U plan may fold a third college

Mary Jane Smetanka, Star Tribune
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At least three colleges, not two, probably would be absorbed by bigger colleges in the University of Minnesota's proposed reorganization.

The report released this week that aims to make the university one of the world's top three public research universities proposes that the College of Natural Resources, one of the smallest of the university's 18 colleges, be "realign[ed] and integrat[ed]" with other units.

While the report never says the college should close, university Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Thomas Sullivan said, "A careful reading of the proposal suggests that is a possibility."

The report also proposes that General College become a department in the College of Education and Human Development and that College of Human Ecology departments be split up among other, possibly new colleges.

General College will fight the proposal, but deans of human ecology and natural resources say they are looking forward to the redesign.

"We're going to support the plan because higher education really is at a crossroads," said Human Ecology Dean Shirley Baugher. "We have to make significant decisions about how to organize and create quality."
"When people say, 'Are you going to disappear? Are we going away? Is what we do going to be lost?', my answer is what we do and who we are and the contributions we make are going to be bigger and better," she said.

Stafford sent a reassuring e-mail to the roughly 45 tenure-track faculty members and other staff members in the college, which enrolls fewer than 600 students. With Human Ecology, it is the smallest of the colleges that don't educate professionals such as doctors and lawyers.

Stafford said that most natural resources faculty members already work closely with people in other colleges and that many are excited by the possibility of reorganization. "We know the future will be different," she said. "Every single e-mail, every note I've gotten, say this is exciting."

University officials say reorganization in areas related to biology and the environment is critical if the school is to capitalize on its research strengths. The job is complex enough that new task forces will study that issue and report in December.

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