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Threat to the Department of Botany at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- David K. Smith, Associate Professor and Curator, UT-Knoxville

The possible demise of the herbarium at Iowa seems to be another symptom of academic malnutrition that is destined to a state of starvation. We are heading toward a third world status by crippling our informational foundations in whole plant systematics. This trend is infecting all programs where whole plant science is being replaced by emphasis on structural and mechanistic [mostly molecular] aspects of plants.

This letter is to make you aware of another grave situation that threatens the existence of the Department of Botany at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. For reasons not totally known, the Botany Department has been placed on a university list for review and consideration for dissolution. This decision has been spun from the upper administration, to identify programs and departments within the university that don't meet selected criteria for productivity. In the case of Botany we do not meet the quota of undergraduate majors, among other criteria. Since we are a department nested in a Division of Biology, we are not competitive with Microbiology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and Biochemistry/Cellular and Molecular Biology. These other departments appear more productive because they benefit from higher numbers of majors; many of which are preparing for pre-professional, health careers [Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, etc.]. Hence it is unusual for such motivated students to select a Botany major for their undergraduate degree. It is probably not at immediate risk in this phase of our reorganisation; but it will have to be reassigned to some unit, and one that will have little practical use for it. My fear of course is that the long-term future is unknown, and the Herbarium may become a management issue for its new owners. There is no discussion at this time to gift, sell or dismantle the Herbarium.

It is my personal belief, and shared by many colleagues, that a comprehensive university like Tennessee will be self-abasing by dumping its Botany Department. It is a poor investment by the powers of upper administration to assure [guarantee] that a presence of strong plant sciences will continue at Tennessee by distributing faculty into other surviving departments. The core and heart of a centralised botanical faculty will be fragmented; and it is likely that attrition will result as faculty retire, or relocate, and their positions will be filled by other sorts. Another key element is the fate of the Herbarium and its staff. While we have been told [?promised] that no faculty or key staff will be furloughed by a reorganisation, that may be no more than a belief in faith.

As most of us are veterans of administrative chess, we expect that a decision to dissolve Botany has already been made. And now we are only stepping through the process to legitimise and validate the decision.

However, I invite any of you who wish to join the resistance to write a letter of concern that addresses the irreversible consequences of loss to the national and international community of Plant Scientists. In the least, I would want my administrators to have to read the written word of concerned colleagues in the face of their decision.

I am hoping the sense of my letter will be read as a greater call and concern for the demise of departmental units that embrace all of the Plant Sciences, not just for those units

that have Herbaria. I see a trend in the past few decades of suffocating the centrality of Plant Science programs; and when dissolutions and mergers occur, there is a gradual de-emphasis of whole organismal, plant systematics as they become starved of graduate student training opportunities. Herbaria are often part of the demise, and it seems they must be part of a formal Plant Science unit to survive and be functional. My fear is the dissolution of Botany at Tennessee will eventually have a negative ripple effect on the presence and function of the Herbarium.

If you choose to voice your concern, send a letter to:

Dr. Stuart Riggsby, Dean
 College of Arts and Sciences
 Alumni Memorial Building
 University of Tennessee
 Knoxville, TN 37996

And:

Dr. Edward Schilling, Head
 Department of Botany
 437 Hesler Biology Building
 University of Tennessee
 Knoxville, TN 37996

Maintaining Support for Herbaria in the 21st Century

- Alan Prather, MSU Dept. of Plant Biology, Michigan State University

A Discussion Section held at the Botany 2003 Meetings in Mobile, AL on 19 July 2003
 Co-organizers: L. Alan Prather, Michigan State University and Lynn G. Clark, Iowa State University

At the Botany 2003 Meeting in Mobile, AL in July 2003, a discussion section was held to consider the current challenges facing herbaria. The discussion section was co-sponsored by the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, the American Bryological and Lichenological Society, the American Fern Society, and the Botanical Society of America and co-organized by L. Alan Prather and Lynn G. Clark. Five panelists contributed to the session: Barbara Ertter (University of California, Berkley), Gerald (Stinger) Guala (National Science Foundation, NSF), Aaron Liston (Oregon State University), Muriel Poston (NSF), and Judith Skog (NSF). The program included a panel presentation, followed by a brief question and answer period; break-out sessions focused on narrower topics, and a group discussion at the conclusion. There were an estimated 80 people in attendance, with a smaller number participating in the break-out sessions and final discussion.

Maintaining support for herbaria has long been problematic, but the pressures are increasing in the current environment. In the near future, several herbaria are likely to be closed and many more are likely to have their institutional support reduced. Nearly all curators will be under increased pressure to justify the support that they receive. The panel/discussion section focused on several related issues:

- 1) How do we justify our existence?