Dear Colleagues:

After a lengthy process of consultation with many groups in the College, I have decided to modify the organizational structure of the CLAS Dean’s Office. There are two primary goals. First, I seek to provide better service to chairs and directors, faculty, staff, and students. Second, I hope to provide myself and future Deans more time to focus on the most important questions within the College, on representing the College to the rest of the University, and on development.

The new structure will be “divisional” in that one Associate Dean will be assigned to each of the College’s three divisions (interdisciplinary centers and programs will also each be assigned to one of the Associate Deans). The divisional Associate Deans will be responsible for knowing the departments/programs they work with better than a Dean can. They will ensure that Chairs and Directors get responses from the Dean’s office in a timely fashion, and that the Dean is well informed when making decisions. Most importantly, their role will be to facilitate better access to the Dean, not to substitute for it. Chairs and Directors will continue to report to the Dean, and to be hired by the Dean.

Two Associate Deans will have portfolio-based duties that cut across divisions. The position of Associate Dean for Student Affairs will continue to exist in its current format, but sometime in the future I will likely convert that to a full-time professional staff position. A new position of Senior Associate Dean will oversee the Tenure and Promotion process and the day-to-day implementation of decisions, and stand in when the Dean is unavailable.

Overall, we are moving from a system with six Associate Deans to one with five. Given the budget situation, a leaner Dean’s office is certainly appropriate. However, I believe that in many ways the Dean’s office is understaffed, not overstaffed. Budget permitting, we will likely add some professional staff in the future to handle tasks that need to be done well, but not by Associate Deans. Overall, I am trying to get a better fit between the tasks we do and the people doing them.

We will soon commence searching for the three divisional Associate Deans. Because these searches will be internal, there is no reason we cannot complete the searches in time for people to begin by the beginning of the fall semester. I will appoint the Senior Associate Dean from within the ranks of the current Associate Deans.

While there has been a lot of support for moving to a divisional model, it has not been unanimous. Below, I address some of the questions that might be raised.

There will be some details to iron out as we go along, but I am very confident that these changes will help the Dean’s office serve departments, faculty, staff, and students more effectively.
Best,

Paul

What problems are we trying to solve?
1. Chairs feel that they need more access to the Dean.
2. Chairs feel that no one in the Dean’s office truly understands their departments and the various ways in which they are unique.
3. Solutions offered by portfolio-centered Associate Deans may not take sufficient account of the particularities of different disciplines and departments.
4. The Dean handles more matters than he can effectively manage. In the current system, a large proportion of the queries to the Dean’s office come first to the Dean. The Dean does the triage, but this is immensely time consuming (and not without mistakes). Many issues brought to the Dean concern matters at a level of detail with which the Dean cannot help. Given the other demands on the Dean’s time, prompt responses to concerns are less likely, and dropped balls are more likely.
5. The Dean finds that the urgent is constantly crowding out the important. In other words, the onslaught of day-to-day demands makes long-term strategic planning and implementation nearly impossible.

How Would a Divisional Model Solve These Problems?
1. Each Chair/Director would have much better access to a divisional AD than to the Dean. Not only would each AD have roughly 1/3 the contact departments that the Dean has, but those Deans are not off campus doing development, or spending large amounts of time working with other Colleges and upper administration. Triage is divided among three people, so matters should be handled more quickly and consistently.
2. Each Associate Dean can get to know the units in the division well. This will facilitate the ADs helping the Dean make better decisions. A lot less time will need to be spent going back to departments and asking repetitive questions.
3. Associate Deans with divisional assignments will be able to provide solutions to departments that take a holistic view of the department’s problems/opportunities.
4. The Dean will be able to spend more time on the problems that only he can address. These include meetings with donors, working with the higher administration, and focusing on the departmental issues that the Chairs find most important.
5. The Dean will be able to spend time on strategic planning and on overseeing implementation of our most important initiatives.

What are the concerns about moving to a divisional system?
1. Chairs will have less access to the Dean.
2. Associate Deans will have less expertise on complex matters such as Tenure and Promotion.
3. Associate Deans may not effectively represent the interests of constituents to the Dean.
4. The Divisions are one step on a slippery slope to three separate colleges.

How are those concerns mitigated?
1. If the Dean’s time is managed more effectively, Chairs will have more access when they need it most—when something truly important comes up. In formal terms, the Chairs will still report to the Dean. They will report, informally, through the AD. Moreover, with the ADs more deeply knowledgeable about the departments, it is more likely that the Dean will know enough to take decisive action.

2. The position of Senior Associate Dean will handle matters such as tenure and promotion where process is both very complicated and exceedingly important.

3. The Dean will hire Associate Deans in whom he has confidence. It will also be important that the Associate Deans have the confidence of their units. In any event, Chairs will continue to have the ability to meet directly with the Dean. To repeat, to the extent that the system manages the Dean’s time more effectively, Chairs will have more time, not less, with the Dean.

4. Looking across the country, it is not clear that a divisional structure is a precursor to separate colleges (many such systems have persisted for years). Nor does a unified structure automatically prevent a split. When a College is not functional, people will be tempted to split it, and when it’s working well, they’ll be inclined to leave it alone. The question then is which model will help this College function best.

A Few Other Points on a Divisional Model

1. The separate divisions will not have their own budgets. We need to retain the flexibility to shift resources as circumstances change. Budget authority will remain with the Dean. It cannot and should not be delegated.

2. The Associate Deans will serve the College, not the division.

3. Moving to a divisional model is less of a change than it might at first appear. The three-division view of CLAS is written into the CLAS Constitution, and prior to 2008/2009, three of the ADs were assigned as liaisons to those three divisions.

4. Portfolios such as research, space, IT and so on will continue to exist. Some of these (e.g. research) will continue to have an AD assigned to them. Others (e.g. some parts of space and IT) may be devolved to professional staff.

5. If this works well, the vast majority of faculty, staff, and students will notice relatively little difference in their relationship with Dean’s office. The most noticeable difference should be the speed and effectiveness with which decisions are made, and the ability of the Dean’s office to focus on the big picture.