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Provost James R. Coffman
Office of the Provost
Anderson Hall
CAMPUS

Dear Dr. Coffman:

After much reflection on the matter, I have concluded that I must oppose the proposed transfer of the Department of Computing and Information Sciences (CIS) from the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Engineering. History faculty who have spoken with me about this matter share my concerns.

First, we believe that the proposed move is inconsistent with the spirit and purpose of foundational education for all our students and of common university degree requirements. In recent months, several disturbing steps have been taken within various colleges that threaten to disperse the general educational mission -- something quite inconsistent with the calls we have simultaneously heard to give sharper focus to all our efforts within the university. We are concerned that moving CIS from the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Engineering must inevitably incline CIS to support the more specialized mission of the latter college and to lessen its commitment to students across campus.

Second, it has been made clear in various planning documents in recent years that the College of Arts and Sciences has a special role as the "university common" in which faculty and students of all disciplines may exchange ideas, share interests, forge new academic partnerships, and help to weave the new texture of intellectual exchange among the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences that will become increasingly important in coming decades. It is striking, suggestive, and symptomatic that CIS is proposing to move to a college that is not authorized to award the B.A. degree. Although probably unintended, this implies an unacceptable divorce between information technology and conceptualization related to it from social issues and humane studies.

Third, we doubt that it would be possible to develop an equitable definition of "resource neutrality" in this proposed move -- and we emphasize that the term "resource neutrality" is more apt than "revenue neutrality." For about two decades, substantial resources from the College of Arts and Sciences have been transferred to CIS. This was done on the clear supposition that CIS was to play a crucial role in fulfilling the responsibilities of the College of Arts and Sciences to students throughout this university. This was done, too, at considerable cost to other departments in Arts and Sciences. One could theorize that a transfer of CIS to Engineering that would be "resource neutral" for Arts and Sciences presupposes that CIS vacate Nichols Hall or that equivalent space be provided Arts and Sciences, that CIS expect no further GTA funds from Arts and Sciences, that Engineering be assessed a substantial percentage of the funding shortfall in Arts and Sciences in which CIS has participated, and that other strong measures be taken. We do not propose that this should actually occur but user it to suggest the ultimate unlikelihood of developing a truly equitable solution.

Fourth, we have serious misgivings as to the possible underlying rationale for the proposed move. In general, we would prefer to respect the preferences of colleagues in other departments. But a university is an enterprise held in common, and our departments must reconcile their own special interests with the common missions we support at the college and university levels. We believe that good academic policy and collegial intellectual discourse argue against the proposed move, and we hope that other means may be found to resolve the concerns of the CIS faculty that have contributed to their interest in it.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Mrozek
Professor and Head

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