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College of Arts and Sciences
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To: Robert Rhodes, Provost
Members of the University Undergraduate Academic Council
ACU Faculty

From: Gregory Straughn, Dean

Date: February 12, 2015

Re: Response to Restructure of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Proposal

Before providing a response, I want to express my appreciation to the faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences for the way they have engaged in a series of difficult conversations throughout the Fall semester. Each discussion has been one of sincerity and advocacy within the context of dignity and respect. I cannot think of a better example of “speaking the truth in love” than the ones displayed by these faculty, staff and students.

As difficult as it is to support the restructure proposal – I would like to have the funds to rehire positions and provide operational support at a more robust level – I give my support and endorsement for the following reasons:

- Closure versus Restructure: While I agree that the restructure may not appeal to the same group of students currently served by the Department, I disagree with the statement that the university is closing the department. It is closing degrees that are undersubscribed and restructuring those that are most highly subscribed, with the intent of serving the interests of the majority of degree-seeking students.
- Effect on Recruiting: Throughout the Fall, I have been in contact with Kevin Campbell regarding the effect this decision might have on our efforts to recruit students. His office has been careful to describe the move as accurately as possible. After asking them to clarify their language – noting that we will not be continuing an “Animal Science” degree with a pre-veterinary health emphasis, but rather we will have a “Bachelor of Biology” with a pre-veterinary health emphasis – I believe the situation has been fairly and accurately portrayed by Admissions; though I am confident that we can still improve communication. Faculty and staff in the Department of Biology have met with prospective students from the mid-Fall semester onward, and faculty and staff in the Department of Agricultural and

Environmental Sciences have apprised me when prospective students or parents have raised questions that needed further conversation.

Kevin Campbell has indicated that the year-to-date interest in students seeking a pre-vet degree is commensurate with last year: 253 (Fall 2015) versus 217 (Fall 2014); completed applications are also similar: 123 (2015) versus 103 (2014). The same holds for students seeking a degree in Wildlife/Natural Resource Management: 65 applications (2015) versus 53 (2014); 37 completes (2015) versus 27 (2014). While the most telling evidence will be in the number of enrolled students counted on the twelfth day, this trend is encouraging.

- Agribusiness Students: Kevin Campbell notes that the three confirmed admitted students who have expressed interest in Agribusiness have been contacted by Admissions to apprise them of the proposal to close that degree. They have been advised to consider appropriate degrees in other areas, including the College of Business Administration.
- Faculty Makeup: I agree with Dr. Brokaw that we are fortunate to have access to a number of qualified, highly-invested individuals who can support specific courses on an adjunct basis. All departments would benefit from connection with such a group of people. The need for adjuncts to cover courses stems from tactical decisions made not to renew positions – in some cases because a qualified replacement could not be found; in most cases because funds were needed to balance the academic unit's budget. With additional reductions likely, it is not possible to infuse the department with funding sufficient to support multiple faculty lines.
Undoubtedly adjunct faculty will be needed to support certain courses until future replacement hires can be identified whose experience and credentialing can support the pre-veterinary health and wildlife and natural resource management areas. In the meantime, this proposal provides a measure of flexibility and efficiency by restructuring degree plans to connect with existing faculty and class offerings in the Department of Biology.
- Endowments: According to Ed Krestley in Student Financial Services, none of the fifteen named scholarship endowments under the Department's auspices is designated for the exclusive support of students in a program that will not be continued. While some say they should be applied to "Animal Science" students – they do not currently preclude awarding to pre-vet students who are BS Animal Science majors, and, therefore, they should not be construed to preclude pre-vet students seeking a BS Biology degree.
- Department Culture: I agree with Dr. Brokaw that history and culture of the Department is both long-standing and unique. The visible engagement they have – from the Rodeo to study abroad experiences in Africa to participating in the Homecoming Parade – is a testament to the ways a department, even a modest sized department, can and should engage the campus. While not every extra-curricular program is likely to continue, I have encouraged the faculty and staff in Biology and in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences to seek out ways to support students in these unique endeavors, even when that means

moving beyond the traditional and customary activities of a department. A good example of this are the plans to continue and improve the Rhoden Farm. Maintaining the connection to and use of the farm is a high priority; doing so provides excellent opportunities for students to engage in a “living lab.” Modest capital improvements are planned, and these would allow for an expansion of student use in the future. Additionally, I have engaged Jason Davis, the current farm manager, in conversations about furthering his professional education with College support in order to gain the credentials needed for classroom instruction. I am hopeful about the future that such an arrangement would support and think it is a creative model that will also support elements of the unique departmental culture that has characterized the program.