UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

University Senate

Introduced by: University Planning & Policy Council

Date: April 24, 2006

PROPOSAL TO CREATE THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATICS

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

I.   That the attached proposal be approved by the University Senate.

II.   That the implementation be effective immediately.

II.   That this bill be referred to the President for approval.

Operationalizing the College of Computing and Information

Preamble

The College of Computing and Information (CCI) brings together three of the University's major contributors to instruction and research in information-related fields: the Department of Computer Science (CSI, formerly in the College of Arts and Sciences), the Department of Information Studies (IST, formerly the School of Information Science and Policy), and the faculty of the interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Information Science (formerly administered through SISP). The new College was created during the 2004-05 academic year following extensive discussion and voting by the constituent groups, legislative action by the University Senate, and executive approval by the University President.

The goal in creating CCI was to give more coherent organization and symbiosis to these interrelated disciplines and to provide for the entire campus both a locus and focus for information-based interdisciplinary teaching and research. During the past two years, there has been overlap between discussions of CCI and the Information Technology (IT) Commons, since the language of the discourse and the participants therein were often similar. The most visible symbolic overlap is that the Dean of CCI is also the Associate Provost for Informatics, a position charged *inter alia* with overseeing any campus-wide resource allocations for the IT Commons. As this indicates, however, the IT Commons combines a campus-wide vision for sharing resources and a practical concern for budgetary mechanisms. The discussion and rationale in this document, while occasionally drawing on examples from the IT Commons experience to date, do not depend in any way on future plans for or allocations through this budget process.

The IT Commons committee structure was intended to be a transitional organization. The operational and policy matters that began under the aegis of faculty committees of the IT Commons now need a persistent organizational home. These include development and oversight of new interdisciplinary academic programs, e.g., IS/IT-related minors, and development and implementation of mechanisms to facilitate joint appointments of faculty with IS/IT-related interdisciplinary interests, whether funded by the IT Commons or not. CCI offers an opportunity to address these matters. Said differently, if the activities of 2004-05 represented the emergence of CCI at a proof-of-concept stage, then 2005-06 is the time to operationalize the vision, and it is to this stage that we now turn.

Informatics

The *most important structural need* is to create a Department of Informatics (INF), at the same level as CSI and IST. As the (lack of an agreed-upon) definition of "informatics" implies, this will be the home for the interdisciplinary activities of the

College that require or would benefit from having a conventional, intra-University identity, viz., "Department." The following elements are important in defining this unit:

- <u>IT and INF minors</u> – These new programs are currently under development by faculty of CSI, IST, and Information Technology Management (ITM, School of Business). The INF minor shares a core with the IT minor, but adds discipline-relevant courses chosen by participating Departments from elsewhere on campus who will support their *majors* in electing the respective INF minors. Unlike the existing Ph.D. Program, where we can expect students to be comfortable with a looser structure, the likely number of undergraduate students in these minors suggests that a familiar, Departmental structure would be beneficial in meeting their needs. The new Department would also have the formal responsibility for curricular oversight and some instruction.

- <u>Other undergraduate programs</u> – One need that we expect to address over the next few years is development of a B.S. degree. This would have a much stronger IT and quantitative focus than the existing faculty-initiated B.A. degree; its exact nature, however, will depend not only on interdisciplinary participation, but also on the outcome of the national debate about undergraduate informatics education. All of the comments from the previous bullet about the need for a Departmental structure would apply even more strongly here because of the demands of advisement, instruction, oversight and development of a more complex curriculum, and formal recommendations for degree conferral.

- <u>Ph.D. Program in Information Science</u> – This is the pre-existing academic core of the new Department. Although the loose, operation-by-committee style has served for more than a decade, the Program and its students need a clearer place and voice in the College, especially when the new budget process is put in place (see below).

- <u>"Elective" faculty</u> – Some existing faculty from within CCI as well as across the University will request that a fraction of their FTE line be assigned to the Department. These faculty will have a true joint appointment to the Department per University guidelines. Except in the rare instance when this assignment is a full 1.0 FTE, the budget details will be governed by the discussion in the following major section.

- <u>"Hired" faculty</u> – Some new-to-campus faculty will have split/joint appointments from the outset. For example, the first two rounds of IT Commons recruiting resulted in nine new hires. Two of these were appropriate for joint appointment with IST, but the balance were not appropriate for either CSI or IST. A new Department of Informatics, however, is an excellent choice. More generally and for future hires across the University, such a Department would be a familiar and comfortable option, especially for faculty who might not gravitate to either CSI or IST and certainly not (based on our anecdotal experience) to something as unorthodox-sounding as "the IT Commons." This point about comfort and

familiarity for those outside the University applies, however, as we continue to nurture IS/IT interdisciplinarity, with or without the IT Commons funding mechanism.

- <u>"Affiliated" faculty</u> – The balance of faculty in the PhD. Program who did not "elect" a split-line appointment would be in this category in the new Department, with appropriate roles as described briefly in the budget discussion (below).

- <u>Day-to-day organizational structures that fit in the University</u> – The foregoing points address how we will relate to our undergraduate and graduate students, to ourselves within the new College, to faculty colleagues in other units of the University, and even to those we would be recruiting or helping others to recruit to the University. What this omits is the non-academic parts of the University itself, from Accounting to Alumni Affairs, Parking to Plant, Registrar to Res Life. As this litany highlights, it can be just as important to fit into the worldview of these units as to persuade a new Assistant Professor to come here rather than another university. And one of the simplest ways to assure that fit is to be familiar, to be (as far as the Office of XYZ is concerned) just another Department.

Making it all work

The *most important operational need* is to create an equitable and workable budget process for the new College, including CSI, IST, and the new INF, and its negotiating procedure with the other Colleges and Schools concerning split/shared resources.

Attached to this document as an appendix is an initial set of goals for the Informatics department drafted by David Andersen that provide some additional details of how this plan might actually roll out during this academic year. David's plans are ambitious and his ideas are clearly drafted as a starting point for a discussion within the College, but they serve as one way of thinking about a path forward for Informatics.

DRAFT

InterOffice Memo

To: Faculty members in Computer Science and Information Studies

From: Peter A. Bloniarz, Dean & Associate Provost

Date: March 3, 2006

Subject: Building the Informatics Department

When we created the College of Computing and Information, we made a commitment to provide the University with world-class educational and research programs in computing and information. Our Computer Science and Information Studies departments have focused programs in their areas, and our Informatics Faculty supports interdisciplinary programs in the application of computing and information in a variety of disciplines.

In addition to our existing degree programs, I have made a substantial commitment to President Hall and Provost Herbst that we as a college will move aggressively to support new options for students. This includes revisions to our existing programs, some of which were included in our compact plans this year. It also includes new University-wide programs that reach out to students in all schools and colleges. We expanded the mission of the Informatics Faculty to include support for these latter programs, with a special emphasis on new undergraduate options. The new IT minor that many of you worked on, and the planned informatics minor and new majors, are indicative of this role. These are exciting developments that should prove popular with students across the campus.

As we develop as a College, it is important that we provide an appropriate structure and level of energy to each of the units carrying out our mission. At present, the Informatics Faculty is organized as a network of loosely affiliated faculty. Its resource base consists of the part-line shared IT Commons faculty, plus several graduate assistantships. It is clear that this base cannot support the new minors and additional interdisciplinary programs that will be developed in coming years.

The Informatics Faculty recognized the need to institutionalize themselves as a department, and voted last fall to take this move. The attached document, drafted in August 2005, contains their justification. Both Provost Herbst and I agree with this plan, and we will move forward with this request. We will review this plan with the University Senate later this spring before final action by President Hall.

Through this memo, I am inviting you to provide leadership for this new department through transfer of all or a part of your line to the Informatics Department. Many of you have already made substantial commitments to interdisciplinary campus-wide education, and the Informatics Department will be the primary locus for continued development of such programs. I believe that a strong Informatics Department that contains a core of committed CCI faculty, combined with the part-line faculty hired in the IT Commons program, will provide a good foundation for supporting interdisciplinary education and research programs. In addition to moving all or part of your line, I am also willing to support faculty who wish to move their tenure home from Information Studies or Computer Science to Informatics. I hope that a number of you will consider formally joining this unit as its core leadership.

Although the Informatics Faculty will retain its previous system of affiliated faculty members, the faculty with whole and split-line appointments will serve as the core of its programs and hold full voting power. Full-line transfers are possible, but I expect that the majority of the faculty in the Informatics Faculty will hold split-line joint appointments with another department, either in the college or elsewhere on campus. This will ensure that the cooperative spirit and inter-unit collaboration that exemplifies the Informatics Faculty will be continued in the new department.

Of course, all moves will be subject to the University's guidelines for faculty transfers (see http://www.albany.edu/academic_affairs/policies_guidelines/policy_to_transfer.html). As part of these guidelines, both your current department and the Informatics Faculty will weigh in on your proposal before final approval is granted.

In order to facilitate our request to the Senate, and to begin discussions with your current department, I ask that you inform your department chair and me by March 17 of your intentions. That way, we can proceed with planning that will allow us to go to the Senate this spring. As always, I am available to talk with you about this should you have any questions.

Enc.
Cc: Informatics Faculty
        Provost Susan B. Herbst