

Provost Makes Administrative Changes An Interview with Provost Joe Alutto

In 2003, a [white paper](#) developed by then-Provost Ed Ray and former President Karen Holbrook directed that Ohio State's five arts and sciences colleges be organized into a federation. The new federated structure provided that each of these units—the Colleges of the Arts; Biological Sciences; Humanities; Mathematical and Physical Sciences; and Social and Behavioral Sciences—would retain its own dean, with an executive dean in the leadership role. This system was established with the expectation that it would build strength both within and across the five colleges while achieving administrative savings. Mandated by the white paper, a review of the federation was begun in autumn 2007 and a final [report](#) issued in late April, 2008. Provost Joseph A. Alutto has announced a number of administrative changes in response to the review findings. These changes are explained in "[A Revised Federation for the Arts and Sciences](#)." The provost shares his vision for the arts and sciences in the following interview.

Q1. The arts and sciences are Ohio State's academic core. What changes will be made within this crucial segment of the university and why?

A1. Let me start with "why." The many, many interviews conducted by the arts and sciences review committee revealed that the federation—as configured—was dysfunctional. It was flawed by its limited authority. And, as a result, the federation could not provide the voice and visibility for the arts and sciences that these disciplines—so fundamental to our institutional reputation—must have. Ohio State could not afford *not* to address this situation.

With that in mind, I have made a number of interim appointments that will serve as the first steps in modifying the administrative structure of the federation.

First, I have appointed Dr. Joan Leitzel to the position of interim executive dean and vice provost of the Federation of Arts and Sciences Colleges. Many at Ohio State will remember Joan, thanks to her 25-year tenure in our Department of Mathematics. She was also our associate provost for curriculum and instruction in the late 80s. She then went to the National Science Foundation as a division director and, after a stint as senior vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, was named president of the University of New Hampshire. After retiring from that post, she became chair of the Mathematical Sciences Education Board of the National Research Council. In the last few years, Joan has returned to Ohio and presently is director of the Ohio Department of Education's Ohio Mathematics Initiative. I am delighted that a scholar and administrator of Joan's eminence has agreed to lead the Federation of Arts and Sciences Colleges until a permanent appointment is made.

As executive dean and vice provost, she will have budgetary authority for our arts and sciences units. In addition, although promotion and tenure assessments will follow the

standard department-to-college processes, Joan will coordinate recommendations from the deans and provide input, as requested by the provost, for all federation P&T cases.

To support Joan in her new role, I have named three interim divisional deans. John Roberts will serve in that capacity for the Colleges of the Arts and Humanities. Matt Platz has been named interim divisional dean of the Colleges of Biological Sciences and Mathematical and Physical Sciences, and Gifford Weary has agreed to serve as the interim divisional dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

John has been the dean of the College of Humanities since 2004. A professor of English, he earlier was as the college's associate dean for faculty and research. John has also served as chair of the Department of African and African American Studies and was deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 2000 to 2002.

This academic year, Matt has been the interim dean of mathematical and physical sciences as well as a vice provost. He has been a member of the Department of Chemistry for the last 30 years and was chair of the department from 1994 to 1999. Matt is the recipient of Ohio State's highest faculty honor, its Distinguished University Professor award.

Like Matt, Giff Weary has been at Ohio State since 1978 and is presently the chair of the Department of Psychology. She holds fellow status in a number of professional organizations, including the American Psychological Association. She has been honored by Ohio State with both the Distinguished Scholar Award and selection as a Distinguished Lecturer.

John, Matt, and Giff will work with Joan to promote the greatest good for the arts and sciences as a whole—academically, budgetarily, and organizationally. The three deans will also remain significantly involved with their colleges and will help balance college-specific and collective interests.

Q2. Are the personnel changes you have just described the result of non-performance by those deans who are not returning?

A2. Not at all. The university has been well served by *all* of the deans of the arts and sciences colleges and by the outgoing executive dean of arts and sciences. I am grateful—indeed, all of us should be grateful—for their commitment to their units and to the university.

Going forward, however, in order to achieve a truly vibrant new administrative structure for the arts and sciences, we needed to bring some fresh perspectives to the table. We need a primary focus on the whole of the arts and sciences.

Q3. The new arts and sciences configuration will clearly be different from its predecessor in important ways, especially in the budgetary and P&T authority accorded to the executive dean and vice provost. Even with that new authority, will the federation be able to escape its identity as a “sixth college” and an additional layer of bureaucracy?

A3. The new federation will not be duplicating, competing with, or inhibiting the efforts of the individual colleges. Rather, precisely because the executive dean will have control over all university resources generated for the arts and sciences, the federation will be poised to promote the academic excellence and visibility of the arts and sciences as never before. Currently, there is duplication of effort in the federation structure, and we expect that the new leadership will deal with that issue aggressively. We anticipate that this will result in the redirection of resources to research and teaching programs and, consequently, the faculty, staff, and students directly involved in such activities. I also believe that the new configuration will stimulate cross-college interactions and encourage new opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching, research, and service.

Q4. The Arts and Sciences Review Committee report included three options for the future configuration of the arts and sciences colleges: creating a multi-college structure with fewer colleges; disbanding the federation and retaining five separate colleges; and establishing one integrated arts and sciences college. The committee endorsed the one-college model and rejected the first two options. Did you give any consideration to those other possibilities? And is the new Federation of Arts and Sciences Colleges intended to be the one-college structure proposed by the review committee?

A4. Like the members of the review committee and the majority of those they interviewed, I was persuaded that the interests of the arts and sciences—and, so, the university as a whole—would best be served by bringing together the faculty, resources, and academic programs of the five colleges. I think that is the most positive step Ohio State can take to empower our arts and sciences units, individually and collectively. As demonstrated in the past years, the notion of simply continuing five independent colleges would ignore the need to foster and facilitate cross-college and cross-department initiatives and therefore was inconsistent with our goals. What is needed is an administrative support structure that will encourage thinking about joint programs of research and teaching. That requires leaders fully committed to such action and granted the authority and resources necessary to support such efforts.

Later, depending on our experiences with the administrative changes that I have described, we may want to consider a reconfiguration of academic units in the federation. Any such changes would require additional discussion with arts and sciences faculty, staff, and administrators and others throughout the university, and perhaps, outside evaluators as well. And any adjustments to academic units would, of course, be made in accordance with university governance processes.

Q5. How was the new arts and sciences configuration developed? Did you base it on other university models?

A5. A similar model is followed at UCLA and the University of Washington. But the configuration I have been describing is based substantially on the recommendations of the arts and sciences review committee and informed comment from the arts and sciences faculty and staff. After the review report was issued, many colleagues in the arts and sciences colleges took the time to let me know how they felt about what was being recommended. It is clear that our arts and sciences faculty and staff are passionate in their commitment to their work and to the structures that enable and advance it.

Q6. How will the reconfiguration affect those faculty and staff?

A6. My staff and I are working to minimize any disruptions so that the important work of the arts and sciences faculty, staff, and students can continue without interruption. I want to stress that the changes we are making are administrative. They will not involve altering any college or any department. Existing departments will still have chairs, and colleges will continue to be led by deans.

Q7. One final question. What outcomes do you expect from this redesign of the arts and sciences federation?

A7. As I said, down the road, we may want to think about proposals to consolidate or reconfigure academic units in the federation. To cite just one example, there may be more strategic and collegial ways to engage the faculty with each other in the life sciences. Any changes to academic units will be done in concert with the faculty and others involved and according to faculty rules. The goal of the new configuration—and of any other configuration that may yet evolve—will be to integrate the arts and sciences for greatest programmatic impact and to strengthen them to maximize their stature and visibility.