

Transforming the University

**Preliminary Recommendations of the
Task Force on Collegiate Design: CNR, COAFES, CHE**

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*“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present
are certain to miss the future.”*

–JFK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Integration of the broad range of scholarship present in the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, the College of Natural Resources, and the Food Science and Nutrition Department provides a host of new opportunities to achieve even greater excellence in research, teaching, and outreach. Our review and discussions over the past three months lead us to believe that this consolidation will enhance the University's natural biological and social science contributions to the environment, production agriculture, human health, food systems, and natural resources.

The mission of the New College relates to the applied life sciences, focusing on scholarship supporting agriculture, environment, food systems, and natural resources. Our work should benefit humans and sustain the ecosystems upon which society depends. The principles guiding the college include interdisciplinary teams conducting fundamental and translational research to enhance the educational opportunities for students and to improve the quality of life in Minnesota and beyond.

Our key recommendations are summarized below, organized around the five Strategic Areas in the President's Repositioning report. Some of our key recommendations include formation of clusters of departments with opportunities and principles for reconfiguration, establishment of a University-wide Institute of the Environment, enhancing interdisciplinary efforts with other units, expansion of scholarly activities related to translational biology, and further development of public engagement.

Recruit, nurture, challenge, and educate outstanding students who are bright, curious, and highly motivated. Students reflect the strength of any University unit. The recruitment of top students and providing an excellent learning environment is central to achieving excellence. Joint degrees between disciplines should be achievable via a streamlined process. Because the 21st century is said to be the century for biology, we recommend that the Council of Biological Deans be re-established in order to maximize curricula development for attracting and educating top quality students in forward-looking areas.

Recruit, mentor, reward, retain and involve in the decision process world-class faculty and staff who are innovative, energetic, and dedicated to the highest standards of excellence. We must strategically invest in faculty with competitive salaries, start-up packages, and on-going staff support. Faculty should be provided "intellectual mobility" to foster interdisciplinary scholarly activity and disciplinary evolution. Faculty participation in units such as the proposed system-wide Institute of the Environment must be both rewarded and evaluated.

Promote an effective organizational culture that is committed to excellence and responsive to change. To provide greater opportunities for interaction and to provide opportunities for reconfiguration of departments, we recommend the formation of three clusters of existing departments, renaming of departments when appropriate, and development of methods for evaluation of three free-standing departments. We recommend that two of these clusters be

charged to reconfigure themselves into a smaller number of departments within a two-year time frame. Reconfiguring into larger departments will allow sufficient faculty turnover and critical intellectual mass to provide excellence in teaching, collaborative research and public engagement. We recommend the developments of an “Allied Department” concept to increased communication across college structures. Timelines are suggested for instituting these changes with the naming of the college and the initiation of cluster activity being achieved by July 1, 2006.

The name of the new college should be determined using a broad consultative process. It should be named by either using familiar and/or new key words relating to the work of the college.

We recommend the formation of the Institute of the Environment, to coalesce the University’s tremendous resources in environmental education and research. This Institute must be System-wide, embracing the talent from all across the University. Core faculty having joint appointments with the Institute and their tenure homes will be accountable to the Institute Director as well as their department heads, and funds will follow faculty effort to the Institute. We recommend that this Institute must have physical space with labs and offices for the core faculty and staff. The Institute would have its home in the New College in Saint Paul, and the Director would report to the Provost.

Translation of advancements in fundamental sciences to applications in agriculture, food, renewable resources and the environment will be an increasingly important focus of the New College. Enhancement of translational biology is recommended by increasing investment in the Department of Plant Biology and by the New College establishing joint appointments between the New College and other units. We recommend that new priority themes for the merged college be developed. Moreover, new technologies and instrumentation for biological research and teaching will require planned investments.

Exercise responsible fiscal stewardship by setting priorities, and enhancing and effectively utilizing resources and infrastructure. A number of efficiencies will be realized by our recommendations. We believe our recommended structural changes will allow for the needed flexibility to respond to and anticipate new research directions and allow faculty to reconfigure in such a way as to maximize the return on investments.

Communicate clearly and credibly with all of our constituencies and practice public engagement responsive to the public good. Public engagement has always been a hallmark of the units involved in this merger, especially through Research and Outreach Centers and other off-campus sites. Public engagement should be expected and evaluated for all faculty, staff, and students. Partners in outreach activities should be established or reinforced.

The new college culture should encourage the development of assessment tools for measuring progress toward excellence. Investments should always be assessed relative to improving quality within the new college.