

Provost's Response to Final Report, Task Force on Educational Initiatives

Monday, March 19, 2007

Dear Members of the Campus Community:

I trust that you have had an opportunity to review the Final Report of the Provost's Task Force on Educational Initiatives, which was circulated on February 5, 2007. I want to take this opportunity to thank again the entire committee and its chair, Wayne TeBrake, for an excellent report that makes a compelling argument for its recommendations.

You will recall that I charged the Task Force with establishing new curricular connections between the performing and visual arts and the liberal arts and sciences at Purchase College. Specifically, our challenge was to propose select new integrative BA programs that involve multiple schools/conservatories and thus capitalize on the distinctive character and strengths of Purchase College.

Members of the Task Force express confidence that exciting new forms of integration and collaboration among the performing and visual arts and the liberal arts and sciences will both strengthen the College as a whole and bring new energy and resources to our existing programs and therefore support a new trajectory of interdisciplinary and collaborative development for Purchase. They also insist that such change not come at the expense of our existing disciplinary excellences.

I write today to let you know that I agree with and have accepted the recommendations and actions, which follow:

The overall thrust of our recommendations is to move integrative studies – that is, programs of study that combine the critical inquiry and analysis of the liberal arts with the communicative practices of the arts – from the margins of our traditional disciplines to the forefront of the College's educational mission, thereby building a clearer and more distinct profile for the College as a whole. To that end, we recommend three principal actions:

- The immediate creation and development of a Center for Integrative Studies to serve as the distinct and centrally visible space within which artists and scholars can interact and collaborate across the schools, conservatories and traditional disciplines of the College.
- A dramatic increase in the short term (for the Fall of 2007, if possible) of the number of foundational skills courses in the arts that are open to everyone regardless of discipline and prior experience, and the development in the slightly longer term (for the Spring of 2008, if possible) of new integrative studies courses that serve simultaneously to produce some of the student learning outcomes required by the General Education curriculum.

- The continued curricular development and gradual implementation (beginning in the Fall of 2008, if possible) of new integrative study tracks in documentary studies, visual studies, and/or performance studies, subject to faculty approval in the academic councils and the Educational Policies Committee.

As the Task Force notes, each of these steps will require new energy, commitment, and especially money from a College that is already stretched to the limits in the delivery of its existing programs of study.

I have shared with President Schwarz my support of the recommendations and actions, and he endorses them as well. As a result, we have identified new funding—some permanent and some one time—so that we can move forward immediately with the following four recommendations:

1. Create a Center for Integrative Studies. I have asked that Wayne TeBrake, who so ably led the Task Force, serve as Interim Director of the Center so that we can move forward expeditiously. President Schwarz and I included funding for a half-time faculty director (stipend and course releases) in last year's budget, so that permanent money is available to fund the Director, both in the interim and permanently. I have also asked Jon Esser, Associate Dean for the School of the Arts, to serve as a 50% Associate Director, ensuring that there are knowledgeable representatives from both Liberal Arts and the Arts as we launch this initiative.
2. Dramatically increase the number of foundational skills courses in the arts, available to all students. I have identified permanent and ongoing state funds from salary savings that will enable us to offer, on an annual basis, 10 sections next year and 16 in following year, of courses such as video production and editing, audio production, digital photography, visual literacy, and drawing and design. Courses like these are already required for some existing majors; they are desired but generally inaccessible for other majors; and they are anticipated as foundational for the new study tracks.
3. Support the development of new integrative studies courses that serve simultaneously to produce the SLOs required by the General Education curriculum. President Schwarz and I are pleased, too, to note how well the Report on the Fall Retreats dovetails with the Report from the Task Force on Educational Initiatives, and we have therefore identified funds to support those recommendations for a revised general education curriculum. I am grateful to Ronnie Halperin and Jennifer Uleman for their leadership in bringing forward those recommendations and a plan to implement them. I have identified funding to support the development of a new General Education curriculum.
4. Continue the curricular development and graduate implementation of new integrative study tracks, subject to appropriate faculty approval.

In addition, I have identified funds to enable faculty to participate in these new initiatives, which are also recommended as follows:

- In order to support the introduction of new forms of integration and collaboration among the disciplines, the College will need to increase the size of the faculty lest integrative innovation seriously undermine our current disciplinary excellences. Thus, in order to free up our current faculty for integrative teaching and practice, their disciplinary programs will need to receive adequate funding for replacements. And to the extent that new faculty lines are created within the College they should, as a rule, be anchored in the disciplines of specific schools or conservatories, though their incumbents should be expected to contribute both to their disciplines and, through the Center for Integrative Studies, to one or more of the integrative programs of study.
- Once established, the Center for Integrative Studies should immediately assess the needs – curricular, personnel, facilities, and equipment – of our existing interdisciplinary programs. There is, of course, an on-going assessment of the organization and delivery of instructional technology, in which the new Center should be represented, but our discussions with individual faculty members and interdisciplinary boards of study have indicated that the Center could immediately relieve some of the on-going pressures on individual programs by identifying synergies and addressing common needs.
- The array of arts courses currently offered to liberal arts and sciences students to fulfill the General Education requirement in the arts serves some students better than others, but on the whole our current offerings are insufficient to meet our students' basic needs, and much less to foster creative interaction and collaboration. While the attractiveness of these course offerings could be improved – for example, by removing the “for non-majors” tag, which immediately suggests inferiority, from course titles – we do not think their number should be decreased. We urge a careful assessment of enrollment patterns in these courses, however, to be certain that our offerings match the interests and needs of students, some of whom may wish to take only one course in the arts to satisfy the Gen Ed requirement.

I will be supporting the recommendations above in the following ways:

1. Support for course development. Per the campus budget process, I have requested and had approved one-time monies to provide stipends to faculty wishing to develop courses for integrative studies. More information will be forthcoming.
2. Support for faculty participation. Using new monies dedicated in the '06-'07 budget for new faculty, I have been able to provide course replacements so

that six faculty can teach a course for Integrative Studies as part of their regular load, if they wish.

3. I am charging Wayne TeBrake and Jon Esser, as a priority, first, to assess the curricular needs of our existing interdisciplinary programs and to identify, if possible, some synergies and common needs that we can address through Center support; and second, to assess enrollment patterns in courses currently offered under the “non-majors” rubric and to ascertain that, going forward, they match the interests and needs of the students.

There are many other substantive recommendations for this new Center to which I am equally committed, but most do not require immediate funding. They are, rather, important long-term objectives that will depend on incorporating the Center as one goal in our upcoming Capital Campaign and/or on funding provided to support the growth of majors in new and existing interdisciplinary/integrative studies programs.

We have taken important first steps in realizing a new vision for Purchase and in creating new educational opportunities for our students. President Schwarz and I thank you for your dedication to the College and its excellence and distinctiveness.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Langland

Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs