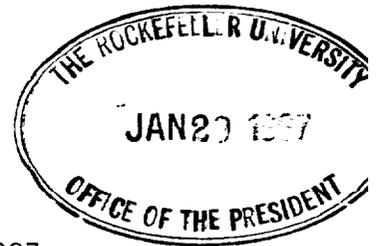


BACTERIAL PHYSIOLOGY UNIT  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL  
25 SHATTUCK STREET  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115  
TELEPHONE: (617) 732-2022



Jan. 23, 1987

Dear Colleague,

The Home Secretary of the NAS has recently sent you a draft report of the ad hoc Committee on the Structure of the Academy, and he invites comments. This occasion offers the possibility for serious consideration of a problem that may interest you.

I was Chairman of the Microbiology Section at the time of its dissolution, in the last reorganization of the Academy, and I did not resist that change because I agreed that functions and levels of organization provide a more logical basis than taxonomic groups for dividing the biological disciplines. But the inevitable result was that microbiologists are at a real disadvantage as candidates, unless they fit into the Class on Medical Science, or unless they use bacteria as model cells to study universal mechanisms in molecular or cell biology. Each of you will have your own list, but to provide evidence that there is a problem I might mention Nikaido, Alex Glazer, Woese, Losick. These all do sophisticated molecular work, but on aspects of microbes that are largely special to these organisms, and that are therefore not widely known to most of the members of the sections on biochemistry or on cell biology. I have written to Bryce Crawford suggesting a simple step that might improve the situation: to change the name of the Section on Cellular and Developmental Biology to the Section on Cellular, Developmental, and Microbial Biology. Microbiologists would still, of course, not be well known to the majority of the members of that section, but we would at least have a stronger claim for an occasional nominee.

If you believe this suggestion has merit you might wish to write a brief supporting letter to the Home Secretary. Or you may have another idea on how to achieve more equitable status for microbiologists, say comparable to that of botanists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernard D. Davis". To the right of the signature is a simple downward-pointing arrow.

Bernard D. Davis

P.S. If you write please send a copy to Carroll Williams, who is a member of the ad hoc committee. His address is: Harvard University, Biological Laboratories, Room 342, 16 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138.