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November 18, 2015
Revised, December 4, 2015

MacKenzie Smith, University Librarian (co-chair)
Deb Niemeier, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering (co-chair)
Duncan Temple-Lang, Professor of Statistics
Prasant Mohapatra, Professor of Computer Science and Associate Chancellor
Joseph Dumit, Professor of Anthropology
Louise Kellogg, Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences
Hemant Bhargava, Professor of Technology Management
Ben Houlton, Associate Professor of Terrestrial Biogeochemistry
Randy Siverson, Professor Emeritus of Political Science
Thomas Lee, Professor and Chair of Statistics
Nina Amenta, Professor and Chair of Computer Science
Wolfgang Polonik, Professor of Statistics
Ian Davidson, Professor of Computer Science
Jonathan Eisen, Professor of Evolution and Ecology, and Medical Microbiology and Immunology
Thomas Nesbitt, UCDHS, Associate Vice Chancellor for Strategic Technologies and Alliances

Dear Colleagues,

I write to thank you for agreeing to serve on a work group that will consider how best to increase the impact of UC Davis on research and education in the field of Data Sciences. The 2013 report of the "Big Data Implementation Committee" [http://tinyurl.com/qyhe7tj] proposed the creation of a Data Science Institute (DSI), which is now being organized under the leadership of Professor Duncan Temple-Lang and University Librarian MacKenzie Smith. In the process of developing this institute, it has become apparent that due to the rapid evolution and impact of data sciences in both research and in the classroom, it is now a good time to consider carefully whether this field might benefit from an independent academic home at UC Davis. There are several possibilities that might be considered, including creation of a new department, an FTE-holding program, or some other academic structure.

In considering the possibilities, I encourage you to think futuristically about possible structures, and to consider these issues from the perspective of research, education, faculty, graduate and undergraduate student programs. How an academic unit could foster interdisciplinary research services, outreach and collaboration is another consideration. A discipline that transcends many academic boundaries, such as data sciences, should be housed in a manner that encourages interdisciplinary approaches and minimizes boundaries as much as possible. It seems to me that the College of Letters and Sciences, which itself spans a wide range of disciplines, would provide an ideal home for the new unit, but I ask for your wisdom and thoughts on this possibility. Within the college and perhaps a specific division, the unit should benefit from porous boundaries and maximal input from all relevant constituencies across campus.

There is some urgency to this discussion, because some of the faculty involved are already thinking about proposals for new hires in the context of the next round of the HIP program, in which interdisciplinarity is one of the key metrics. My hope is that the committee might provide advice to me by March 1, 2016.

Again, thank you very much for your willingness to contribute to this important discussion.

Sincerely,
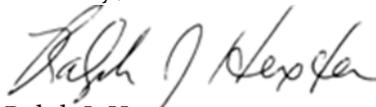
Ralph J. Hexter
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c: Faculty Advisor Burtis
        Assistant Executive Vice Chancellor Mohr