

Joint statement of Professor Charles Walcott, Director of the Division of Biological Sciences and Professor Howard Howland, Convener of the Response Group on the occasion of the Senate Discussion of the Proposals of the Visiting Committee

In preparing a position statement for this discussion we believed it best to enunciate certain principles, objectives and factual constraints upon which an administrative solution to problems facing the Division of Biological Sciences and the Life Sciences at Cornell may be based. We list some here:

- 1.) The undergraduate curriculum of the biological sciences at Cornell is a nationally recognized success. Its health and maintenance depends upon a strong single academic unit which embraces the full range of the basic biological sciences and includes a professoriate which both teaches and conducts research.
- 2.) With the advent of modern molecular biology, biologists of all sub disciplines have more reasons to collaborate with one another than they ever did before. With artful coordination, Cornell biology can be greater than the sum of its parts rather than less as it is at present.
- 3.) No academic unit can be strong unless its principal officer has control of an adequate budget and the power of appointment of a significant number of faculty positions.
- 4.) While the distinction between pure and applied biological research has become increasingly blurred over the past decades, nonetheless, there will always be some areas of biological research which may have no immediate obvious practical application, but which are believed to be basic to other applied areas of research. The central biology unit referred to above must provide a home for such "pure" research areas.
- 5.) Biochemistry and Molecular biology must be strengthened and invigorated at Cornell, but not at the cost of weakening the great strength in classical biology that makes Cornell unique among the nation's research universities.
- 6.) Biology exists in many different colleges, departments and programs at Cornell. To build a strong program in biology at Cornell, ways must be found to facilitate communication, cooperation, and coordination among the various biologists. Where it is useful, worthy new research and teaching efforts in biology that originate from its sister sciences should be integrated with the Biological Sciences unit.
- 7.) We believe that the direction of the Biological Sciences unit would be materially improved if the chief officer were advised by advisory groups which were both internal and external to Cornell.

From these premises there follow from (1) and (2) that it would be unwise to abandon the Division of Biological Sciences without replacing it with a stronger central unit; from (3) that the current Division as presently constituted cannot survive, from (4) that not all research can be expected to support short-term applied goals, from (5) that the budget for the biological sciences unit should experience a significant increase and from (6) that some person above the level of the colleges must have the responsibility and resources to encourage cooperation and collaboration, and (7) that the chief officer of the biological sciences unit must be able and willing to be well advised by faculty from within and experts from outside the university.

Taken together we believe that these facts argue for the creation of a strong central unit of biological sciences whose chief officer has a considerable disposable budget and power over a significant number of faculty lines with enough resources to reinvigorate biochemical and molecular biology at Cornell, and that he or she must find ways to combat both stagnation and isolation, and be willing to consult with colleagues within and without the University.

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