Merger Proposed for Three SU Schools

Vice Chancellor and Provost Deborah A. Freund has announced plans to explore the development of a new school that would combine the College for Human Development, the College of Nursing, and the School of Social Work into a single, multidisciplinary academic unit specializing in human services and health. “These three units already share a commitment to improving humankind and the quality of life through their academic concentrations,” Freund says. “By bringing the various disciplines together into one unit, we can create a school that is on the cutting edge of research, teaching, and practice.”

Plans for the new school must be presented to and approved by the University Senate and the Board of Trustees. Freund says the multidisciplinary nature of the school, and the facilitated collaboration between faculty members with similar academic and research interests, would help create an environment that fosters personal and professional development and maximizes learning for faculty as well as students. Freund also envisions an overall strengthening of programs and increased potential for funding from such sources as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Freund’s belief in the potential for a strong new school is shared by many of her colleagues across campus. “This is an opportune time to consider ways to build a stronger University,” says School of Social Work Dean William L. Pollard, who would serve as dean of the new academic unit. “The proposal for a new school presents a chance for all three units to move forward in a positive direction, to become better and stronger, and to make the University better and stronger as a result.”

Pollard says the common interests of human development, nursing, and social work represent the new unit’s greatest source of strength—a foundation upon which the new school would be built. “Through our various programs and majors, we all deal with some of society’s weightiest issues—things like mental health, child care, primary care, long-term care, nutrition, health care, and family therapy,” he says. “By pooling our respective strengths, we can take a stronger, more efficient approach to these issues. We can raise—and answer—the important questions. And we can create a significant tool for education in the 21st century.”

Freund acknowledges that the proposal for a new school may be greeted with wariness by many of the individuals involved. “I am well aware that some faculty members are concerned about their programs and departments,” she says. “I want to assure them that their professional identities will be maintained and that we will work together on these areas of concern as we go through this process. In the long run I fully believe that the intellectual lives and practical training of our students would be greatly enhanced by the creation of this school.”

Freund says the new school would have the potential to meet several long-term goals, including the development of a shared Ph.D. program and the formation of two University-wide research centers: one focusing on issues relating to children and families, the other focusing on scholarship and practice.

She says faculty from other SU schools and colleges that share common interests also would be invited to play a role in the new school. And she hopes to see the new school help foster a connection between the University and the SUNY Health Science Center by “building a bridge of research and teaching.”

Freund notes that students currently enrolled in human development, nursing, or social work would not be negatively affected by the merger; majors and degree programs would continue uninterrupted.

Freund will convene a planning committee consisting of faculty, students, staff, and members of the three units’ boards of visitors and consultants. Committee members will work together to define various aspects of the new school, including its title and its administrative organization.

“I want the future of the new school to be charted by the students, faculty, and staff who will be a part of it,” says Freund.

—WENDY S. LOUGHLIN

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