

Position Paper on Reorganization and Structural Change at ECU

Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences

The following statement has been endorsed by fourteen of the fifteen Departments in Harriot College.

In the context of the broader campus-wide discussion of re-organization scenarios, and in light of the request from the ECU Faculty Senate for written feedback to the White Paper of the Program Prioritization Committee, the Faculty Senators representing departments within the Harriot College of Arts and Sciences submit the following comments for consideration by the Faculty Senate, the PPC and wider campus community.

We limit our observations to those menu items in the White Paper that would compromise the integrity of the college as it is currently constituted, and in particular the proposals for a separate STEM College (Item B6), a College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (B10), and a College of Humanities and Fine Arts (B7). The Harriot College faculty have examined and discussed these proposals, in both formal and less formal settings, and we have endeavored to consider seriously the potential benefits arising from any proposed restructuring. We are not in principle opposed to change, and indeed many of us can envision possible modifications and/or additions to Harriot College that might prove beneficial. That said, there is near unanimity of opinion among College faculty that a break-up and redistribution of Harriot College departments would result in their decreased health and vitality, and thus have a negative impact on the teaching and research mission of East Carolina University.

The fifteen departments that currently constitute ECU's College of Arts and Sciences are characterized by a great diversity in their fields of scholarly inquiry, methodological approach, and classroom subject matter. On the surface, therefore, it may appear feasible to partition the college into narrower groupings, perhaps along with allied professional programs, based upon a perceived commonality of subject matter or approach. Such a view, however, overlooks both the important institutional culture that our departments share in common, and the valuable synergies that help to strengthen our contributions to teaching and research at East Carolina University.

Despite our disparate areas of focus, the departments currently housed within the college share a common mission, centered on the deep connection between intellectual inquiry and the promotion of student learning within the disciplines of the liberal arts. No matter our particular tools and methods of inquiry, we all value deeply the importance of research and creative activity in the life of a great university, and hold ourselves to high expectations regarding the development and application of new knowledge and the dissemination of scholarship among our peers. We recognize, of course, that this commitment is shared by many others across the ECU campus, but we believe that it takes a particular form within Harriot College because of our departments' responsibility for liberal arts knowledge and skills in our teaching and research.

As faculty within the arts and sciences, we hold a common pedagogical vision, evidenced in the first instance by our strong support for, and contributions to, the Foundations Curriculum. We share a goal of providing all ECU students with a broad and multidisciplinary grounding in the core liberal arts disciplines, a grounding that we believe is essential to an engaged and rewarding life. And we also maintain undergraduate and graduate degree programs that, despite their variety, recognize in common the importance of cultivating in our students not only the knowledge of their chosen field, but also the skills, aptitudes and leadership capacities necessary for free ("liberal") citizenship. These shared understandings of both teaching and research have helped to shape a distinctive and long-standing intellectual and institutional culture within Harriot College, one that is evident, for example, in the common values and expectations that we hold regarding tenure and promotion. This liberal arts academic culture, we believe, is somewhat distinct from that of most professional programs, and it serves to unify the Harriot College departments, despite their diversity, into a strong and effective College of Arts and Sciences.

Not only this, but it is precisely because of our diversity that we feel the existing Arts and Sciences college structure benefits ECU. We in Harriot College are particularly cognizant of the valuable and productive synergies that exist, in both teaching and research, across the broad range of fields that comprise the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences and mathematics. These synergies are currently cultivated through the interactions and dialogues that take place in a wide range of college venues, from our curriculum committee to the various collaborative research endeavors that we undertake, from our MA/MS and Doctoral committees to the many seminars and colloquia where we engage in scholarly exchange. Through these and other interactions, we have come to appreciate the enhanced understanding and pedagogical outcomes that can result from an engagement between different methodological and epistemological perspectives. We believe that our various programs gain vitality from this disciplinary cross-fertilization, and we value it greatly.

This vital cross-fertilization positions us well with major research funders such as NSF, NIH, NEH, USDA, NASA and others, which increasingly seek proposals integrating multidisciplinary perspectives. Many of society's most pressing contemporary challenges, we would argue, demand solutions that span the liberal arts disciplines, combining rigorous scientific inquiry with an appreciation for social, political, and cultural context and an understanding of ethics and the nature of the human condition. It is the dialogues that take place *across* these domains that generate truly transformative insight and discovery, and prepare our students to be thoughtful and engaged citizens. Such dialogues simply do not occur as widely or as easily if the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences and mathematics, the full components of the liberal arts, are organized in any fashion other than a unified College of Arts and Sciences.

For these reasons, we stand opposed to any course of action that would fragment or dissolve Harriot College, and instead urge the PPC to recommend a unified and strengthened College of Arts and Sciences. The Harriot College faculty stand ready to work together as colleagues, across the liberal arts disciplines, to continue our collective contributions to the teaching and research mission of East Carolina University.