Report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee to investigate the CACS office relocation

After a number of meetings with members of the administration, including Dean Azmy Ackleh, Provost James Henderson and Assistant VP Robert McKinney, and members of the CACS faculty, including Professors Magdy Bayoumi, Nian-Feng Tzeng, Hong-yi Wu, and Dmitri Perkins, as well as with Leslie Schilling, in her capacity as staff member assigned to determine space/use on campus, the Senate’s ad hoc committee to investigate the move of the Dean of Sciences and his staff to the office suites in Oliver Hall 201 reports the following findings.

According to a staff member involved in the assessment of space and usage, as early as 2008 or 2009, incoming President Joseph Savoie expressed his intention to reconfigure Martin Hall to provide space for certain areas of the administration by moving the Deans of Sciences and Liberal Arts into academic buildings close to their faculties. Later, incoming Provost James Henderson took on the project, explaining that he was a believer in the principle of placing Deans in close contact with their faculties, based on his own experiences in the university setting.

According to Provost Henderson, he sent a memo on March 25, 2014, to initiate the move process. In that memo, he requested that Assistant VP Robert McKinney explore options for relocation of the Deans of Sciences and Liberal Arts. McKinney surveyed pertinent campus buildings. (On a not entirely unrelated note, on August 1, McKinney officially became the administration’s adviser on space allocations.) On April 9, he met with Deans Ackleh and Kellman to report his findings (see attached) and to discuss the options. According to Dr. Henderson, McKinney’s recommendation to move the Dean of Sciences into Oliver 201 was based on his assessment that it was “underutilized for academic leadership.” Dr. Wu was initially informed in May of the plan to move the Dean to Suite 201 in Oliver Hall. Dr. Wu expressed serious concerns about this plan. On June 15, Dean Ackleh met with Dr. Wu to inform him of the plan. Again Dr. Wu expressed serious concerns. Dean Ackleh suggested that Dr. Wu convey his concerns directly to the Provost, which he did in a meeting on June 16, accompanied by other CACS faculty members. Dr. Henderson agreed to consider the concerns. A month later, Dr. Henderson announced his decision to proceed with the previously announced plan.

On July 15, 2014, the Provost sent an email to all faculty announcing, among other things, the movement of the Dean of Sciences to Suite 201, in Oliver Hall. In that email the Provost’s stated reasons for the move included his desire for the Deans “to have closer contact with both the faculty and students in their colleges” and to make room for graduate school offices in Martin Hall. On July 30, Dr. Wu responded with a question concerning storage, among other things. On August 1, the Dean’s walk-through in Suite 201 evolved into a meeting with CACS faculty members who protested the move. An alternative option involving Suite 222 was proposed. On August 5, 2014, the Dean of Sciences moved into Suite 201, Oliver Hall. On August 11, representatives of the CACS faculty met with President Joseph Savoie, Provost Henderson, Dean Ackleh and VP for Administration and Finance Jerry Luke LeBlanc to express their concerns. On August 19, Dr. Wu again met with the administration to discuss possible alternatives.
Contrary to apparent expectations, however, the installation of the Dean of sciences into Suite 201 has occasioned great distress among the faculty of the School of Computing and Informatics which was formerly headquartered there, as well as among the CACS faculty, which had formerly used the space as a showcase and meeting place for faculty, students and alumni, as well as for recruiting faculty, students, corporate clients and donors. Dean Ackleh reported meeting with each CACS faculty member individually in an attempt to resolve the distress. All alternatives proposed to him by CACS faculty representatives, individually and in group meetings, have involved moving the Dean’s offices out of Oliver 201.

On September 17, 2014, at the request of Dr. Magdy Bayoumi, the Faculty Senate created an *ad hoc* committee for the purpose of investigating the issues surrounding the movement of the Dean of Sciences into Suite 201 Oliver Hall. The committee gathered documents and reviewed them and received testimony from the Provost, the Dean of Sciences, the Assistant VP for Faculty Affairs, and several members of the CACS faculty, in addition to interviews with other administrators, faculty and staff members. Some of our members also visited Oliver Hall, more than once, walked through, and spoke to the faculty and staff members there, in their offices. This is the report of that *ad hoc* committee.

We have identified two essential problems. One has to do with the allocation of space. The other has to do with lines of communication. Each of these problems has subsequently caused considerable fallout and ongoing concerns that seem to be seriously affecting the stability of the CACS program, including productivity, morale, retention, potential recruitment and support among faculty, students and alumni. These problems are real and must be addressed as they stand to affect the status and performance of one of the premiere programs on this campus.

• Background

In 2007, the computer science program, the informatics program, and the Center for Advanced Computer Studies (CACS) were moved, after many years in the Conference Center, into Oliver Hall and later combined into the School of Computing and Informatics, all as part of a master plan for the school which would eventually include the construction of new buildings.
and which envisions considerable expansion for the school. The two undergraduate programs were to have their administrative hub in Suite 222. The graduate program (CACS) was to have its administrative hub across the building in Suite 201.

Both suites contain five offices, a conference room, a waiting room, a room for filing and a storage room. Suite 222 is also adjacent to and connects with room 223, a full kitchen and lounge. Suite 201 has a coffee bar. The conference room in Suite 201 is approximately twice the size of the conference room in Suite 222. Both suites are adjacent to restrooms. However, the director’s office in Suite 201 also contains a private restroom.

- Facts in Dispute
  - *Was Suite 201 being utilized?*

The Provost, the Dean of Sciences, and the Assistant Vice President for Faculty Affairs all assert that Suite 201 in Oliver Hall was underutilized, housing only two staff members. However, the CACS Faculty maintain that every space in Suite 201 was being used for the purposes they intended when they were given the opportunity to design the suite when the building was originally planned, with the exception of 201E which had recently been vacated because its occupant retired and permission had not been granted to replace her. Further, they add that 201H was occupied by the former director of CACS, and that he was in the process of vacating the office in early 2014 so that the newly appointed director of CACS could move in. And still further, CACS faculty members testified that in April 2014 the newly elected director of the school was finally officially appointed and told at that time, by the Dean of Sciences, not to move in to Suite 201. They insist that the claim of underutilization based on the director of the school not being in the suite was due to Dr. Henry Chu’s decision to avoid disturbing CACS space by moving there. It would appear then, that at least part of the space utilization issue was affected by complications that were produced by the creation of the School of Computing and Informatics in 2011.

It is the testimony of that newly appointed director that no reason was given for the Dean’s order that the new director not move into Suite 201 at that time, and that he was unaware at that time, of any plans to move the Dean into Suite 201. Though, according to the timeline we have established, the Dean himself was aware of such plans, when he told the director not to move. The Dean also indicated that the previous director of CACS had elected to remain in his own office on the third floor.

- The Complaints

The faculty of CACS assert that in the state of disarray occasioned by their “eviction” (their term) from Suite 201,

- they are less likely to favorably impress potential candidates who visit their offices and therefore less likely to be successful in their efforts to hire the best faculty and attract the best students;
they may lose some of their best faculty, who are currently contemplating seeking employment elsewhere;

that the work of the school in research and education has been hampered by the disruption caused by the loss of their administrative hub in Suite 201;

that their ongoing implementation of plans for expansion have been stymied thereby; and

that student, staff and faculty morale has been damaged as a result.

Given the short time that has expired since the installation of the Dean of Sciences into Suite 201, there are no available data with which to verify or refute the bulleted assertions above, so the committee can make no conclusions regarding them, except to confirm that student, staff and faculty morale does seem to have been harmed.

- **The Issue of Shared Governance**

  “The board, president and faculty should all seek agreement on basic decisions regarding buildings and other facilities to be used in the educational work of the institution.”

(Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, AAUP Policy Documents and Reports (Redbook))

*From the University’s own Strategic Plan, point 7B, the stated goal: “To optimally structure the organization” in order to “foster communication among internal stakeholders.”*

The CACS Faculty asserts that at no time during the process, which culminated in the movement of the Dean into Suite 201, was there “meaningful consultation” with faculty. The Provost stated that on more than one occasion the faculty of CACS were consulted about the move and that, indeed, when the director of the school asked to make his case to the Provost, the Provost obliged, listened and considered the director’s arguments for a month before affirming his original decision and proceeding accordingly.

In the view of the faculty of CACS, repetitive statements that the original decision stands, interspersed with what they interpret as *pro forma* meetings, most often for the purpose of restating the original decision, do not constitute “meaningful consultation.” In any case, it does not appear that the faculty of CACS were equal partners in the decision making process or that all parties were sufficiently committed to seeking agreement (as would be consistent with AAUP standards) about the movement of the Dean and the proper use of Suite 201.

- **The Consideration of Alternatives**

  The Provost asserts that the faculty of CACS presented only one alternative to the movement of the Dean into Suite 201 and that was that the Dean not move into Suite 201. That appears to be the case. However, part and parcel of the CACS alternative was that the Dean
move into Suite 222 instead of Suite 201, and that the programs currently occupying that suite could be accommodated along with CACS, in Suite 201, as well as other spaces in Oliver Hall, as necessary.

The Dean of Sciences and the Assistant VP for faculty affairs contend that the hallway layout in Suite 222 is too awkward for the Dean’s offices. A view of the floor plan as in the figure above and a walk-through by some of our committee members have not enabled us to sufficiently understand this administrative objection. However, a study of the floor plans and square footage assessments provided by the staff member who was in charge of identifying space and usage on campus for the last few years suggests that the space requirements for the Dean’s suite in the Assistant VP’s April 9th report appear to be inflated, when compared to state mandated Space Entitlements and with the university’s own Construction Design Standards (see attached). A quick look at the floor plans for the second floor in Oliver would seem to show that the space in the 222 suite would be virtually identical to the space in the 201 suite, in both square footage and configuration (notwithstanding the “convoluted hallways” argument), especially with the elimination of one wall, to create a larger conference room, and the addition of another, to create an additional office space by reducing the size of the kitchen/lounge (see attached). It is also curious that the staff member in question, Leslie Schilling does not appear to have been involved with the assessment of potentially available space during this process.

In August 2014 the faculty of CACS contacted the president of the UL chapter of the AAUP to request assistance in this matter. After consultation with CACS faculty, the chapter president was able to approach the Provost with another suggested alternative, that the room 359 lounge, which was currently filled with study carrels, that were little used, would make a potentially appropriate space, with some remodeling, for the School of Computing and Informatics. It was anticipated that this second alternative might have greater appeal for the Provost since it would not require the Dean of Sciences to vacate Suite 201. The Provost rejected the alternative and later, at a meeting of this committee, offered a reason for that rejection; that the remodeling required would be prohibitively expensive. The Provost did not, however, indicate that any attempt to develop actual budget estimates for the remodeling had been undertaken. Were this committee in possession of such estimates we could compare the
remodeling expenses for this second alternative with those required for the Dean of Liberal Arts to effect his move into part of the modern languages lab in Harry L Griffith Hall, and thus make a more informed report on the Provost’s objection.

• Pros and Cons

Dean of Sciences Ackleh informed this committee that he and the Provost reviewed the pros and cons of his anticipated move, early in the process, informed by space descriptions (square footage and current usage assessments) from Assistant VP Robert McKinney. Members of the Faculty of CACS were not present for that exercise or consulted. Members of the faculty of CACS would surely be the most knowledgeable about the potential effects upon their programs, of losing their administrative hub in Suite 201. Therefore, without input of the CACS faculty, the determination of pros and cons, by the Dean and the Provost alone, seems less than comprehensive and loses some credibility as a valid exercise. It would appear, for example, that this assessment did not take into consideration the academic culture and human resources issues attached to the space in question.

This committee requested of the Dean a copy of the pros and cons developed by the Provost and him. The Dean responded that he did not possess such a document. However, the committee understands that one of the goals of the move was to facilitate a closer relationship between the Dean and the Dean’s faculty. Clearly, quite the opposite has occurred. The faculty of CACS is in great distress and quite at odds with their Dean and the Provost over what appears to faculty to be a unilateral decision coupled with what came across to them as an abusive implementation of that decision, including an “eviction” notice posted on the door of the suite and a hurried move that included lock changes and movement of certain artifacts (theses, models, etc.) into the hallways. They insist that they have lost confidence in the good-faith of the Provost.

The administration insists that from their perspective the move was done in a timely and respectful fashion with prior notification, that, for example, the “eviction” notice did not come from them but from someone on the physical plant staff acting on orders to help effect the move, and that CACS staffers even expressed thanks in a subsequent communication for the assistance they received.

• The Conflict

At first, all of this agitation on the part of the CACS faculty seemed to committee members to be excessive. The use of the expression “Save CACS” implies that they consider CACS to be under attack. This would appear to be a harsh and potentially inflammatory claim. Members of our committee were challenged to imagine their own response if, over their objection, their own departmental administrative offices were suddenly taken by their Deans and the administrative functions of the department scattered throughout the building, and certainly that would be understandably disturbing to almost anyone. The depth of CACS injury can be gauged by the comments they have made during a faculty and staff meeting as reproduced in Appendix A, of this report. But a critically important part of the answer to this intense, emotional response from people who typically are professionally engaged in hard logic lies quite simply in the notion that the CACS faculty seem to consider Suite 201 to be something akin to hallowed ground. This
space that may have appeared to be “underused” from the administration’s perspective (terra nullius) was being used precisely as the faculty intended when they designed it. The administration’s assessment of available square footage did not take into consideration this perspective, neither in the initial planning stages nor in the subsequent meetings during which they heard the objections of the CACS faculty.

- The Response
  - The Students and Faculty

    It is difficult to overstate the distress in the CACS program. But distress has not been their sole response. The students and faculty have created a “Save CACS” Facebook page and a highly-produced YouTube video, as well as a blog. They have collected signatures on a petition. They have created a website. And, they have encouraged alumni to write the President of the University using some variation of a letter they drafted.

    Apparently, many of our alumni are also distressed by the movement of the Dean of Sciences into Suite 201, and the way that move was implemented. They have made their displeasure known by sending letters to the President as was requested by the students and faculty of the School and suggesting that future financial alumni support for the University might be reconsidered.

    On Friday, November 21, 2014, the students and faculty of CACS set up tables, gave away wristbands (inscribed with the words “Save CACS” and the web address of their Facebook account) hung banners and passed out literature on the corner of Rex Street and St. Mary. They have reached out to their AAUP chapter and to the Faculty Senate. There have been news reports in local media, including the Vermilion, and there is every reason to expect more to come.

  - The Task Force

    The Provost has impaneled a task force and given it three charges:

    1. to review all occupancy in Oliver Hall and create a program plan;

    2. to examine current uses of space; and

    3. to issue recommendations by mid April 2015.

    The Provost has requested that two members of the CACS faculty serve on the task force. Believing that the task force findings are predetermined, the members of the CACS faculty initially refused to become members of the task force. They reported feeling that to do so would lend credibility to a sham. They do not trust the process or the Provost. Recently we learned that two CACS faculty members have apparently agreed to serve as liaisons to the task force.

- Conclusion

    Unlike some of the principle stakeholders in the current controversy, this committee maintains full confidence in the good faith of the faculty of CACS, the Provost and the Dean of
Sciences all of whom, we believe, only seek what is best for this University, whatever mistakes may have been made.

None of these events, however, seems to have been a good thing for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette or for the proper functioning of CACS. All of this seems like it could have been avoided, if members of our administration and representatives of the CACS faculty had sought and achieved agreement, at the outset of the planning process, as recommended by the AAUP.

Because this committee is not in possession of the pros and cons that were developed by the Dean of Sciences and the Provost, we cannot claim to know precisely what were the goals of moving the Dean into Suite 201, aside from the Provost’s statement that it was an effort to enable the Dean “to have closer contact with both the faculty and students in their colleges” and to make room for the graduate school in Martin Hall. However, we must conclude, on the basis of our investigation,

1. that moving the Dean into Suite 201 at the least neglected to take into consideration the human element and the emotional and professional attachment that the CACS program has with that particular space, for historical and work-culture related reasons;

2. that the administration missed an opportunity to “push the pause button” on the process in June, when members of the CACS faculty conveyed their opposition to the move and their reasons for it;

3. that the results of the move have been counter-productive, seriously disrupting the CACS program at all levels, potentially diminishing its positive impact on the University’s reputation and effectiveness, as well as undermining rather than strengthening the relationship between the faculty and their dean;

4. that the reaction of some CACS faculty members, students and alumni, while perhaps understandable, have also been counter-productive, contributing to the problem rather than to a solution.

It must be acknowledged that unfortunate mistakes have been made. Though it may not have been apparent at the outset, in hindsight, the cons seem to outweigh the pros. One would be hard-pressed to argue that the University administration is deliberately trying to devalue or destabilize CACS. And the space issue may not be an isolated incident in the minds of some who indicated that it appeared to have been another stage in a gradual erosion that began with the integration of the CACS program into the School of Computing and Informatics, which predates both the current dean and the current provost. We understand full well the instinct to fight to preserve one’s home, but jeopardizing the stability and viability of that very home in the process is neither a viable nor a responsible option. Several CACS faculty members told us that these events have “dramatically affected research and teaching productivity.” Several factors contribute to this, including the time that has been spent meeting and protesting, but also the adverse effect this has had on morale and confidence. The current state of affairs seems to be the result of a combination of things. While we fully understand the importance of Suite 201 to the CACS
program, we also feel that it is important to remember that CACS is not where they are, but rather who they are and what they do. While we understand that the allocation of space in the university setting is the responsibility of the administration, it is important to respect the dignity of the faculty members, students and alumni who work in these spaces, especially by consulting with them in meaningful and effective ways concerning the conditions of their workplace. It is important that all those involved in this situation focus tightly on finding ways to solve the problems, rather than ways to win points. One of the things that faculty members and administrators need to consider is the ultimate cost of this rift. Is this space allocation issue worth potentially diminishing one of our flagship programs? Another is that the chronic problem of communication between the administration and the faculty is serious, real and must be addressed if we are to move toward meaningful shared governance on this campus.

- Recommendation

It is the recommendation of this committee, that the Provost, the Dean of Sciences and the CACS faculty, on the basis of shared governance, seek and achieve a plan for the placement of the Dean of Sciences, the administrative hubs of the School of Computing and Informatics and CACS, as well as their associated programs, which is acceptable and agreed to by all, without further delay.

Aside from the prima facie advantages of such a solution, such an achievement would also go far in rebuilding a cooperative working relationship among the Provost, the Dean of Sciences and the CACS faculty, student body and alumni, and restoring lost faith.

Addressing the big picture, it is also the recommendation of this committee that the administration establish policies and procedures that will insure the principles of shared governance and timely and effective communication in all matters that affect faculty and staff work and life.