

## Comments on the Division of Biological Sciences

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### Preamble

As an emeritus professor, I have not taken time to be involved in reports, etc., that no longer affect me. However, I am interested in the welfare of biology at Cornell, as I have been for the past 50 years. I am still fully active on the campus, guest lecturing in several courses, helping graduate students, writing papers and answering a multitude of questions about cloning from high school and college students, and from the mass media around the world.

I have heard discussions that concern me about problems in the Division of Biological Sciences 1) that related to personal differences and 2) that are part of the natural stress caused by reduction of positions and shortage of funding. These problems are perceived by some as being caused by the structure of the Division of Biological Sciences, and that changing the structure will remedy all problems. This appears to be the goal of the Task Force. I do not believe that this assumption is reasonable. While I commend all the people for their dedication in preparing various reports, and I agree with some of the recommendations, I strongly believe that one of the problems is one of attitude. This is difficult to put in a report, but in difficult times (and these are not very difficult compared to the depression I grew up in on the farm working 100 hours a week) individuals on a personal basis must be more resourceful, more sharing and more caring. Structure always can be improved also, but structure can be too rigid and costly.

### Historical

Details are in the Task Force Report. I should add that there was much uneasiness with establishment of a Division of Biological Sciences. Part of it was simply that no system could fit perfectly the perceptions of individual needs. Much of this really was over fear of losing turf. Unfortunately, individually we usually seek all we can get, and really don't properly appreciate that our own development depends on the balance that leads to the greatest common good. How many give thanks everyday for the help one gets by being a part of the Cornell community?

So after the Division of Biological Sciences was in place, the campus settled down and the system bore fruit.

1. There are about 600 courses in a coordinated curriculum offered by the many sections.
2. We have a great body of undergraduates and faculty.
3. The Explorations program has won wide acclaim.
4. I have enjoyed the undergraduates and honors students coming through various programs.
5. I've had Hughes scholars. I believe this is the only Hughes Scholars program in the US that has won 3 consecutive awards. That says something about the strength of the program.

Weaknesses. Yes, the Report notes many. I found this recently when a world expert on cloning came to

Cornell and spoke to the largest seminar group I've seen in years (mostly students came). Yet, when I sent an e-mail for interested faculty to meet with him, none signed up without my coercion. The response from the Biotechnology building groups was that no one was interested in animals larger than *Drosophila*. That group is very strong at Cornell. A few years ago we lost a fine collaborator in Willie Marks, who also served as a funnel into other great faculty resources. We found no one else to collaborate with on the biotechnology of early mammalian development and the application to agriculture and medicine. In the downsizing, some areas of strength have been able to maintain their position, and areas such as mammalian development in the Division have shrunk.

### **Present status from my distant perspective**

1. The system has many good features.
2. One administrative problem stems from having statutory and endowed units -- a strength and a complication in any system.
3. The system needs some remodeling. First, I suggest a correction of some of the regression that has occurred since the system was established.

For example, the director was an Associate Dean in 2 colleges and along with assistant directors (one for teaching and one for research, plus the provost), the administration could be in place. Secondly, let's utilize past experience to meet new needs to upgrade the Division and not destroy it.

4. The report stated "we recommend that the Division be eliminated." Mass media love these headlines that are 99% misleading. One could give the impression to alumni, government and industry that Cornell is downgrading or even discontinuing its biology program. Of course, this is not true.
5. Let's make modest changes in the present program promptly within resources available, and be able truthfully to tell the world that Cornell is taking the current solid framework and redesigning it to zoom into the 21st century. Then everyone should be committed to make the program work and not try to push parts just for themselves.
6. More emphasis should be put on increased funding for the biological sciences. However, unless a multimillionaire comes forward, or an agreement can be forged with a large company for tens of millions of dollars now, ideas in the report on new facilities and many new positions must be part of a long-range plan, and not part of a current solution.

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