Comments on FCI/CIS

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The usual way to launch a successful new program in the University is to:

1. State clearly what you want to do - with specific objectives beyond some vague desire to do good.

2. Propose a plan of how you are going to achieve those goals - with enough details to show that your proposed plan will lead to your stated goals and some indications of how to measure progress.

3. Find the best person to lead the effort - a person with a track record to show that he/she will have the competence to carry out the program and with the confidence of the people he/she is expected to lead.

These steps are usually taken in order and with broad-based input and support from the potentially affected Cornell constituencies.

In the case of the proposed FCI/CIS program, the early planning was done in a way which excluded input from highly qualified faculty who were not members of the CS Department. Before broader faculty input was solicited, a structure was already determined and a particular person was appointed for the job. The person appointed to lead this proposed large, complicated, and poorly defined university-wide program was the head of a department (CS) that has suffered what appears to be a melt-down only recently; something like six out of twenty-six faculty members left that department in one year for one reason or another, including many of its recent young recruits. Based upon comments at the Faculty Forum organized by Dean Cooke, general support for this appointment was not much in evidence.

This unusual procedure has led to massive confusion and divisiveness in the University, especially in the College of Engineering. Feverish efforts are now under way trying to make this topsy-turvy process look respectable and to figure out in a hurry what exactly should be done and how to do it in a manner that responds to the broader community.

Why is there any controversy and what are the core issues?

- There can be no objection if the goals of the proposed FCI/CIS project are to improve services in the computing area to the students throughout the University and to promote and facilitate collaborations among faculties across the traditional boundaries between departments.

- There can also be no objection if a particular group of CS faculty members wish to resign from the Engineering College and dedicate themselves to serving the computing needs of the university community at large, including Digital Arts and Culture, Human and Social Systems, and presumably Engineering. Indeed, they should have the blessings and whole-hearted support of us all.

- It is, however, an issue, if a small appointed group of faculty, especially a self-appointed group, purports to represent and speak for a large and active community.

- It becomes problematic, if a small group of administratively ambitious faculty from one department maneuvers to place themselves at the core of the proposed FCI and manipulates to control a
disproportionally large part of the University resources that are potentially available directly to this large and amorphous field of computational science, computer, information technology and science, and related areas. The danger of this skewed and undemocratic process at the outset is that it will lead to a structure and tradition that will likely reflect the biases and self-interests of a small group rather than the greater good of the community at large.

- It is also an interesting question: Who assigns voting rights in the Engineering College? We are told that the members of CIS still and will have voting rights in the Engineering College. If so, are they also subject to the legislation of the College? If they are, why, for example, do they have a tenure and promotion procedure with a decision process that "rests with the Dean for Computing and Information Science"? If they are not, why should they have the right to vote on Engineering College legislation?

**In conclusion,** it appears that substantial and divisive actions have already been taken without sorting out some of the important underlying issues. Also, there is ample evidence that vigorous and well-recognized activities in computational science, computer, information technology and science, and related areas have grown and flourished in many departments across the university over the years independent of the Computer Science Department.