

Yale Plan Draws Faculty Fire

Sky-rocketing costs, reduced enrollments, and tight federal funding are wracking research universities throughout the United States. But few have opted for as drastic a treatment as the one key officials at Yale University prescribed last week.

A report, released by the Committee on Restructuring the Faculty of Arts and Sciences but not yet approved by the university's board of trustees, calls for: cutting faculty by 11%; eliminating two entire departments—operations research and linguistics; merging three engineering departments; and decreasing the sociology department's faculty by 40%. All told, 65 to 75 faculty positions would be eliminated (through attrition, not layoffs) over the next decade.

No institutional surgery this severe could be carried out without cries of pain. But the criticisms already being leveled could prove damaging to the university officials responsible. Specifically, critics charge that the insiders represented on the 15-person committee protected their own. Says Alessandro Gomez, a newly hired assistant professor of mechanical engineering and therefore in one of the departments slated for merger: "By and large, all those departments represented on the committee were hit far less than other departments."

Other Yale faculty take an even darker view, arguing that the decisions about which areas should be cut were made before the committee was even appointed by Yale president Benno Schmidt Jr. last February. Says Werner Wolf, head of the applied physics department, which is scheduled to merge with physics: "They had already made up their mind on what they're going to do—the committee was constituted [that] way."

Judith Rodin, dean of the graduate school and a restructuring committee member, acknowledges that "there's an argument for worrying about areas being targeted when no one's on the committee." But Rodin points to exceptions like the economics department, which, despite having three faculty on the committee, would lose an average number of positions in the proposed changes: 7 out of 68.5. Further, Rodin argues, the restructuring shouldn't be taken by its targets as criticism. "It isn't a matter of cutting weakness," she says, adding that it was a "matter of a university trying to come to grips with diminishing resources." Rodin and other administrators point to a projected \$8.8 million deficit in Yale's 1991-1992 budget and a potential decline in future revenue if the government cuts Yale's rate of reimbursement for indirect costs during current negotiations.

Such arguments do not mollify Yale's engineering faculty, which would lose a total of 12 faculty positions (tenured faculty count as 2 positions and nontenured as 1) in the recommended merger of the chemical, electrical, and mechanical engineering departments. The engineers are particularly irked because less than 3 years ago, Schmidt declared a "renewed commitment" to engineering, in the form of an initiative that would enable the three departments to hire 10 junior faculty over the next 5 years. Instead, says Tso-Ping Ma, head of electrical engineering, "this will put Yale's engineering and applied science in serious jeopardy."

Repeated attempts to contact Schmidt were unsuccessful, but to *Science* Rodin explained the cuts in engineering this way: "We were never going to grow to be the most

diverse and most broad applied sciences institution, that's simply not our strength. We wanted to become the most consolidated."

The game isn't over for the engineers and those in other threatened departments. The committee has given them until 17 February to make their case, and faculty in the engineering departments and elsewhere say they are gearing up to make a final pitch to save their programs. But some of those facing cuts aren't in an optimistic frame of mind. Engineer Gomez, for example, thinks the committee's proposals are "a fait accompli." Adds Ma, "The junior faculty see the writing on the wall. The best ones will get attractive offers and they will leave." But it may not take that long for the recent events to have serious repercussions at Yale. As *Science* went to press it was learned that Yale's graduate student union was planning to meet and vote on the possibility of striking against the cutbacks proposed in the committee's report. ■ RICHARD STONE

Stanford and MIT in the Dock?

The national controversy over the indirect costs of research, driven by efforts of Congressman John Dingell (D-MI) to root out overcharges by universities, has caused the research community much pain. There's been the loss of public prestige for research universities, the resignation of Donald Kennedy as president of Stanford, and givebacks of millions of dollars at a time when universities couldn't afford it less. But the situation could get worse.

For one thing, the government has escalated its demands of some universities into the hundreds of millions of dollars (*Science*, 8 November 1991, p. 788). And as if that weren't worrisome enough, the charges may move beyond the arena of controversy into that of criminality.

Investigators from the Department of Defense (DOD) are looking for evidence that indirect cost overcharges at Stanford and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology constitute criminal fraud. The investigation is being conducted by the Naval Investigative Service (NIS), one of DOD's several investigative offices. It has been under way for several months but was only recently revealed by articles in *The Boston Globe* and *The San Jose Mercury News*. According to Ernest Simmen, deputy assistant director for fraud at the NIS, the probe was spurred by findings of auditors from the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA). DCAA began its audit of university indirect cost charges in 1990, following allegations of impropriety at Stanford by Office of Na-

val Research negotiator Paul Biddle. What precisely has been uncovered by DCAA Simmen refuses to say—he won't even say whether the investigation has turned up evidence of crime. "You don't know when you first look at something whether this is fraud or just a misunderstanding," he told *Science*.

The focus of the criminal investigation is a set of negotiated agreements called memoranda of understanding, or MOUs. Stanford and MIT (and other universities) have routinely used MOUs to recover what they consider to be legitimate costs of research—such as equipment depreciation or library expenses—that may not be fully covered under standard government guidelines. But Biddle has alleged that some MOUs are so generous to the universities as to be fraudulent. Last year, the DCAA found reason to cancel all of Stanford's MOUs, bringing its indirect cost rate crashing down from 74% to 55%.

Spokesmen for both MIT and Stanford say the universities are cooperating fully with the ongoing criminal investigation. In a letter to the Department of Defense last week after the *Globe* story appeared, MIT vice president for financial operations James Culliton said he had no knowledge of crimes. But it could be some time before the two universities find out whether they're going to wind up in the dock. The next step in criminal proceedings would be for the NIS to take the case to the U.S. Attorney, but the agency isn't saying when—or even whether—that will happen. ■ MARCIA BARINAGA