

Statement by Dean of Science H. Joseph Newton

Four Year Review, October 2006

Brief Personal Background

I came to Texas A&M in Fall 1978 after receiving a PhD in Statistics at SUNY Buffalo. After going through the ranks to professor in 1988 I have held the following administrative positions:

9/1990-12/1997:	Head of Statistics
1/1998-10/2000:	Executive Associate Dean of Science
10/2000-7/2002:	Interim Dean of Science
7/2002-present:	Dean of Science

Thus I have been one kind of dean or another for almost nine years, and either interim dean or dean for six.

Basic Parts of the Dean of Science Job

A dean at Texas A&M is a great example of a “360 degree” position, that is, the dean works with a large number of “stakeholders”, including the higher administration, the other deans, the departments, students, former students, and so on. This is especially the case since President Gates has placed great emphasis on the role of deans as almost a “board of directors” for the academic affairs of the university.

I have considered the following activities as basic to my job:

1. Provide short and long term visions for the college. My primary vision has been to strengthen the visibility locally, nationally, and internationally of each of the departments while enhancing interdepartmental and intercollege activities, and as a result to improve educational experiences and learning outcomes of all our students.
2. Hire outstanding department heads for our five departments, providing adequate funding for the departments (including salaries, startup funds, equipment matching, etc), and doing all I can to help departments a) recruit, reward, and retain outstanding faculty and students, and b) provide outstanding majors and service courses to both graduate and undergraduate students.
3. Establish good relationships with my fellow deans in terms of facilitating research collaborations, working on policies and procedures of the university, and in general providing a university-wide voice from the College of Science.
4. Work well with the Provost and President and their staffs.
5. Increase learning opportunities in the college and university by increasing the diversity of our faculty, staff, and students.
6. Help departments and other parts of the university compete for federal research funds.
7. Foster good communication with the university, the local and national media, and with our former students.
8. Work with the Texas A&M Foundation to raise gift funds for the college for scholarships, fellowships, professorships, chairs, and other similar purposes.

9. Attack the huge shortage of highly qualified K–12 teachers in math and science.

Budget Cuts and Faculty Reinvestment

Three highly unusual events occurred at almost exactly the moment I became dean in July of 2002. These events have colored all of my efforts over the past four years:

1. In the summer of 2002, the state demanded a \$860K “giveback” from that year’s budget, an action that wiped out all reserves the college had accumulated.
2. The budget of each college in the university was cut by anywhere from 4.5% to 6.5% in the fall of 2002. For science this amounted to over \$1.5M. The university administration disallowed any effort to cut teaching to help absorb this cut, so the brunt of the cuts fell on staff and operating expenses.
3. When Robert Gates became president of A&M in August of 2002, he carefully studied and visited each college and concluded that the university needed to attack the problem of high student-faculty ratio by what he referred to as a “reinvestment program” that would hire 447 new tenured/tenure track faculty over a five year period. After a lengthy process, science was awarded 70 of these positions, the first 52 of whom have been hired as of 9/1/06.

Accomplishments

1. Since I became interim dean, I have hired Ed Fry as head of physics, Al Boggess as head of math, Vince Cassone as head of biology, Simon Sheather as head of statistics, Robert Tribble as Cyclotron director, and am currently negotiating with David Russell to be head of chemistry. I feel all of the heads I have appointed are doing outstanding jobs.
2. The college survived the terrible cuts of 2002 without reducing services or firing any staff. My office led this effort by reducing our staff budget through attrition and other means by almost \$300K. In fact, our office now is managing the college with only the equivalent of 2.5 associate deans and fewer staff people than when I became dean. This is only possible because of the truly wonderful staff in my office.

In particular, biology faculty members Tim Scott and Mark Zoran became associate deans of undergraduate and graduate affairs, respectively, at much less than full time and have done a truly remarkable job.

College-wide, the cuts in staff and operating expenses have placed a terrible strain on the college. Solving this problem is one of my top goals for the next four years.

I would emphasize that despite our cuts and other remarkable pressures on our budget, we have continued to provide seats for all students who have sought them, even this fall when the new policies on flat rate tuition and grade forgiveness, and President Gates’ new initiative to increase undergrads by 2,500 over five years led to overwhelming demand for seats.

3. We hired 52 of the reinvestment faculty we had been allocated for 9/1/06 as well as hiring almost a full complement of replacements for faculty who left or retired. After much effort, I was able to obtain adequate startup funding for these positions. Continuing this search for startup is another major problem for the college.
4. In terms of graduate students, Mark Zoran and I led the effort across campus to ensure that tuition was paid (by either the university or PIs) for all funded graduate students, a major victory in improving the status of graduate assistants.
5. Our research funding continues to steadily increase. Our annual research awards have increased

from approximately \$30M to approximately \$38M while I have been interim dean and dean. Our office has been able to provide large amounts of cost sharing that have led to particular successes such as large center grants and training grants, a large upgrade for the cyclotron, and many others.

6. I have been told by many people that our development efforts are truly remarkable, taking a program that averaged less than \$1.5M per year in gifts to one that by far has led the university in the One Spirit One Vision Campaign. Even without the approximate \$50M from George Mitchell described in the next paragraph, we have exceeded our campaign goal. Additionally, our External Advisory and Development Council (EADC) has increased from approximately 25 members to 50, and we have instituted dues for the members for the first time. We have also traveled extensively around the state and had a very active program of visitors to a variety of college events including those associated with various sporting and scientific events. These successes are in large part because of our remarkable director of development, Don Birkelbach, and our department heads, particularly Ed Fry.

Very exciting things are happening in each department because of our research and development efforts. Of course, the support of George Mitchell (funding for 10 endowed chairs, \$35M toward two buildings for physics, endowing the Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics, for A&M's leadership in the Giant Magellan Telescope project) and Bill Lyons (funding for an endowed chair in biology) are the most significant of many gifts the college has received.

7. Our communications efforts led by Kendra Beasley and Shana Hutchins are also becoming a model for the university. In addition to revolutionizing the dean's office web site and promotional materials and providing assistance throughout the college, both Beasley and Hutchins are on important university committees and are providing important assistance to A&M's new Vice President for communications in the university's branding and marketing efforts.
8. In terms of providing space for the reinvestment faculty expansion, I have worked very hard with physics to obtain the funding for the Mitchell Buildings, the biology renovations appear to be finally on track (much delayed), space for math and stat has been obtained in Blocker, and truly remarkable opportunities appear to be on the horizon for chemistry expansion, first in Reed-McDonald, and then a university-sponsored master plan that calls for renovation and expansion of the entire chemistry complex.
9. In diversity, I have reinstated the college's diversity committee and appointed chemistry professor Sherry Yennello as Associate Dean for Diversity. We have instituted a process of trying to enhance the pools in faculty searches and using the reinvestment program to ensure that no highly qualified diverse candidate is missed because we don't know of them or don't have a position for them.

The college was a very active participant in TAMU's extraordinarily successful effort to increase the number of admitted minority students to enroll. During the first year of the Regents' scholarship program, we provided advisors around the university with progress reports to help retain these at-risk students, as student retention is very much impacted by the courses in the College of Science.

10. I have worked very hard with the departments to ward off several raids of our faculty. While one can never be totally successful in this area, I have taken this responsibility very seriously to do everything possible to retain our future stars and current leaders.
11. I have led several special university wide activities including

- a. Serving as chair of the Research Environment Council, member of the Educational Environment Council, and a member of the Faculty Senate Research Committee,
 - b. Actively working to enhance the planning process for the proposed life sciences complex,
 - c. Serving as user coordinator for the Mitchell Physics Buildings,
 - d. Representing the Council of Deans on a university-wide committee studying parking issues,
 - e. Being a leader in TAMU's efforts at our branch campus in Qatar,
 - f. Chairing the search for the Dean of Geosciences,
 - g. Serving on the faculty working group on intellectual property and commercialization.
12. Our Center (joint with education) for Math and Science Education continues to thrive under the leadership of associate deans Tim Scott and Jane Schielack. We are looked to by not just the university but also the TAMU System and in fact the Texas Education Agency for help and leadership in math and science teacher training.
 13. Associate Dean for Technology-Mediated Instruction (TMI) and Distance Education Mike Speed is a university and national leader in the area of using technology in the classroom. He chaired a university task force on TMI and distance education. The college's Technology Working Group continues to supply training to the entire university.
 14. In 2005 it was my honor to be awarded the Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement in Administration Award.

Four Major Goals for the Future

It is difficult to single out just a few major goals for the short term from all of the areas listed above, but I will emphasize the following:

1. Continue to work to recruit, reward, and retain great faculty. The reinvestment plan has helped with this effort, but I will devote the bulk of my energies to all three of these areas.
2. Continue to work toward providing excellent space for both the new and current faculty.
3. Continue to try to convince the higher administration that adequate graduate student funding is absolutely crucial to the success of our enterprise, particularly that of the reinvestment program.
4. Greatly increase the diversity of our faculty and student body.

Summary

When I was interviewing in January of 2002 for the dean position I claimed I was a hands-on administrator who is a consensus builder, but not afraid of difficult decisions and conversations. I said I would assemble a set of department heads who strongly represent departments but act collegially and with other parts of university. I said I would have them prioritize and get them resources for priorities.

I said I would assemble a strong Dean's staff who can help departments while also pushing the college agenda to the university.

My goal was to have the world say: "Look at all those exciting things going on in science at Texas A&M". I really believe this is what is happening, and I eagerly await the next four years to carry this process on.