II.E.14. Procedures for the Establishment, Merger and Closing of Departments, Divisions and Similar Entities within Schools

(Source: Offices of the President and Provost, Almanac, September 5 1995; proposed, for comment, Almanac, April 30, 2002 and approved, Almanac, September 3, 2002; revised, as Article 10, Statutes of the Trustees, November 2, 2001)

According to the Statutes of the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, “Upon recommendation of the President and Provost, the Trustees may authorize the establishment, merging, or closing of departments, divisions or similar entities in schools that do not have departments.” Subject to the statutes of the University, these procedures govern the establishment, merger and closing of departments, divisions and similar entities (hereinafter “departments”) within the schools of the University.

Although the organization of a school into departments is an administrative decision, the dean should make a recommendation concerning the establishment, merger or closing of a department only after careful study and consultation with involved faculty inside and outside the school, including discussion in a meeting of the faculty of the school. The process leading to such recommendations requires special care in reviewing possible courses of action, special efforts to consult early and often with interested parties, and special sensitivity to the legitimate interests of faculty who may be affected.

Careful Study

The decision to establish, merge or close a department should be based upon academic considerations and priorities as determined by the faculty as a whole or appropriate committees hereof. Accordingly, there should be early and meaningful faculty involvement in the process leading to decisions relating to the creation, reorganization or reduction of instructional and research programs.

Schools having a departmental structure should have regular reviews of departments. Departmental reviews should be used to provide departments with timely notice of any shortcomings and the need for improvement and to provide school decision-makers with information essential to a sound evaluation of the department. Such reviews also provide formal and informal opportunities to alert departments to the school’s plans. Departmental reviews should not be triggered by specific proposals for closing or making other adverse changes to a department. However, when a closing is being considered, there should be a timely external review.

Consultation

1. Most, if not all, schools, and the University as a whole, have faculty committees charged with responsibility to review planning and budget decisions. Such committees should be involved in the process leading to decisions to establish, merge or close departments. However, such reviews are not substitutes for early and frequent consultation with the faculty of the affected departments themselves and/or with the faculty as a whole. Consultation should include
the opportunity for thorough discussion at a meeting of the faculty of the school. Consultation also will require soliciting an advisory vote, in favor of or against the proposed course of action, from those members of the faculty of the school with voting privileges. Although such vote is advisory only, in most circumstances the dean should act in accordance with the advice received.

2. Action to establish, merge or close departments within one school may have serious implications for the activities and resources of departments in other schools. At such time as a dean initiates consultation with the faculty of the school directly affected, he/she should send a communication to all other deans requesting that they bring the possibility of the action to the attention of their colleagues who may be interested and inviting comment.

Informing Departments of Recommendations to Close

1. Given that department closings typically follow a protracted period during which the department in question receives limited resources, school administrations have ample time to explain the implications of such action for the future. Departments that are at risk should be so informed promptly and provided with a full, frank and detailed explanation of the reasons.

2. Faculty members of a department facing closure must be informed well before a formal recommendation is publicly announced. At that time, they must be given information regarding their future at the University and the procedures the school has initiated to find a new University affiliation for them.

Academic Freedom

1. Although decisions regarding departmental structure may be made for reasons that would not justify adverse action against an individual faculty member, ordinarily they do not for that reason give rise to an academic freedom violation. However, even if all appropriate review and consultation procedures have been followed, structural decisions concerning a department may present delicate and difficult questions of academic freedom.

2. In cases where academic freedom issues appear to be raised, the dean should seek the advice of the committee on academic freedom and responsibility of the school or the Faculty Senate at a sufficiently early stage for that advice to be considered before the dean makes a recommendation.

3. Aggrieved faculty members have the right to complain of the dean’s action to the appropriate committee on academic freedom and responsibility.