

Statement from Biolecturers on Restructuring the Division of Biological Sciences

October 27, 1998

Lecturers and Sr. Lecturers are an integral part of the Division undergraduate teaching program and many have been involved [with the teaching program] for quite some time. We concur with the general opinion that the undergraduate teaching program is successful and should be supported in such a way that it continues to flourish. We do not believe this can happen without a strong, central unit that also serves as a home for the undergraduate teaching program.

Many of our concerns are described in the 10/21/98 Statement by Jeff Doyle, Associate Director for Academic Affairs. Options for restructuring that depend on a separate Director of Undergraduate Studies are unsatisfactory in that there would likely be a separation of the research and teaching functions of the faculty. The present commendable integration of research and teaching is a great strength of Biology at Cornell and should not be weakened in any way.

As explained in detail in the Faculty of the Future portion of the University of the Future mission statement, teaching and research are not separate activities and both are strengthened when they are closely integrated. In the present case, research activities support not only the quality of the courses offered, but are required to provide opportunity for undergraduate research, support for and evaluation of Honors Theses, sponsorship of Hughes Scholars and a range of choices for the Explorations program. It is difficult to think of another unit in which research is so entwined with the undergraduate program. Please see the addendum below for details.

If the undergraduate teaching program is in a separate unit, no matter how well supported, faculty efforts will be divided between a "research" department and a "teaching" unit. This is not going to be beneficial to the teaching program.

With respect to other components of the undergraduate teaching program - faculty advising, faculty staffing and offering of courses, and recruitment of excellent TA's - these are facets of the undergraduate program that are highly dependent on faculty generosity with time and expertise that cannot be extracted by pressure. In other words, giving a Director of Undergraduate Studies "...resources and authority to effect full departmental cooperation..." with the program will not necessarily achieve the desired results in these areas.

If the program is separate from the departments, faculty participation is likely to diminish. Biolecturers already play a significant role in the latter four of these functions listed in the addendum, so it is especially important to maintain and strengthen the participation of the research faculty that we now have. Further, these functions depend on cooperation of the sections, which may be more problematic if they were independent departments.

Thus we support retaining a central unit that unites the teaching and research functions of the faculty. It is simply unrealistic to expect the teaching program to thrive on its own.

BIOLECTURERS ENDORSING THIS STATEMENT:

Rita Calvo, Sr. Lecturer, Genetics and Development

Carolyn Eberhard, Sr. Lecturer, Plant Biology

Jon Glase, Sr. Lecturer, Neurobiology and Behavior

Bruce Johnson, Sr. Res. Assoc./Lecturer, Neurobiology and Behavior

Carol McFadden, Sr. Lecturer, Physiology

Susan Merkel, Lecturer, Microbiology

Laurel Southard, Director of Undergraduate Research

Marty Taylor, Lecturer, Plant Biology

ADDENDUM

This is the present faculty involvement in specific undergraduate teaching activities:

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SUPERVISORS (499): 228 students

HUGHES SCHOLAR SUPERVISORS: approximately 75 sophomores and juniors

HONORS THESIS ADVISORS: 70

EXPLORATIONS: 133 options for approximately 850 students each semester

MAJORS ADVISING: counting freshmen, there are about 1,688 majors to be advised. This load is handled by 121 faculty advisors

CALS FRESHMAN ADVISING: about 19 faculty advisors are involved in this program in which freshmen have both a trained undergraduate student advisor and a faculty advisor. Each advisor has 10-12 freshmen.

OTHER ADVISING: Some faculty advise Biology and Society majors and College Scholars in the Arts College, and General Studies majors in CALS

TA SELECTION: The pool selection process for 36 TA's in introductory biology has been operating well for quite some time. This directly involves 3 sections and the cooperation of faculty inside and outside of the division.