

Option 1. Maintain Status Quo

Advantages:

1. Retaining an independent school with its own dean allows direct access to the Provost.
2. An independent unit may have more clout when soliciting gifts and when recruiting prospective faculty and students.
3. Most Ph.D. granting schools in the U.S. are independent.
4. SLIS has high visibility as an independent unit.
5. Keeps SLIS small and presumably quick to move on development and curriculum opportunities. Small size can also confer flexibility to make exciting conceptual changes, be a model of new ways to do things in higher education. Experiment, take risks.
6. This option has the strong support of the SLIS faculty, students, alumni, and alumnae.

Disadvantages:

1. Misses an opportunity to re-channel administrative salary into faculty salary lines.
2. Leaves the University vulnerable to criticism regarding administrative overhead cost for a relatively small program.
3. The faculty are strained to cover the many disciplinary areas that comprise SLIS, and research productivity suffers with the heavy teaching, advising, and service loads.
4. According to the recent SLIS re-accreditation report, some faculty feel isolated and alienated from the rest of the University.
5. As one of the University's smallest units, SLIS may not carry sufficient clout with central administration.

Resources Needed:

1. A new dean with a competitive salary

Option 2. Merge with College of Communication

Advantages:

1. SLIS and the College of Communication share many interests and values (e.g., information, freedom of speech, access to information, information policy, telecommunication orientation, how people use information). Both deal with information as the subject for research and the management of information as the focus for practice. They share the belief that there is an intellectual/theoretical center to their fields and a practical/professional component.
2. Some ties already exist at the graduate level between programs, due to common interests in information and communication studies. Students in each unit are taking courses in the other, and faculty in each unit are serving on graduate committees in the other unit. A merger would increase the possibility of interdisciplinary work, especially at the doctoral level.
3. There is potential for the two units to enrich each other in teaching, research, and service. The Institute for Communication Research could benefit SLIS's research faculty and possibly foster some collaboration between faculty on funded projects. There is also the possibility of sharing laboratory space.
4. The Dean of Communication sees such a merger as an important step toward bringing together all the communication and information studies-related faculty and criteria on campus under one administrative umbrella. He believes that the College's major industry supporters, including firms like Bell South, Southern Progress, and Alabama Power, would look favorably on such a combination. He anticipates that SLIS could remain semi-autonomous, a plus for SLIS faculty morale and perception of SLIS value outside the University.
5. SLIS's faculty, students, alumni, and alumnae have a generally positive perception of the College of Communication and rank it as their first choice, if not left free-standing.
6. There are national precedents for such combinations (i.e., Rutgers and Kentucky).
7. If the dean's position is converted into two entry-level faculty positions, SLIS could restructure the curriculum and faculty workloads, creating the catalyst for positive change.
8. Could provide an opportunity to create a new "College of Communication and Information," generating an impression of innovation, rather than down-sizing.

Disadvantages:

1. Any merger creates anxiety about SLIS's future, how it would be understood in a new unit. Relinquishing "stand-alone" status may cause resistance among some faculty.
2. Any merger involves the potential for loss of voice in curriculum matters and loss of resources. There must be sufficient administrative support to continue securing the resources that sustain quality programs.
3. Any merger involves the potential loss of support of graduate student funds.
4. The two units would be physically separated in any merger.
5. Unless properly supported, a merger could add to the administrative burden of the Communication Dean at a critical time in that College's development.

Resources Needed:

1. Conversion of dean's position into some combination of new entry-level faculty position(s) and a new Director of the School of Library and Information Studies who is a scholar and will actively recruit and provide leadership at state and national levels.

Option 3. Merge with College of Arts and Sciences

Advantages:

1. A&S is broad and interdisciplinary and might provide opportunities for closer working collaboration between SLIS and their faculty.
2. Possibility that the SLIS book arts program could find studio space and a home in the Art Department, though this is not clear, and book arts faculty are skeptical about potential working relationships.
3. Associates SLIS with a major division whose development and other resources could potentially benefit SLIS.
4. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences believes a merger could benefit both A&S and SLIS and is cautiously optimistic.

Disadvantages:

1. Any merger creates anxiety about SLIS's future, how it would be understood in a new unit. Relinquishing "stand-alone" status may cause resistance among some faculty.
2. Any merger involves the potential for loss of voice in curriculum matters and loss of resources. There must be sufficient administrative support to continue securing the resources that sustain quality programs.
3. Any merger involves the potential loss of support of graduate student funds.
4. The two units would be physically separated in any merger.
5. SLIS faculty are concerned that key A&S departments would view them as mere practitioners of a clinical-type program, rather than academic equals.
6. Little precedent for such an arrangement nationally among the higher-ranked programs.
7. Possibility of SLIS becoming "lost" in such a large administrative unit.

Resources Needed:

1. Conversion of dean's position into some combination of new entry-level faculty position(s) and a new Director of the School of Library and Information Studies who is a scholar and will actively recruit and provide leadership at state and national levels.