Colleges integrate fields

By Anna Weggel

This article is a first in a three-part series outlining various structural changes to the University a task force recommended to University President Bob Bruininks in March. Bruininks will propose some or all of these recommendations to the Board of Regents in May, and the board will vote on them in June.

Recent task force recommendations for the University’s future suggest creating a new College of Design and Institute of the Environment.

Aside from changes to General College and the College of Human Ecology, these new colleges would integrate strengths from a variety of subjects into a stronger whole, according to the task force report.

The College of Design would integrate the department of design, housing and apparel with the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture.

Becky Yust, head of the department of design, housing and apparel, said she doesn’t think any of her programs will be negatively affected by the changes.

“We often don’t have the chance to reinvent ourselves in academia, so that part is exciting and also challenging,” she said.

But Yust said she is concerned about the loss of the College of Human Ecology, which has attributes that contribute to her department’s strength.

She said the college meets the standards of excellence the University wants every college to meet.

“Basically, we’re going to need to build that in a new College of Design,” Yust said. “It does take work to sustain excellence and grow, and doing that
Yust said she is in favor of the proposed changes and hopes the regents will not only support them but make them stronger.

The task force also recommended reconfiguring the University’s sciences and engineering departments to make the most of four colleges’ strengths.

The colleges included are the College of Biological Sciences, the Institute of Technology, the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, and the College of Natural Resources.

The plan aims to strengthen the core of biology and its connections to the physical sciences, mathematics and engineering in the Institute of Technology by creating a new Institute of the Environment.

The institute will combine subjects in the College of Natural Resources, the College of Biological Sciences, the College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, and other fields, which will become the central focus for environmental research and teaching at the University.

The report stated the colleges’ locations constrain faculty members and students from developing research and making discoveries.

In a newsletter, Bob Elde, dean of the College of Biological Sciences, encouraged people to give the plan serious thought and engage in discussions with colleagues.

“This is our opportunity to shape our own future and the future of the University,” he wrote.

Elde wrote that the proposal provides a good starting point for brainstorming about people’s ideal vision for biology at the University.

“Over the past few months we have identified infusions of knowledge needed to advance our disciplines,” he wrote. “This is the time to connect our plan with the University’s plan.”
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