

MEMO

TO: Linda Mitchell
Chair, UMKC Faculty Senate

FROM: Kenneth Novak
Chair, UMKC College of Arts & Sciences Faculty

DATE: May 14, 2018

RE: Merger of School of Biological Sciences and Department of Chemistry

This memo is in response to Step II.I-B of the Faculty Senate Proposed Structure for Overseeing Reorganizations at UMKC, approved by Faculty Senate March 6, 2018. I have reviewed documents submitted by Biology and Chemistry and find these arguments to be comprehensive and reflective.

I do not contest the veracity of the information contained within these reports, and agree with the tenor of these reports that merging these academic units is likely in the best interest of the university.

The reports are framed across 8 criteria, including improving operational efficiencies, sharpen strategic focus to better achieve goals, clarify unique value and competitive distinction, improve quality, improve the work experience and bring out the 'better' in faculty and staff, empower academic leaders by providing greater support and accountability, take advantage of new ways to learn, teach and work, and take advantage of new opportunities for knowledge creation and transmission. Overall faculty of the moving and receiving units are optimistic many of these factors will be met through reorganization, and I concur.

In the interest of providing as much information and feedback as possible to university stakeholders as they consider this action I would like to focus this memo on the impact this reorganization will likely have on the College of Arts & Sciences. I feel this is appropriate given my formal role within this process. The aforementioned reports indicate positive results are expected for biology and chemistry faculty, staff and students, and by extension, the university. It is important to keep in mind that the College will be impacted by this action also, and it is unclear whether this impact will be positive or negative, but I do believe it will impact the liberal arts experience for students and faculty. The aforementioned report indicates comments "must address AT LEAST 4 of the 8 criteria". This memo could meet this burden, but it would be a bit of a stretch and unconvincing. I would rather focus on two criterion that this reorganization will impact the College the most.

Sharpen strategic focus – It appears this reorganization will sharpen the strategic focus for students and faculty in biology and chemistry, however, it will create complications for students pursuing a liberal arts education in the College of Arts & Sciences. Chemistry is an important part of the liberal arts experience at UMKC, and the Department of Chemistry has historically been integral in strategically aligning liberal arts education (particularly within the natural sciences). Chemistry historically served a large number of non-chemistry majors, especially those seeking laboratory experience (a requirement within the College of Arts & Sciences). It is important to note that while the strategic focus may be sharpened for students studying biology and chemistry, it will be dulled for those strategically seeking a holistic liberal arts experience. This reorganization will likely have a ripple effect across the College (here and elsewhere) –

none of which are fatal, but it will definitely impact the operational efficiency of the College of Arts & Sciences. For example, a larger part of offering natural sciences to College of Arts & Sciences students will fall upon other natural sciences departments, especially Physics and Geosciences, and it is unclear whether those departments have the capacity to manage this change without additional resources. Also, the College will likely need to revisit degree requirements to accept more lab/natural science experiences offered outside the College (e.g. the School of Natural Sciences). This may in the long run be a good thing because it may further encourage multidisciplinary (or at least multi-school) interaction and exposure. But this change will definitely result in short-term discomfort and complications for students as we 'figure things out' in this new university environment.

Clarify unique value and competitive distinction – This factor, as positioned, ignores the aforementioned liberal arts experience for students. For many years the College of Arts & Sciences 'brand' has been to offer a liberal arts education (competitive with small liberal arts, teaching intensive universities) within an urban, public, research university setting. UMKC, and the College, provide unique opportunities that small liberal arts universities cannot. Movement of chemistry, the College's largest and most robust discipline within the natural sciences, compromises this mission. Similar to above, there will be work-arounds, but the uniqueness of the liberal arts experience and the College's brand equity could suffer.

I hope stakeholders keep these concerns in mind as they make decisions that are in the best interest of the university.

On a personal level, I approach this reorganization with a bit of melancholy. Members of the Department of Chemistry are valued colleagues within the college, and the programs they offer serve an important purpose within the college. It will be difficult to 'see them go', even if this is largely administrative in nature. This reorganization will alter the dynamic chemistry has with faculty, staff and student in the College of Arts & Sciences – maybe for the better, maybe not. At the same time I recognize organizational change inherently creates anxiety, perhaps due to simple fear of the unknown or disruptions to the status quo. Ultimately this reorganization may be healthy for the university, but in the meantime growing pains are to be expected within the College of Arts & Sciences.