the Canadian Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics have succeeded in identifying new ways to enlarge CITA's role in undergraduate education. Finally, the proposal to close the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies and move its programs to another unit has been reconsidered. Recent discussions with the director have focused on sharpening the Centre's teaching and research mandate, while revisiting its budget in order to identify potential savings.

Department of Earth Sciences:

The proposal to establish this new department, to include the current Department of Geology plus those geoscientists in Geography and Physics who would be interested in joining the new group, is currently under discussion involving the heads of all three units, as well as interested faculty and students. As these discussions progress further, staff will also be consulted. Our goal is to strengthen teaching programs and attract students to earth sciences by working more closely across disciplinary boundaries. At the same time, we hope to create conditions that would enable all faculty in this area to conduct leading-edge programs of teaching and research.

Graduate enrolment and funding policy:

The three-campus Graduate Advisory Committee, comprised of a representative selection of faculty members and graduate students and chaired by Vice-Dean Rob Baker, has been asked to review current practices with respect to graduate enrolment planning, funding packages, international student targets and related issues. Graduate chairs in the Faculty have been asked to provide input to the factors that should be considered when determining enrolments. This committee will report its recommendations to the Three-Campus Deans group before the end of this term.

Big Ideas in Arts & Science courses:

The proposal to mount a series of new first-year, theme-based interdisciplinary courses that showcase the Faculty's breadth and some of its leading scholars has met with widespread enthusiasm thus far. We have already received many expressions of interest, indicating a high level of excitement around this proposal. My office is in the process of producing guidelines and consulting on the design of these courses. Once these are complete, a formal call for proposals will be issued.

College-based initiatives:

The recommendation to expand the number of first-year, small-cohort programs pioneered by Vic One and Trinity One has been enthusiastically received by many of the other colleges. Concrete proposals have now been formulated by St Michael's College, University College and Woodsworth College, and further proposals are anticipated from New and Innis Colleges. Moreover, the Provost has recently offered seed funding to help launch these initiatives. We expect the courses associated with these new programs to begin working their way through the Faculty approvals process this fall.

The Faculty Registrar will coordinate a review of registrarial capacity in the colleges beginning later this term, and will be assembling an appropriately broad and representative group to assist him in this task.

The Faculty is also in the process of generating guidelines for English-language learning (ELL) programs for prospective international students, and is working closely with those colleges that have indicated their interest in offering such programs. Our goal is to develop a Faculty-wide protocol that matches prospective students exhibiting particular levels of English-language ability with preparatory programs of appropriate length and content.

Expand the number of research opportunities for undergraduates:

The Faculty is committed to expanding the number of research opportunities provided through 299 and 399 courses as well as summer research assistantships, and will be working with departments to scale up current offerings. In the meantime, we have also agreed to an initiative proposed by the ASSU executive to form a committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing a new undergraduate research fund and devise appropriate guidelines.

Expand the number of international opportunities for undergraduates:

The Faculty has recently put out a call for a new round of proposals under the International Course Modules (ICM) program. Although the initial funding for this program (from the Provost's Student Experience Fund) has now been spent, the Faculty has committed additional resources to fund this highly popular program, which enables students and faculty members to travel abroad in order to study subjects pertinent to their courses.

In sum, the current academic planning exercise has stimulated a deeper and broader discussion of change within the Faculty than has occurred in quite some time. The above report indicates that we have already been able to address many of the academic goals identified in the plan. In some cases, such as the proposed School of Languages and Literatures, we are now pursuing alternative approaches that do not require significant structural changes, but still allow the Faculty to achieve its important objectives. This suggests that the consultation process has been successful in highlighting the strengths and shortcomings of our original proposals, and in generating viable alternatives. Through this process, the Faculty will be able to meet its most important academic and financial objectives, to the ultimate benefit of our students.

Subsequent developments will be discussed at Arts & Science Council and documented in future periodic updates from my office. This will include budget updates, the most recent of which is posted at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/faculty-staff/cpad-info/pdfs/2010-2011/%20as-base-budget-and-oto-2010-11.pdf>. In the meantime, I am confident that, as this process continues to unfold, we will be able to achieve a high degree of consensus around the Faculty's direction as we head into the next five years. I thank you for your engagement with the process thus far, and for your commitment to working together to ensure the continued progress of the Faculty of Arts & Science.