

April 20, 2011

Jeffrey C. Williams, Chair
Executive Committee
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

RE: Proposal to Suspend Admissions to Textiles and Clothing

Dear Chair Williams,

The majority of Undergraduate Council members voted against the suspension of admissions to the Textiles and Clothing major for the reasons given below. The rationalization of the minority who voted in favor of suspending admissions is given at the end of the majority report.

Majority report against closing admissions. The Undergraduate Council does not approve affirming the decision of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences to suspend admissions to the major in Textiles and Clothing for 2 years beginning Fall 2012. While we understand that continuing admissions may present a problem to students when the major goes unfunded, capitulating to this concern risks putting the faculty in the place of changing curriculum based on an administration's refusal to fund a program rather than thinking about the instructional needs, disciplinary validity, institutional uniqueness and value, employability of graduates, and contribution to knowledge and society of any given major. While there are logical economic reasons provided for the discontinuation of the major following the dissolution of the Department, there are no *academic* justifications provided for discontinuing the major. And even the absence of these is not remarked upon. The documents simply claim that after the retirement of one FTE the major becomes unsustainable. This rationale could be argued for a plethora of majors across the university and is, in and of itself, not compelling. Without a sufficient *academic* rationale the Undergraduate Council sees no reason to close any major that is viable and has faculty support. The Undergraduate Council is happy to reconsider the request in a timely manner when an academic rationale is presented.

It is further disturbing to some members of the Undergraduate Council that this choice seems to be a deliberate disinvestment in social science, humanities and the arts. Furthermore, while the Undergraduate Council recognizes that efforts have been made to find a new institutional home for the major, the majority decision sees the capitulation to economic necessity that drove the decision to suspend admissions while continuing to seek a solution for the institutional home of the major to be a problematic solution. This establishes a dangerous precedent where in any small department where a dean refuses to restore an FTE a legitimate economic argument could be made for dissolution, and majors seem to be collateral damage of this restructuring rather than part of a carefully thought through academic plan. While we recognize that certain programs, majors and departments may need to be eliminated due to

financial exigency, we maintain that an academic justification needs to be considered so that the restructuring process does not dilute the mission of the university and the faculty's responsibility for delivering a curriculum that serves the people of California. This is not to say that a significant amount of planning has not already happened at the college level in this regard, but rather that the academic aspect is not visible and that even in the letter of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences decision there are a number of phrases that drew the attention and concern of the Undergraduate Council:

1) *"This case about TXC is far from routine. The faculty involved with the major do not want to close it to admissions."* Given sufficient faculty investment to teach courses in the major it seems difficult to argue for suspension of admissions. The decision might be different were the faculty committed to a shift in academic focus.

2) *"As part of a restructuring plan to reduce total faculty numbers in the College by about thirty-three, the Dean of CA&ES proposed last year to eliminate the Department of Textiles and Clothing. The Dean's decision followed a comparison of the scale and scope of research department by department within CA&ES; the effective provision of undergraduate instruction and the quality of majors were not part of this comparison. The dean concluded that smaller departments were not viable."* This suggests that one of the primary missions of the University of California, the education of the people of California received little or no attention in this decision. While the comments of the letter may not in fact reflect the true scope of the restructuring plan's evaluation, the focus on scope and scale of research if reflected in external dollars will inherently disadvantage any program with a historical, socio-cultural, humanities, or arts element where federal research dollars are minimal at best.

3) *"The TXC major had 90 registered students as of Fall Quarter 2010, following a steady increase over the last decade. Of these 90 students, 82 were women. The TXC major is the only one of its kind within the University of California. In addition to a minor in Textiles and Clothing, the department administers a second major in Fiber and Polymer Science. Because the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering has agreed to be the administrator for Fiber and Polymer Science, a decision to close that major to admissions is not yet required. But few students would be affected. As of Fall Quarter 2010, the Fiber and Polymer Science major had 3 students, all women. The most recent reviews of both majors were positive. The Department of Textiles and Clothing has not been asked for any current material about the TXC major. (The CA&ES Dean's Office could provide some.) Nor has the CA&ES Executive Committee examined the major itself."* Before agreeing to suspend admissions to a major it seems, from the Undergraduate Council's point of view, that the willingness to administer a major should not be the primary grounds for a decision. In this particular case the major is not only unique to the University of California as a whole, it also has healthy numbers, a positive review, and no data was solicited from the faculty prior to making the decision. Furthermore, it seems worthwhile to ask the question whether the major would be less vulnerable if it were slightly refocused and explored the idea of Sustainable Textiles and Clothing since such a major in Agriculture (Sustainable Agriculture) is currently being considered for creation.

4) *“Given the low probability that the TXC major can be maintained longer term, the Executive Committee feels students will be ill-served if they select this major. We recognize that closure of this major to admissions may well set it on a path to where dis-establishment is inevitable. Indeed, it is the intention of the Dean of CA&ES that dis-establishment happen. A number of us are disquieted that the dean has thereby determined curriculum, which should be under the purview of the Academic Senate. Rather than resolve this deep contradiction within UC governance before the fate of the TXC major is determined, we feel it important not to mislead prospective students beginning as soon as possible.”* While we respect the positions of our colleagues and the minority, we feel that student welfare is better served through a vote that insists that the academic mission is the reason for a university and that curricular decisions must be driven by academic decisions and not by fiscal efficiencies.

Minority report in favor of suspending admissions. Some members of Undergraduate Council felt that the closing of the Textile Major is inevitable given the recommendations of the CAES Planning Committee and budgetary constraints. These members felt that admitting students into a major that will soon close was not in the students’ best interest.

Sincerely,

John Yoder, Chair
Undergraduate Council
Davis Division Academic Senate

JY:nk

cc: Robert Powell, Chair, Davis Division Academic Senate
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