



Aditya P. Mathur
Professor and Head
Department of Computer Science

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Dear Provost Sands:

Regretfully, I tender herewith my resignation as Head of the Department of Computer Science. While I wish to return to my professorial position starting Friday September 10, 2010, I will continue to fulfill the minimal duties of a department Head until a replacement is found. Kindly accept my resignation as soon as possible and relieve me of all my duties as Head.

[Why resign?] My resignation is prompted by serious differences with Dean Roberts on the handling of the issue of moving the Department of Computer Science (CS) to the College of Engineering, often referred to as the realignment issue. Our faculty first discussed this issue early in the 2008-09 AY. While an overwhelming majority of our Full Professors supported the relocation of CS to the College of Engineering, I strongly believe that an academic issue must not be settled based exclusively on whether or not it has a majority support. Instead, benefits to Purdue and its current and future student body must be the key determinants of the resolution of any academic issue. Fortunately, in the case of the realignment issue, the goals of its supporters match very well with the resulting benefits to Purdue and its students.

[Lack of decision by Provost Woodson] In spite of a detailed report submitted in April 2009 to the Deans of Science and Engineering and the previous Provost (Dr. Woodson), the higher administration has yet to make a decision regarding an issue that is critical not only for CS but also for Purdue University and its students. Dr. Woodson avoided making a decision, relegating it instead to a new Dean who has yet to understand the dynamics of our Department, conditions at Purdue, and the nearly duplicate role of Computer Engineering and Computer Science on this campus. As you know, soon after the arrival of Dean Roberts, Dr. Woodson departed to North Carolina State University as a Chancellor. Since the establishment of the first CS department at Purdue in 1962, the discipline has evolved into an engineering discipline. By delaying the decision on the realignment, we are denying current and future students of Purdue excellent educational opportunities and also denying Purdue a higher ranking in the area of Computer Science and Engineering.

[Academic and financial benefits] I strongly believe that by placing CS in Engineering, the combined strengths of ECE and CS will lead to novel educational opportunities for Purdue students. Doing so will allow Purdue to compete directly with places such as MIT, Stanford, and Berkeley in the closely related areas of Computer Science and Computer Engineering. Such a move will significantly increase the existing research collaborations between CS and the Engineering faculty. It is well known, not only at Purdue but also across the national CS/ECE community, that Purdue has two departments (CS and Computer Engineering) with significant academic overlap (curricula and research activities). Having two very similar programs existing in two different colleges is academically unsound and wasteful of Purdue's already stretched financial resources.

[Lawson CS Building] It was with some difficulty and concern that Purdue was able to raise funds to build a new abode for the CS department. Thanks to Pat and Richard Lawson and other donors, we were able to succeed in obtaining funds to build an excellent facility for CS— but only one-half of it! Today, for most people there is almost no hope that the much needed second phase of the Lawson Computer Science Building will ever exist. However, I am confident that moving CS to engineering and enhancing its partnership with Computer Engineering and other engineering disciplines will enable Purdue to attract donors so we could complete the Lawson building and bring it to its full spectacle.

[Initiating the realignment issue] The department initiated discussions of the realignment issue in May 2008. Provost Woodson, Dean Jamieson, and Associate Dean George McCabe were consulted prior to initiating any discussion with the faculty (Interim Dean Jon Harbor was out of the country at that time). Provost Woodson lent his support for initiating discussions among the CS faculty. Dean Jamieson seemed to indicate quite clearly that CS is now an engineering discipline but declined to take a proactive role in any administrative realignment. Associate Dean McCabe favored faculty discussion on the realignment issue. Several department heads as well as junior and senior faculty members in engineering were also consulted. The support for realignment with engineering was near unanimous.

[Transforming an academic issue into a political one] Upon his arrival at Purdue, Dean Roberts announced publicly to CS faculty that he was agnostic about the realignment issue. In about one year after his arrival, and without any open discussion with the faculty, he changed his stance from being agnostic to being clearly against the move. This change in stance is evidence that Dean Roberts has aligned himself with a small group of full professors and has ignored the best interests of Purdue while considering the realignment issue. He is adamant in that he will not make any recommendation to the Provost regarding realignment until the department faculty has discussed the issue in a calm manner and the temperature in the department has come down. This change in stance has highly

disappointed me in the leadership of Dean Roberts. Rather than consider the long-term significant academic and financial benefits to Purdue. Dean Roberts has functioned as a catalyst in transforming a highly successful department, and a clear academic issue, into a political confusion.

[Scared of engineering?] Starting in the fall of 2008, discussions on the realignment issue took place on several occasions and, since then, a formal faculty and staff survey has been conducted. This survey was authorized by Interim Dean Jon Harbor who also laid out in front of the CS faculty a clear sequence of steps in the decision making process. While the majority of our Full Professors are strongly in favor of this realignment, a few Full Professors are opposed to the move to engineering mostly for personal reasons. Such reasons include the possibility of a higher teaching load, and possible taxation, by the College of Engineering, of industrial gift funds that support their research activities. These few Full Professors have ignored the benefits to Purdue students and to Purdue at large. Unfortunately, this handful of Full Professors have been successful in convincing some junior faculty members that the move to Engineering is not in their best interests, i.e., higher standards in the College of Engineering might reduce their chances of tenure and promotion. To complicate the issue further, this small subgroup of Full Professors found a sympathetic ear in Dean Roberts. With such implicit support from Dean Roberts, it should be clear to anyone that there is no incentive for this handful of Full Professors to either change their stance or to eliminate needless contention whenever convenient, with secondary or even tertiary issues.

[External review] The five-year external review of the department is scheduled for September 27 and 28. A majority of CS faculty members believe that the faculty must be given an opportunity to get the views of the external review committee on the issue of realignment. Dean Roberts, however, has decided to deny us that opportunity. He has censured the document that our faculty and staff prepared for the external review committee after several months of hard work. I strongly believe that the realignment issue is a key determinant of the current and the future state of the department and hence must be placed up front before the committee. I must point out that around 1972, an advisory committee at UC Berkeley recommended that the CS department in the College of Letters and Science be moved to the College of Engineering¹.

[CS: an outstanding department] CS is an outstanding department in nearly all respects with brilliant faculty and excellent staff. It is hard to accept that an administrator who finds it convenient to negatively label a highly successful department as dysfunctional can have its interests at heart. During my tenure as the Department Head, our faculty, students, and staff have made remarkable progress and must be credited with notable achievements. These include, among others, the

¹<http://netshow01.eecs.berkeley.edu/zadeh2010.wmv>

establishment of the first ever \$25 Million NSF Science and Technology Center at Purdue, record growth in graduate enrollment, rebound in undergraduate enrollment, record number of PhDs produced, record number of female students in the undergraduate and graduate programs, first African-American PhD, a flexible undergraduate curriculum, and a new strategic plan. *How could a department achieve so much in just three years if it were dysfunctional?* In fact CS is probably one of the most dynamic academic departments at Purdue that constantly adapts to changes in the discipline. Surprisingly, while Dean Roberts labels this department as dysfunctional, he has never given a single clear suggestion on how to resolve what he perceives as a major issue with the department.

[Engineering versus Science?] I am told that those who wish to move to engineering do so due primarily to the higher ranking and the brand name of the college. This is untrue. The primary reasons for the realignment are the benefits to Purdue, its students and the new and enhanced opportunities to CS faculty. Realignment will lead to no loss to students who enter the college of science. As is the case in several top ranked universities, CS will continue to offer its existing academic options to students in Science. Indeed, and obviously, the overall budget of the College of Science will reduce, and a top ranked department will move out. These are two key reasons why several faculty members, and department heads, in departments other than CS in the College of Science are opposed to CS moving out of Science.

[Lack of support from Dean Roberts] In my humble opinion, any organization that undertakes bold steps to enhance its quality so it rises to the level of a top tier department in the discipline is bound to create anxiety among few of its faculty, especially those who have become comfortable with the status quo. Unless the senior administration provides unequivocal support to the departments administration, this department will not realize its vision of improving its standing among its peers. Unfortunately, the department has not received the desired support from Dean Roberts. Instead, Dean Roberts has allowed himself to be influenced by a handful of senior and junior faculty regarding issues facing the department. Rather than calmly discuss these issues in the open, he has stated that the department is dysfunctional and decided to continually postpone any decision on the realignment issue using non-academic and politically motivated rationale.

[Change of conditions for decision making] Prior to my re-appointment as the department head, Dean Roberts and I agreed to visit the realignment issue at a slower pace, and under certain conditions. The three conditions we agreed upon are: (a) CS prepare a faculty approved strategic plan, (b) the external review be over, and (c) the new provost has had time to study the issue. However, when I asked Dean Roberts to include the issue of realignment on the agenda of the external review committee, he informed me through George McCabe that “the de-

partment has been informed several times that no decision will be [made] [and] until the department as a whole is able to discuss the question calmly and without unnecessary rancor.” *Clearly, this was yet another new condition that nobody was informed about prior to this communication.* I believe that a lack of resolution of the realignment issue is the primary reason for the heightened anxiety among some faculty members.

[Request] The data regarding the views of our faculty and staff concerning the realignment issue has been provided to you. Further, a majority of our research-active and most productive Full Professors have submitted a letter to the previous Provost (Dr. Woodson) expressing their strong support for the move to the College of Engineering more than a year ago. Yet, the higher administration has ignored the voice of the majority of our senior faculty and the significant academic benefits of the realignment. I request you and President Córdoba to make a decision that takes into account the best interests of Purdue students and the University at large. Waiting any longer is no longer viable. The higher administration needs to exercise leadership by arriving at a decision that exclusively places a premium on the benefits to Purdue rather than on protecting a College turf, or personal benefits of a few individuals.

After returning to my professorial position I will continue to work hard, and more aggressively than ever before, to convince the Purdue administration, our trustees, and students to move CS to the College of Engineering.

Best regards.



Aditya Mathur

Cc: Keith J. Krach, Chairman Board of Trustees, President France A. Córdoba, Dean Leah Jamieson, Dean Jeffrey Roberts, Senate Chair Joan Fulton, Department Heads of Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Mathematics, Physics, and Statistics.