

Dear Chancellor Mnookin,

As campus labor organizations, we urge you to abandon plans to reorganize business operations at the University along a “shared services” model, and instead seek meaningful input from staff, faculty, and students. Because we value the work we do and the mission of the University, we support efforts to improve efficiency and streamline campus processes. We have yet to see evidence that shared services will accomplish these goals. Divisional and campus leadership have not offered a clear business case for the restructuring, and divisional leaders have pursued it without offering department staff, faculty, and leadership the opportunity for substantial input. We therefore request a series of open meetings in order to fully explore the plans and to ensure that we have access to the information we require in order to participate in meaningful consultation.

We are aware that many Universities of Wisconsin campuses already operate with shared services and that the School of Medicine and Public Health at UW-Madison has done so for some time. In August, the College of Letters and Science unveiled a plan to create five bodies now called “Administrative Regional Teams” (ARTs) above the department level that, if implemented, will handle HR, finance, and research administration for collections of related departments by July 2025. We suspect other divisions are also considering such changes. We say “suspect,” because communication about these matters with formal shared governance bodies on campus has been scant, and communication with labor organizations has been nonexistent. We have heard rumors that central campus leadership is considering adopting a shared services model for the University as a whole. If this is true, then our request for meetings and opportunities for substantive input by staff are especially urgent.

As we review the communications so far around the Administrative Regional Teams plan in the College of Letters and Science, important questions remain unanswered. Among these are the following:

1. What is not working right now, and how do we know? The 2024 Administrative Quality Satisfaction Survey showed a high degree of satisfaction on campus with local services. Those results do not cry out for a “fix.” What reviews have central campus and the divisions conducted to evaluate the quality, efficiency, and resilience of existing processes and staffing models? When were these reviews conducted, and what are their results? How do we know shared services will solve the problems we have?
2. According to the knowledge base article created by the College to support its transition, creating ARTs will not save money. Will implementing this plan cost more than retaining our existing staffing model would? If so, how much? And how will the University cover the increased costs? What benefits justify those costs?

3. Are there completed business cases for any of the reorganizations that are happening in the divisions? When can staff, faculty, and students expect to see those?
4. How will we know whether reorganizations like those proposed in the College of Letters and Science succeed? What baseline data is available to evaluate operations before and after the changes? What comparisons are available of operations in SMPH to those in divisions that have kept financial, research, and HR functions at the department level?
5. How are end users of services to be involved in implementing and evaluating these changes?
6. Who is responsible for identifying and solving process and performance problems with the newly reorganized services?
7. Why has there been so little consultation with shared governance bodies for faculty, academic staff, and university staff as these reorganizations have proceeded? Is the way these changes have been rolled out consistent with Regents Policy Document 20-20? This document states that each UW-System institution should provide University staff with “the opportunity to be active participants in the immediate governance of and policy development for the institution” and “the primary responsibility for the formulation and review, and representation in the development, of all policies and procedures concerning University Staff members, including University Staff personnel matters.” Is the rollout of shared services at UW-Madison consistent with this policy?

Although we take some comfort in reassurances from divisional leadership that no staff will lose their jobs because of the College’s reorganization, we remain concerned that the change is already pushing some of our most experienced and knowledgeable colleagues to retire early. We worry about this loss of institutional knowledge and about the lack of connection new employees hired into the ARTs may have with the departments they will serve.

Concerns about these changes are not limited to campus labor organizations. It is our understanding, for example, that faculty in the Chemistry Department have taken a vote of no confidence in the plan to create Administrative Regional Teams. Given such significant opposition from a core department on campus, we feel that it is incumbent on leadership to allow for meaningful dialogue on the proposed new staffing models. Many of our members in the College of Letters and Science have attended multiple meetings about the ARTs. At no point has there been an opportunity for input that could genuinely affect the course of events. Those of us on the receiving end of this reorganization feel like it is being done TO us, not WITH us. Faculty, staff, and graduate students across the UW System have asked to meet regularly with University leadership through “Meet & Confer,” which Governor Evers endorsed this fall. Why

not start now? We urge you to meet with workers impacted by the ARTs and with campus labor organizations. Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

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