



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Executive Action Summary

Academic Affairs-Attachment 4

Committee: Academic Affairs

Date June 13, 2025

Agenda Item: Merger of the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities with the College of Arts and Letters

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Information

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Discussion

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Action

Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of Michigan State University hereby approves the merger of the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH) and the College of Arts and Letters (CAL).

Recommendation:

The Trustee Committee on Academic Affairs recommends that the Board of Trustees authorize the merger of RCAH and CAL.

Prior action by BOT: Not applicable.

Responsible Officers:

Thomas D. Jeitschko, Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Glenn Chambers, Interim Dean, Residential College in the Arts and Humanities

Thomas Stubblefield, Dean Designee, College of Arts and Letters

Summary:

The president, upon the recommendation of the provost, is requesting that the Board of Trustees authorize a merger of RCAH and CAL. The effect of the merger is the dissolution of RCAH as a standalone, degree-granting college and establishing RCAH as a department or school within CAL. Therefore, this action requires board approval under Article 7 of the Board of Trustees Bylaws. Upon approval from the Board of Trustees, the Office of the Provost will create a detailed plan and timeline for implementation. It's anticipated that the merger will formally occur at the beginning of the 2026-27 fiscal year (July 2026) with many logistical details to follow.

MSU is committed to the sustainable stewardship of its academic units in alignment with its mission and strategic goals. Enrollment trends within RCAH, along with broader student enrollment patterns, have made the current structure of RCAH financially unsustainable. While RCAH's pedagogical model and academic offerings remain valuable, its capacity to recruit and retain students has been significantly

constrained by its status as a freestanding college. From Fall 2015 to Fall 2021, RCAH enrollments have consistently decreased from a high of 307 to 168. Enrollment is down from a total of 251 students in Fall 2017 to 139 in Fall 2024. From 2016-2018, 50% of students graduated from RCAH and 34% graduated from elsewhere at MSU with the biggest receiving college being Arts and Letters (12%).

The Administration will prioritize the following during the transition:

- transparency with stakeholders
- continuity of academic programs
- strong support for affected students, faculty, and staff
- Preservation of RCAH's distinctive mission and programmatic strengths, while promoting enhanced collaboration, administrative sustainability, and academic excellence across the arts and humanities.

The need to strengthen the arts and humanities—both within higher education and in society more broadly—is urgent, and MSU has a leadership role to play in ensuring these disciplines are accessible, visible, and institutionally supported. RCAH stakeholders have voiced understandable concern about the potential loss of programming, unit culture, and identity. The merger is intended to preserve these features in RCAH, while placing them into the larger context of a combined college to support their growth.

Background Information:

RCAH was founded in 2005 and welcomed its first class of students in 2007. RCAH is the heir to the legacy of Justin Morrill College (1967-1979) as a residential unit dedicated to the study of interdisciplinary, engaged arts and humanities. RCAH has been a standalone college since its inception. Since then, concerns about RCAH's structural viability have been noted in past reviews and consultations. These concerns have intensified amid shifting enrollment patterns and institutional resource challenges. Indeed, recruitment efforts into RCAH have faced challenges tied to it being a free-standing unit in which recruitment more broadly into the Arts and Humanities is hard to realize. While some advances in recruitment have taken place over the last few years, these have proved to be very costly and have not yielded the desired scale. Merging RCAH and CAL creates a more stable and efficient administrative structure, allows for strategic resource alignment, and enables deeper collaboration across academic programs, thereby enhancing the visibility and impacts of the arts and humanities at MSU. Such a merger creates synergies across the colleges' nationally recognized community engagement and civic education programs, further advancing MSU's land-grant mission and public service commitments.

Process overview

The recommendation for integration is the result of a consultative process that included input from faculty, staff, and students in both RCAH and CAL, and was informed by extensive review by academic governance bodies, including the University Committees on: Academic Governance, Faculty Affairs, Faculty Tenure, Academic Governance, Undergraduate Education, and Curriculum. There was also a committee established by the Interim Provost (comprised of administrators, faculty and staff, and students from RCAH and CAL) charged on January 6, 2025, with exploring the benefits and challenges of

administratively integrating RCAH into CAL. The exploration included evaluating how such an integration might strengthen the arts and humanities at MSU, support students and faculty, and position MSU to meet the evolving needs of higher education. The committee collected data from various areas including Human Resources, Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure, Student Matters, Curriculum and Co-Curricular Infrastructure, Academic Governance, Finance, Institutional Support, Funding (Grants & Endowments & Other), and University Systems.

The process provided for ongoing communication to academic governance bodies on what the charge was, the committee's progress, and an opportunity for academic governance committees to review and provide input. The feedback was also shared back to the committee for their consideration to include in their final report to the Interim Provost, delivered on May 13, 2025.

Source of Funds: The merger will yield cost savings over time rather than incur costs. Cost savings are anticipated through consolidated operations, shared resources, administrative streamlining, etc.

Resource Impact: The merger will result in the increased sharing of resources between units. Personnel impacts are planned to occur through attrition.