

Andrew Fisher, Distinguished Professor  
Chair of Graduate Council, 2022-23  
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Dear Andrew:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the pre-proposal from the University of California, Merced (UCM) to establish the Ernest & Julio Gallo School of Management. I have reviewed the documents you provided in light of the charge to focus exclusively on graduate programs, and share my thoughts below.

As I understand the proposal from the materials provided, the new Gallo School will combine the existing Departments of Cognitive and Information Sciences, Economics and Business Management, Political Science, and Management of Complex Systems. For the most part, existing faculty within these departments would be merged into the school, and existing programs within the departments would continue to be offered, with two graduate-level additions: a proposed Master of Professional Accountancy, and a proposed Master of Parks and Land Management.

The proposed structure of the school strikes me as being similar to my own school, and frankly other schools of public affairs. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was formed 50 years ago, and brings together faculty with backgrounds in Economics, Management (some business, some government and some non-profit), Political Science (mainly public administration scholars), and Environmental Sciences, with some additional faculty with professional backgrounds in Data Science and IT. I have seen firsthand that there are synergies to be gained by grouping this array of faculty all in one school, both in the ability to offer interdisciplinary programs and in the fostering of interdisciplinary research. Given that this is a reorganization of existing departments and not the creation of new departments, and in a manner that is similar to a number of existing schools, the school will fit well within both the UC system and higher education writ large.

Turning to academic programs, I will first comment on the academically-focused graduate programs. Given that my background is in Economics, I can comment most

intelligently on the MA and PhD in Economics, and both of those seem to be consistent with the “industry standards” for these types of programs. Although my background does not span the other three graduate tracks for academic degrees (MS and PhD in Cognitive and Information Sciences, MS and PhD in Management of Complex Systems, and MA and PhD in Political Science), the programs as described appear to be of expected structure for those fields. Thus, I have no question about the academic rigor of any of these programs. In addition, the sizes of the programs all seem reasonable and the placements of students are good, suggesting that there is both student demand and a societal need for these programs.

Turning next to the professional degrees, the curriculum of the Master of Management seems reasonable, and sufficiently rigorous for a Master’s degree. However, I do have concerns that the market for this degree, as currently structured, may be limited. The degree is structured to be a cross-sector degree in which students seeking careers in “for-profit, not-for-profit, and public agencies will go through the program together.” However, there are existing “gold-standard” degrees for each of these sectors – the MBA for the for-profit sector, and the MPA/MPP (Master of Public Administration/Affairs/Policy) for the public and non-profit sectors.

The proposal rightly notes that existing nearby schools of management and business generally offer MBA programs (and often finance-focused programs) geared toward working in the private sector. Within MPA/MPP degrees, there often will be different tracks for particular sectors. At ██████████ for example, although our MPA is intended to give students the ability to succeed in any sector (and our placements are roughly 1/3 of our students to each of the three sectors), we have a Nonprofit Management concentration, a Public Management concentration, and a Local Government Management concentration. Through these concentrations, students can signal to employers which sector they intend to pursue and for which they are qualified. The rationale for these tracks is that the structure, rules, and goals (e.g. accounting, sources of funds, employment rules, mission) are often different across sectors, and the employers who hire our students often are looking for students who have the knowledge to hit the ground running in their particular sector. We also have recently started two new degree programs meant to focus on sectors within these sectors – a Master of Science in Healthcare Management for students who wish to manage healthcare organizations, and a Master of International Affairs for students who wish to manage in international organizations, which each have their own characteristics and needs.

All of this is to say that I’m concerned that the current M.M. degree might be structured in too broad a manner, in that in trying to be something for all sectors, it ends up being something that isn’t enough for any particular sector. The current level of student enrollments (ranging from 7 students to 16) is worrisome to me, as is the recent trajectory (declining through the last few years – years in which Masters enrollments, particularly 2021-22, were reasonably robust). I wonder whether both students and employers don’t know exactly what they’re getting in pursuing this degree. If they do not already exist, I would encourage the creation of

concentrations within the degree, so that student can signal and better prepare for the sector in which they see themselves starting their careers.

Finally, the two additional proposed Master's degrees (in Professional Accountancy and Parks and Land Management) both meet clear needs in society and among California universities (as few schools currently offer these), and I anticipate sufficient demand for these programs to make them viable.

Given the proposed structure of the new school, I was frankly surprised that there weren't more cross-department interdisciplinary programs in the works, at least at the ideation stage, as there would clearly be scope for such programs in the new school. For example, a PhD program in Public Policy comes immediately to mind, in which students are trained in the political process, economic analysis, management of organizations, and perhaps data science and sustainability, and are able to do cross-cutting research. The courses to deploy such a program are likely already existing within the school, and we've found at [REDACTED] that students from such a program have good placement opportunities. Similarly, I wonder whether this school should consider offering an MPA or MPP program. To offer such a program, a school typically needs to cobble together courses in economics, political science, management, and statistics. Given the constituent parts of the proposed school, most of these courses are likely already being offered, or could be offered using existing faculty.

Overall, I view the structure and programs of the proposed Gallo School to be generally reasonable and well thought out, with the caveat that I have longer term concerns about the viability of the M.M. program.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any further assistance at

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Sincerely,

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