April 22, 2005

President Emeritus Peter T. Flawn
Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson
Vice President Juan M. Sanchez
Vice President Patricia C. Ohlendorf
Dean Victoria E. Rodriguez
Dean Mary Ann Rankin
Dr. Linda Reichl
Dr. William Fisher
Dr William D. Carlson
Dr. Paul Stoffa
Dr. Scott Tinker
Dr. Clark Wilson
Mr. James C. Patterson
Members of the Jackson School of Geosciences
Members of the Faculty Council Executive Committee
Members of the Faculty Council

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to conclude an extensive, two-year process in which our University has considered the optimal organization of units relating to the geosciences. My recommendation to the leadership of the UT System is that we proceed to transform the Jackson School of Geosciences into a federated unit organized at the campus level and led by a dean. Through separate correspondence, I am today transmitting that recommendation to Executive Vice Chancellor Teresa A. Sullivan for the next steps of review. To become effective, this proposal will require formal action by Dr. Sullivan, by the Regents, and by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

I am also authorizing Provost Ekland-Olson to begin the search for the first Dean of the Jackson School. Of course, no such officer can be appointed before the School is legally authorized as proposed, but it seems to me appropriate to begin the search process now. Before candidates are actually interviewed, it should become clear whether ultimate approval is to be gained.

Please let me now summarize the basis for my decision:

Much of the drive comes from the creation of the Jackson Endowment, which is larger than $250 million and represents the most extraordinary flexible resource available in the geosciences, certainly on this campus and probably anywhere in the world. It principally supports the work of faculty, professional staff members, and students in three sizable units (the Department of Geological Sciences, the Institute of Geophysics, and the Bureau of Economic Geology); however the terms of the gift define a scope that extends beyond these units to include certain other activities within the University.
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Given the scale and transformative potential of the gift, I concluded in 2003 that we should not establish patterns of use without careful thought about the most effective strategy for developing the geosciences at the University. Toward that end, I appointed a Jackson School Vision Committee under the leadership of President Emeritus Peter T. Flawn. It reported in December 2003 with many recommendations. Principal among them was that a college-like structure be created to bring the three units into closer interaction and common governance. The report is available on the web at the following address: www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/jackson_report_2003.pdf.

The Jackson School already existed when the Vision Committee was appointed, but it was (and is now) a coordinating, not a governing, structure. It was set up to enable effective joint use of the proceeds of the much smaller Jackson Endowment that had been created through Mr. Jackson’s gifts before his death. The three units remain organizationally situated as they had been earlier, with the Department and the Institute reporting to the Dean of the College of Natural Sciences and the Bureau reporting to the Vice President for Research.

In late 2003 and early 2004, I received comments on the Vision Committee’s report, and on April 1, 2004, I issued to all members of the Jackson School (i.e., to the members of the three units) a detailed response to the Report of the Jackson School Vision Committee. This memorandum is also available on the web: www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/jackson_040104.pdf. I laid out three possible organizational paths that the University might follow and invited further comment. On the basis of the responses and my own further analysis, I concluded in a follow-up memorandum dated April 29, 2004, that it would be best to pursue the concept of a “federated school.” This last memorandum can be found on the web: www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/jackson_042904.html.

To design a specific plan for the federated school, I invited a Jackson School Implementation Committee to devise a draft charter that could be examined and discussed by all members. The Implementation Committee was chaired by Professor William D. Carlson and included representatives from all three constituent units. It also included two respected members of the faculty from outside the Jackson School. The Implementation Committee began its work in the summer of 2004. Through several cycles of consultation with the leadership and membership of the units making up the Jackson School, the Committee recommended a charter in February 2005. This charter can be viewed at: www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/jackson_charter.pdf.

Early last month, Provost Ekland-Olson formally requested that each unit respond to the Implementation Committee’s recommendation by taking a vote on the following language:

The (unit name) endorses the draft Charter for the Jackson School of Geosciences dated February 7, 2005, and formally requests that the School be established under the Charter and that the (unit name) be included in the School.
Strongly affirmative votes were manifested in all three constituent units. The Provost subsequently recommended that the University move forward to create the School.

In late March, I asked for consideration of the proposal by the Faculty Council Executive Committee. The Committee decided to refer it for discussion in the Faculty Council as a whole.

The proposal was placed on the agenda of the Faculty Council meeting of April 11, 2005. On that occasion, Dr. William Fisher, Dr. William Carlson, and Dean Mary Ann Rankin spoke on behalf of the Jackson School leadership, the Implementation Committee, and the College of Natural Sciences, respectively. A general discussion ensued. The following resolution, at odds with the outcome of prior process, was adopted by the Faculty Council on a 22-6 vote:

RESOLUTION REGARDING THE JACKSON SCHOOL OF GEOSCIENCES

Professor John C. (Jack) Gilbert (chemistry and biochemistry and Faculty Council member) submitted the following resolution regarding the Jackson School of Geosciences. On April 11, 2005, the Faculty Council discussed the resolution and endorsed it by count of hands, 22 to 6.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The Faculty Council

Resolution Regarding Jackson School of Geosciences

- Whereas the goal of The University of Texas is to foster excellence in teaching and research

  and

- Whereas one approach to achieving this goal is by organizing undergraduate and graduate programs according to commonality of disciplines within a single administrative unit

  and

- Whereas developing interdisciplinary programs, which may involve both teaching and research, is possible across colleges and schools, it is most readily accomplished within a single administrative unit
and

- Whereas the purpose of the bequest by John A. and Katherine G. Jackson to pursue sustained leadership and highest distinction in "the subjects of geology, geophysics, energy, mineral, and water resources; as well as the broad areas [emphasis mine] of the earth sciences, including the Earth's environment," topics that are closely correlated with a number of teaching and research disciplines of academic units currently embedded in the College of Natural Sciences

and

- Whereas there should be compelling reasons for creating new colleges and schools in terms of the benefits that will accrue to the teaching and research programs of the entire academic enterprise of The University

Be it therefore resolved that it is not in the best long-term interests of The University of Texas to separate the John A. and Katherine G. Jackson School of Geosciences from the College of Natural Sciences.

Distributed through the Faculty Council web site (www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/) on April 12, 2005. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500

1 Count corrected from "22 to 11" to "22 to 6" on April 20, 2005.

Since April 11, I have been considering the content of the discussion in the meeting of the Faculty Council, as well as the resolution itself. My decision, as announced in the opening paragraph of this letter, is to proceed with the proposal to establish the Jackson School on a free-standing basis. Here are points that make up the main basis for this decision:

1. It is clearly the overwhelming preference of the members of the Jackson School to organize as proposed. The consultation process leading to the charter was very extensive and was carried out almost wholly by the membership itself. The charter was endorsed in all three units without dissent. In subsequent review, I do not believe that less affected members of the University's faculty can exercise a veto over the wishes of more affected members. The less affected members can and should raise questions. Therefore, the consideration at this stage is one of substance: Was there, in the Faculty Council debate, a persuasive argument that the process has been on the wrong track? After the meeting of April 11, I asked this question of the leadership of the Jackson School, including the leaders of all units. They judged that no argument had been presented that had not already been carefully considered, and they unanimously urged me to proceed toward establishing the free-standing school as proposed.
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2. The resolution adopted by the Faculty Council is not cognizant of the actual current situation of the affected units. The expressed preference that the Jackson School "remain" in the College of Natural Sciences implies that it is now there. In fact, a large portion -- approaching half -- lies outside the College. A main purpose of the reorganization is to bring the geosciences units into a common structure. The preference expressed in the vote of the Faculty Council leaves this fundamental problem unresolved.

3. The formal action by the Faculty Council was taken by sub-quorum vote following a debate in which no Jackson School members had the right to speak in rebuttal (even though many were in the room). These facts dictate that I cannot give this action precedence over the outcome of the extensive, carefully considered process that preceded it. I was present for the entire discussion in the Faculty Council and am able to consider individual points made there. One set of them seem to me worthy of additional review, and I indicate below that they will be followed up.

4. I believe that there is unacceptable risk in the implied alternative of a reorganization that brings the Jackson School together as a federated unit, but within the College of Natural Sciences. First, I judge that this model puts the Bureau of Economic Geology in a much less effective, probably unworkable, operating environment. Second, the overall effectiveness of the College would most likely be greatly reduced in a structure involving one large unit with flexible resources dominated by a large common endowment merged with other units operating on different financial principles. The everlasting frictions would, in my judgment, impede everyone.

5. Most issues raised in the debate, including cost effectiveness, impact on curriculum and the educational experiences of students, and impact on services, have been considered extensively in other venues. In my mind, they are all either resolved in favor of the proposal for the free-standing School or they are not significantly affected by the proposed organizational change.

The debate did highlight some points, especially concerning the organization of the School's graduate studies program, that merit additional discussion. I will see that these points are examined further.

I am grateful for the work of every individual who has considered this subject at any time during the past two years. This is a matter of considerable consequence, so we have been proceeding with care at every stage, and I believe that we have arrived at an appropriate conclusion.

Sincerely,

Larry R. Faulkner
President