University Regents to Vote on Academic Changes June 10

The University of Minnesota Board of Regents will take public testimony Monday on President Robert Bruininks' plan to eliminate the General College and two other colleges as part of an effort to increase focus on public research.

Regents Chairman David Metzen said the 10 a.m. forum on the sixth floor of the McNamara Alumni Building will be very important in helping regents decide whether to approve the plan for overhauling the university's academic programs.

Metzen said after Friday's board meeting that regents will not delay a June 10 vote on the plan, which would kick off the most sweeping changes at the University in decades and would save up to $25 million over three to four years.

Twelve DFL senators -- including Metzen's brother, Sen. James Metzen -- had written to regents asking that the board put off a decision until November to get more input.

Under Bruininks' plan, General College would become a department within the college of education. Bruininks said the mission of helping academically struggling students would be kept and offered across campus.

For nearly 75 years, General College has kept a door open to underprepared students, offering an intensive focus on English, writing and math so the students can transfer to other colleges within the university.

Bruininks said the graduation rates of students starting at General College were "intolerably low" and said the university would fall short of its overall goals to boost graduation rates if General College stayed in its current form.

Fewer than 10 percent of the students who start in General College graduate from the university in four years, compared to 32 percent overall on the Twin Cities campus, he said. By 2012, the university hopes to have a 50 percent four-year graduation rate and a 75 percent six-year graduation rate.

Bruininks' plan also includes:

- Closing the College of Human Ecology and moving its programs to other colleges.
• Merging the College of Natural Resources into the College of Agriculture.

• A new College of Design that would include the current college of architecture.

• A campus honors program.

• A new emphasis on undergraduate writing.

Those fighting the closure of General College maintain graduation rates are a university-wide problem, and that other colleges haven’t done enough to keep students on track after they transfer from General College.

The greatest divide seems to be over what the future holds for students of color and low-income youth on the Twin Cities campus without General College.

Supporters of General College also say closing the college is a sign that university leaders are more interested in global reputations than in serving Minnesotans, a charge the administration denies.

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