

Idaho State Journal, Friday, Oct. 9, 2009 – by Yann Ranaivo (2 pages)

Coming together?

Merger proposed of ISU's pharmacy, health colleges

POCATELLO — Idaho State University Provost Gary Olson has proposed to merge the College of Pharmacy and the Kasiska College of Health Professions.

Olson said both colleges educate students going into the health field, and a merger would help ISU become more efficient in its administration of health sciences programs.

“It’s not so much a budget-saving tactic as it is creating a very strong and very united health science unit within ISU,” Olson said. “It would be smart “because it would bring a lot of the university’s resources together).”

Olson said merging both colleges is one idea ISU is considering as it mulls over ways to cope with recent budget cuts.

Due to a 6 percent state budget holdback imposed on state universities, ISU is looking to trim nearly \$4 million from its fiscal year 2010 budget. Late last month, ISU President Arthur Vailas said the university will likely undergo a substantial reorganization rather than focusing on personnel cuts or asking each department to reduce its budget.

Olson, who writes guest columns for the Chronicle of Higher Education, wrote a piece titled “The Unkindest Cut of All,” which was published Monday. In his column, he writes it is counterproductive for universities to enforce across-the-board spending cuts.

“Requiring your very best and most productive programs to be reduced at the same rate as your least productive areas shows a lack of imagination and an absence of strategic thinking,” Olson writes. “A more strategic approach would be to analyze which areas of the university are contributing least to its mission and which are helping it propel forward. When an institution approaches the process from that perspective, it is even conceivable that some areas might gain funds at the very moment that other areas are being trimmed or eliminated.”

Olson made a bullet list at the end of his column, explaining the priorities universities should have when facing budget cuts. The list states universities should protect its revenue generators, protect and even nurture principal programs, protect core faculty members, eliminate non-essential personnel and programs first, reduce departmental commitments, consider mergers and seek to reduce the number of administrators when possible.

“Some departments and programs might thrive if joined together while also saving the university money by eliminating redundant administrative overhead,” he writes in his discussion of mergers. “It might even make sense, for example, to combine several small departments into one unit rather than let them limp along as separate entities. An added advantage might be increased collaboration among faculty members.”

Proposals to merge departments and colleges have not been uncommon at ISU during the past decade . In the early 2000s, there was a proposal to merge the College of Technology and College of Engineering. Talks of merging colleges and departments resurfaced last year when ISU had to cope with 4 percent state holdbacks.

Earlier this year, ISU sought to identify cost savings in the College of Engineering by merging four of the college's departments on a temporary basis. The computer science and electrical engineering departments were joined, and so were nuclear engineering and mechanical engineering.

Among other programs, the Kasiska College offers degrees in dental hygiene and nursing.