Dear Colleagues:

In early May, 2013, Academic Senate Chair Bruno Nachtergaele and Provost Hexter charged a Task Force, co-chaired by Academic Senate Vice Chair André Knoesen and (then Interim) Vice Provost-Undergraduate Education Carolyn de la Peña, to study the issues raised by a proposal emerging from the MPS division within L&S that MPS form a separate college. The charge of the task force was to think broadly about the organization of L&S in light of the proposal submitted by the faculty of MPS suggesting the creation of a separate College of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, knowing that were MPS to be constituted as a college separate from L&S, this would have significant ramifications for the other two divisions and the campus as a whole.

The Task Force’s final report was received in early February and was made available shortly thereafter. We thank the Task Force again for its thorough, careful and timely work. Since the creation of the Task Force, we have engaged in thinking carefully about the future of the College of Letters & Science. We have spoken on multiple occasions with all three deans and also sought advice from Senate leadership. Additionally, we recently announced that Professor Susan Kaiser will serve as the interim dean of HArCS, effective July 1, 2014, and we have solicited her preliminary views on the optimal organization of L&S as well.

The Academic Senate is awaiting formal responses from its several committees to the task force’s report, and their input and other perspectives that emerge will continue to inform evolving thinking in significant ways. What seems so far uncontroverted is that the administrative structure of the College of Letters and Science needs considered attention and renewal. For all the great work that is being done across L&S, there exist organizational and administrative barriers to the college’s achieving its maximum potential so that it is fully recognized as constituting one of the core intellectual pillars on which the greatness of our university rests.

At the highest level, we believe that the future success of L&S can best be realized within a structure that is more rather than less unified. Like every other such college across the

nation, L&S includes departments and programs that reflect a breathtaking diversity of disciplines. And as elsewhere, the challenge is to find a way to advance the excellence and prominence of the individual disciplines while supporting, for faculty and students, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels, interdisciplinary activities out of which emerge new discoveries, extraordinary conceptual breakthroughs, and the most bracing intellectual experiences. We especially want our undergraduates to experience their time in the college as an exciting adventure of the mind.

With these ends in mind, we propose that L&S remain a single college but that the structure of the college be re-envisioned. Specifically, we suggest that we search for and appoint a single Dean of the College of Letters & Science. While this dean’s span may be large, it is certainly not larger than the portfolios of Arts & Sciences deans at many peer institutions (e.g., publics such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington, Virginia, and Illinois, not to mention many private universities). Effective implementation of this structure would require the recruitment of an extraordinary individual who will have both the capacity to extend and build upon our current excellence as well as to effect, indeed inspire, a spirit of flexibility, collaboration and adventure so that all members of the college can discover and realize new possibilities and opportunities for excellence. We believe such a reframing of the college will be viewed as a tremendously exciting opportunity and challenge, a fact that is likely to attract highly experienced faculty administrators from the nation’s leading universities.

Of course, such a transformational change brings with it a host of specific questions and considerations, including the structure of the L&S dean’s office itself. It will be important to be mindful of the lessons of our college’s past history and learn from them, to the extent they remain applicable today.

To further engage the campus community in this forward-looking examination of L&S, the provost will appoint a work group to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of this suggested structure. The work group’s task would in some ways not be very different from the trio of task forces that pondered the hypothesis of growth that the 2020 Initiative involves. In this instance, the work group would consider, among other questions, whether it would make sense to have associate deans assigned to each of the current divisions (known at some universities as “divisional deans”) or associate deans with functional assignments such as undergraduate affairs (including pre-major advising), research, international, development etc., or some hybrid form. We would also want to look in some detail at the organizational structures of other comparable colleges, including other UC campuses, and could arrange for visits from deans of colleges elsewhere to benefit and learn from their experiences.

In developing the appropriate composition of the work group, the provost will consult with Academic Senate and Federation leadership, the L&S deans and their steering committees, the Staff Assembly and others. Over the summer, he will work with the (as yet unnamed) chair or co-chairs of the work group to finalize its charge and to assemble basic information and materials so that the work group could begin in earnest in the fall. We will look for a report by Winter Quarter of 2014-15 and foresee a crucial period of discussion and comment. It is impossible, naturally, to anticipate the conclusions of this process, but if
significant restructuring is called for, we will not embark upon it until we have worked out, with careful consultation, a clear transition plan. Our goal is to create structure and functions that can be supported by all constituents, and constituent parts, of the college.

Structure is not the only issue that needs to be addressed in L&S. We are also committed to discerning whether, where and to what extent investments in the college fall short of appropriate levels and to identifying means to close the gaps as rapidly as possible. The provost has already provided investments to ensure sufficient seats in high-demand gateway courses and to expand advising; in different ways he has enabled more support of both doctoral education and faculty scholarship. His support for continued faculty hiring will be clear in the provost allocations and authorizations for 2014-15. Issues of infrastructure, including buildings and facilities, are also being addressed in a holistic manner. Clearly, such investment is a multiyear process.

These investments are more important now than ever, as recent discussions have deepened our sense that L&S must be one of the educational and intellectual pillars on which the greatness of our university rests. For UC Davis to enter the very top ranks of great research universities, our College of Letters & Science must be supported and resourced in a manner that demonstrates and enhances its excellence as well.

We look forward to continuation of the discussions about further advancing the excellence of L&S and welcome your thoughts and feedback on the suggestions we propose.

Sincerely,

Linda P.B. Katehi
Chancellor

Ralph J. Hexter
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor