

Life Sciences Planning Task Force

May-September 2009

Charge

Cornell University must address an approximately \$230M operating budget deficit on the Ithaca campus. This will require a substantial correction—between 15 and 18 percent of the unrestricted budget, with larger corrections likely among administrative units (see www.cornell.edu/budget for more on the budget challenge and responses).

Solving this budget challenge will require unprecedented coordination across campus constituencies, and a process that imbues budget reduction and revenue enhancement strategies with credibility. Major decisions will need to be made well before the end of the Fall 2009 semester, so that changes can be implemented beginning in fiscal year 2011.

Given the magnitude of the challenge, and the breadth of the life sciences across the Ithaca campus¹, Provost Kent Fuchs is establishing a life sciences planning task force to make recommendations about life sciences priorities, and opportunities for cost savings and revenue enhancements. The recommendations of this task force will be considered alongside recommendations from college-based task forces (see attached charge for colleges and schools).

The task force should focus on the following questions:

1. In which life sciences areas must Cornell offer instruction if it is to continue to be an elite undergraduate institution? Responses should focus on disciplines and areas, not departments.
2. What are Cornell's highest-ranked life sciences research areas? Which areas are making significant progress? Which areas are at risk of significant declines?
3. In which life sciences areas should Cornell focus new investments and minimize budget reductions?
4. What changes in the Graduate School, the graduate field system, and the list of current graduate fields would benefit the life sciences?
5. How critical are cross-college infrastructure units (e.g., Division of Nutritional Sciences, Weill Institute, Cornell Center for Comparative and

¹ The life sciences are a substantial component of the following colleges and schools: Arts and Sciences, Agriculture and Life Sciences, Computing and Information Science, Engineering, Human Ecology, and Veterinary Medicine.

Population Genomics, Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future, and the Institute for Biotechnology-Life Sciences Core Facilities) to life sciences research?

6. Are there life sciences units that should be merged? Are there life sciences centers, programs, fields, or departments that should be closed? What would the costs and benefits of these changes be? What roles should faculty, administrators, students, and alumni play in identifying and implementing mergers and closings?
7. What other opportunities exist for budget reductions and revenue enhancements in the life sciences that will not cause undue harm to the core missions of research, teaching, and outreach?

Throughout, consideration should be given to how planning decisions will be implemented, what difficulties might arise, and what resources and support will be necessary to achieve change.

It will be critical that the task force structure its work in a way that allows for input from, consultation with, or participation by, relevant constituencies. This need for transparency must be balanced against the need to be expeditious, efficient, and capable of making hard decisions. It is inevitable that some recommendations will be unpopular with some constituencies, but if Cornell is to enhance its prominence in the life sciences, this task force cannot allow a desire to avoid conflict deter it from making bold recommendations.

An initial report is due to Provost Fuchs by July 1, 2009. The final report is due by September 15, 2009.