Strategic Alignment of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University
Responses to Comments and Questions from SABRRC, Provost’s Council, and Others
April 30, 2010

“The College is encouraged to engage in a broader discussion within the Division of Earth System Sciences (ESS) concerning natural resources programs. There is considerable overlap across the Division in this thematic area and it is possible that such a discussion will result in innovative proposals that involve reorganization/consolidation of related departments, possibly administered within a single college.”

We agree. There are additional opportunities for conversation and College of Forestry faculty has been actively engaged, per our March 15 report and that of the ESS Division. For updates, please refer to ESS Division response of 4.29.10.

“The Wood Science and Engineering department does not meet the minimum guideline for number of faculty, neither does its principal undergraduate program meet graduation guidelines. The College asserts that the department must, nevertheless, be retained as an independent unit because of its strategic importance. Furthermore, restructuring of its graduate program is expected to meet guidelines in the near future. Is there a timeline for achieving this goal, and if the goal is not achieved, should merging with another department, such as Forest Engineering, Resources, and Management, be considered?”

This program is all about strategic alignment and distinction. Wood Science & Engineering at OSU is an internationally renowned program that is unique and distinctive in the Western United States. Its education, research and outreach programs directly support a major economic sector of Oregon and the growing fields of green materials, bioenergy and advanced renewable composites. Stakeholders consider WSE’s programs vital to their well being and global competitiveness. The department is proposing to rebrand and restructure the undergraduate degree program to better meet the needs of Oregon and PNW employers, and attract more students. If the ongoing Cat I and II review process is successful, within the next month a new BS in Renewable Materials will be offered beginning fall 2010. An aggressive marketing and recruiting campaign is being designed and will be rolled out upon approval. Success with this transformation will be measured by monitoring Fall term enrollment starting in fall 2012 and graduation numbers beginning Spring 2014. Conversations are also underway with faculty in the Departments of Crop and Soil Science and Biological and Ecological Engineering in the College of Agricultural Sciences about gaining program efficiencies around renewable materials and their transformation into bio-based products and/or energy. Should our efforts at revitalizing the Departments undergraduate program not succeed, merger of faculty into the Department of Forest Engineering, Resources and Management will be considered.

“The Department of Forest Engineering, Resources and Management offers separate undergraduate programs in a variety of areas, all emphasizing different aspects of forest management. Considering that at least two of these do not meet minimum graduation requirements, could any of these programs be merged and restructured with options?”

FERM programs are also all about strategic alignment and distinction. OSU has the preeminent forest management and forest engineering programs in the western United States and perhaps in the world. Graduates from these undergraduate degree programs are the most highly sought
by industry and governmental agencies. As noted in our March 15 report, the FERM Department is scoping the establishment of a new Cooperative Education program and an aggressive new recruiting program to increase enrollment in all departmental degree programs. Demand for future graduates has been championed by employers, though the current economic downturn in the forest products sector has slowed enrollment growth. We believe there is potential for all degree programs to meet minimum requirement if these efforts are successful over the next five years. Since the March 15 report, the College has formed a Faculty of Forest Management (FM) that is initiating a review of all current options in the undergraduate forest management and forest operations management (FOM) degrees. The FERM faculty have also proposed consolidation of the former forest engineering and forest management graduate programs into a Sustainable Forest Management graduate program.

The forest engineering and forest engineering/civil engineering undergraduate programs are distinctive and widely recognized throughout North America. With this distinction and ABET accreditation it would be highly unlikely that consolidation with the forest management or forest operations management degree programs would be a smart decision or feasible.

The FOM degree was established at the request of the forest sector employers 3 years ago to meet evolving workforce needs. Graduates are just beginning to complete the new program. As the forest sector economy recovers, employers forecast that they will be aggressively recruiting graduates from this program. The FERM Department is currently exploring making the FOM degree one of three tracks within the revised Forest Management degree. If efforts to grow this program are not successful in meeting minimum guidelines for graduates within the next 3-5 years, it may be possible to realign this curriculum with the FM curriculum in some manner.

“In the reduction of “non-essential” instructors, the College cancelled on-campus sections of baccalaureate core courses. What is the impact of this action on other units that may rely on the College’s bacc core courses for their students?”

The College of Forestry does not have the resources needed (human or financial) to teach all courses that are currently required within our various curricula. As a result, we made a business decision to eliminate as many courses as possible that were taught by non-tenure/tenure track faculty. FOR 365 fell into the category of being expendable because of who was teaching it and because it was not required in our undergraduate degree programs. It is still offered via distance and has high enrollment. We did not do liaison with others about the impact of cancelling this class.

“The College indicates that it intends to reassign extension faculty to on-campus instructional responsibilities, primarily in other colleges. Please provide more information concerning this plan, including the availability of instructional assignments that are well suited to the qualifications and expertise of the extension faculty and whether other colleges have the budget and flexibility to hire these faculty?”

This potential tool for meeting funding shortfalls was advanced last summer by the Provost and President. However, no guidance has been provided on how to implement this tool. In anticipation of such guidance, the Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Program identified 1.4 FTE for transfer from OES to E&G funds to meet a mandated plan to balance their budget in
this fiscal year. In the absence of such guidance, this plan will not be implemented, and no further planning has been done to identify specific capacity.

“Budget projections for the next biennium indicate that additional cuts will probably be necessary, possibly in excess of 10%. To what extent will the proposed changes address further decreases in state-appropriated funding?”

The proposed changes are more focused on strategic alignment than preparation for further budget reductions. If state appropriations drop by 10% or more during the next biennium, and if economic conditions and housing markets do not recover, reductions of that magnitude would require termination of programs and accompanying faculty due to inability to offset reductions in research and outreach with tuition increases. Expected retirements are not sufficient to absorb another round of cuts of that magnitude and the last round of cuts has eliminated all positions not considered core to the College’s mission.

“Comments from Provost’s Council about natural resources at OSU.”

The faculty in the College of Forestry is beginning to discuss ways to gain program efficiencies with colleagues in other Colleges who participate in natural resources programs, most especially those in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

“Concern from stakeholders about diminishment of core forest resources undergraduate, research and outreach programs.”

Continue focus on and delivery of the core functions of higher education related to sustainably meeting the needs of a growing human population for renewable forest resources and forest ecosystem services, revising them as needed to best serve the needs of agencies, businesses and organizations that provide the fundamentals of a quality life.