

PURCHASE
COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**FINAL REPORT
OF THE
PROVOST'S TASK FORCE ON EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES**

To Provost Langland and the College Community:

In February of 2006, the Task Force on Educational Initiatives was charged 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. We began our work during a day-long retreat at Beechwood on February 21, 2006, at which we developed the broad outlines of the proposals we have since been developing in smaller working groups. While the working groups consulted variously with faculty and staff in the early conceptual stage, a preliminary report to the faculty in advance of a Faculty Forum on April 19, 2006, was intended to initiate an even broader pattern of consultation and participation in what we believe has been an inclusive and transparent process. Informed by the very constructive criticism and suggestions we received at the Faculty Forum, a discussion facilitated very ably by Professor Douglas Challenger of Franklin Pierce College, we resumed our work in the Fall semester of 2006, with our working groups once again consulting the individual faculty members and boards of study most engaged in the integrative studies programs we currently offer as well as the new programs of study we were charged to propose. We are now pleased to be able to present our final report, with specific recommendations for action that we will articulate below, to you and the entire Purchase College community.

This is, we believe, a moment of extraordinary opportunity for Purchase College – one in which we can realize as never before the founding vision of a single college in which artists and scholars, both students and faculty, challenge and strengthen one another through sustained interaction and collaboration. With its strong and energetic faculty and staff and its unique facilities, including the Neuberger Museum and the Performing Arts Center, Purchase College has the potential to integrate high-quality arts and liberal arts education as few other institutions in the country could do. In recent years, the development and growth of variously integrative programs like Drama Studies, New Media, Media, Society and the Arts, and Cinema Studies demonstrate that there is considerable demand among our students for programs that aspire to connect the liberal arts disciplines to active participation in the arts. Clearly these programs have brought new students and new energy to the College. By further developing the array of integrative programs of study – both majors and minors – we believe that the College can capitalize on the persistent demand of liberal arts students for greater and more significant access to the arts while simultaneously opening up new opportunities for integration and collaboration for students in the visual and performing arts.

From the very beginning, however, we have understood our charge to entail much more than the creation of new programs of study. Throughout our deliberations we have been keenly aware of the way in which integrative programs of study challenge us to rethink both how we conceive and how we deliver our General Education curriculum. Arts students, for example, will only be able to benefit from these

programs to the extent that we can configure our General Education requirements in ways that simultaneously support curricular integration. In our first meeting, we also imagined that we could not create new programs of integrative study without first creating a physical and intellectual space – what we came to call the Center for Integrative Studies – within which students and faculty from a variety of programs could interact, collaborate and support one another. To our delight, the idea of creating such a Center – one that is capacious enough to support existing programs as well as new study tracks – received a strong endorsement from our faculty at the Faculty Forum in April. Finally, we have become ever more convinced that it is our responsibility to be attentive to the needs and challenges of our existing integrative studies programs as we develop our vision of new possibilities for integrative study and collaboration. Thus, our recommendations aim to strengthen our existing programs of study by building new possibilities for creative engagement and provocative interaction across the boundaries of our traditional disciplines.

During the fall semester of 2006, our on-going deliberations coincided with a new campus-wide discussion, which grew out of a series of administrative and faculty/staff retreats, of what President Schwarz has called our “second founding.” To the extent that this discussion has underscored the challenge of reconfiguring our curriculum so that it fosters the student learning outcomes required under the State-mandated General Education curriculum, it has reinforced our sense of the complementarity of General Education reform and the expansion of our integrative programs of study. The recommendations we make here are not intended to preempt that larger discussion; on the contrary, we believe that the course of action we envision in this report will not be complete or fully realized until the transformation of the General Education curriculum has been agreed upon and implemented. In the meantime, we believe that our recommendations will move the College in an exciting new direction that will position Purchase at the forefront of a sea change in undergraduate arts and liberal arts education in the twenty-first century.

Charting a Course of Action

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 center 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.

Taken together, these three steps describe a trajectory of curricular and institutional development that is, we believe, distinctive, exciting, and uniquely suited to the innovative interests and practices of the students, faculty, and staff of Purchase College. At the same time, 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. This represents an enormous challenge to the academic and fiscal leaders of Purchase College and requires a firm commitment from them that these new steps, however promising they may be, will not be undertaken without clear budgetary planning that is capable of launching our new initiatives and then sustaining them into the future. Bitter experience has taught the Purchase College community to be wary of new initiatives that are founded on soft money and fuzzy financial planning. Nevertheless, we believe that with proper planning and commitment all of these steps are feasible in the relatively short term and capable of founding, once again, a nationally distinctive College, uniquely situated in the public sector, that can weather the demographic effects of the end of the baby-boom echo and, indeed, prosper in the era of semi-privatization in public education.

The Purchase College Center for Integrative Studies

The mission of the Center for Integrative Studies, as we envision it, is to create an institutional, curricular and physical space within which students and faculty can explore the enormous potential for curricular integration and creative collaboration among the liberal arts and arts disciplines that Purchase College represents. Ideally the Center will be the focal point of a wide range of activities – lecture series, conferences, performances, screenings, exhibitions, visiting scholars and artists, and so forth – but the core of its mission is to provide structural support for programs of study – both majors and minors – that are broadly integrative of the modes of formulation, articulation, and expression represented by the professional programs in the visual and performing arts with the modes of inquiry and analysis represented by the disciplinary majors in the liberal arts and sciences.

- In order to fulfill its mission, the Center for Integrative Studies needs to be capacious enough to nurture currently existing, well-defined programs of study alongside newly designed study tracks and even individually designed programs that respond to changing opportunities and interests. Ideally, the new integrative programs that it develops and sponsors will include both majors leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree (generally, 44-52 credits) and minors that are open to both BFA and BA students in other programs (usually, 18-24 credits).
- The Center for Integrative Studies should be integrative and collaborative in the sense that the programs of study it supports, nurtures and develops combine multiple modes of inquiry with multiple modes of expression – that is to say, programs that engage faculty and staff from multiple disciplines and schools/conservatories within the College. Flexibility and choice need be the hallmarks of its curricular architecture, while collaboration and interdependence mark its institutional practice. As its functions grow, the Center will require solid state-side funding for its core personnel, but in the delivery of new integrative courses and programs of study, it will draw primarily on the teaching resources of our existing programs. In short, the Center should not become a new, autonomous school within the College, though its leadership should report directly to the Office of Academic Affairs.
- 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.
- For the Center to take on a broader array of activities and to become a vital hub of interaction and collaboration emblematic of the College, we strongly recommend that the Center for Integrative Studies become a centerpiece of our capital campaign and our external fundraising efforts more generally. We envision the possibility of endowed professorships, faculty and student support resources, visiting scholar and artist residencies and even externally supported labs, smart classrooms, and presentation/performance spaces.

New Courses to Foster Integration and Collaboration

From its original founding, Purchase College has always had difficulty providing students in the liberal arts and sciences with meaningful curricular avenues for active participation in the arts. At the same time, students in professional training programs in the arts have had very limited access to meaningful and coherent coursework in the liberal arts – a problem that has only been aggravated in recent years by the strictures of the State-mandated General Education curriculum. To be sure, Purchase has had its share of cross-over students – students who proved they could shine in both the artistic and the academic cultures of Purchase – but these have always been the exception, not the rule.

While we believe that programs of integrative study can serve to address these problems for students who choose to major or minor in them, something more fundamental has to happen first: We need to increase dramatically the number of foundational skills courses in the arts that are open to everyone regardless of discipline and prior experience and to develop new integrative studies courses that serve simultaneously to produce some of the student learning outcomes required by the General Education curriculum. While the Center for Integrative Studies should take the lead in this effort, we strongly urge the Office of Academic Affairs and the Deans to begin to address this challenge even before the Center is fully operational.

- 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.
- In addition, we strongly recommend a dramatic increase in the number of courses that may be considered foundational for advanced work in integrative studies: 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 we have

developed. To be sure, some of this coursework is already offered on a limited basis through our existing programs of study, but demand so outstrips the supply that an interested student effectively has to declare a specific major in order to gain access. What we envision, by contrast, is a supply sufficient to allow access to all interested students regardless of disciplinary background and prior experience.

- What this proposal requires is a dramatic commitment of new resources in common support of a broad range of existing and possible new integrative studies curricula. If such resources can be found, this dramatic gesture will not only relieve some of the perennial pressures on our existing interdisciplinary programs, but actually offer all of our students the chance to test their interests – to experiment in the best sense of the word – prior to declaring a new major or minor in integrative studies.
- Which courses are offered and how many depends not only on available funding, but on a careful assessment of the common curricular foundations of our various integrative studies programs, both existing and anticipated. We strongly encourage the Office of Academic Affairs and the Deans to undertake such an assessment as soon as possible in order to introduce a new and expanded array of foundational courses to all our students in the Fall of 2007.
- At the same time, we propose that the Deans and the Office of Academic Affairs organize an effort, in the context of the larger campus-wide discussion of General Education, to develop new interdisciplinary courses, especially for students in the visual and performing arts, that are designed to produce essential student learning outcomes required by the General Education curriculum while at the same time enabling participation in and commitment to minors and majors in integrative studies curricula. Although this effort needs to be congruent with the larger transformation of the Gen Ed curriculum, the development and experimental implementation of such pilot courses need not await the completion of that larger process.

We believe that a dramatic increase in coursework foundational for more advanced integrative and collaborative work across the boundaries of our traditional disciplines will have an equally dramatic and positive effect on the campus as a whole. Thus, we urge the implementation of this recommendation even before the Center for Integrative Studies is fully functional and quite apart from whether the College proceeds with the implementation of new programs in integrative studies.

New Programs of Integrative Study

For nearly a year, working groups within the Task Force on Educational Initiatives have been investigating and developing possible new integrative curricula in visual studies, performance studies, and documentary studies. To be sure, we have looked for and learned from successful models of these programs elsewhere in the country, but more importantly we have taken stock of the training, talent, and experience of our faculty and professional staff as well as the breadth and depth of our current course offerings in order to develop curricular visions that are uniquely adapted to *our* resources and interests. In addition, we have consulted whenever possible the broad range of faculty members who would most likely participate in these programs, seeking curricular suggestions, criticism, and general feedback on our preliminary proposals.

In the end, we believe that all three of these study tracks – performance, documentary and visual studies – would enjoy considerable support within the College community, mobilize in new and exciting ways the unique constellation of resources that Purchase College represents, and attract new students to the College who are looking for programs that integrate the arts and liberal arts. But each of these study

tracks will also require the commitment of significant new resources in the context of programs and personnel already stretched to the limits. Thus, while we recommend further refinement and development of all three curricula, we also recommend their phased and gradual introduction, under the aegis initially of the BALA degree and pending the identification and mobilization of sufficient new resources to support and sustain the personnel, infrastructural, and material requirements of high-quality programs in documentary, performance and visual studies.

Documentary Studies

Documentary work communicates an understanding of society and provides audiences with novel perspectives on problems both old and new. The Documentary Studies program will supply students with the tools to express this comprehension and engagement. Further, this program should foster civic engagement through a focus on social issues and promote positive change through public discourse. Documentary Studies will ground students in a liberal arts and sciences discipline and prepare them to express this understanding through creative documentary work. Students from a broad range of disciplines may choose to major or minor in Documentary Studies.

The strength of the Documentary Studies program lies in the combination of expertise in the liberal arts and sciences and the visual and performing arts that Purchase can provide. The liberal arts component provides students with a firm intellectual background in a focal field – the required cognate coursework will typically constitute a minor in that field, but with additional coursework, could also constitute a double major field. The required coursework in an expressive methodology (a minimum of four courses) will cultivate the student's communicative creativity and with the guidance of an Interdisciplinary Advisor build toward a strong senior project. As the culmination of their work, Documentary Studies majors will be required to complete a senior project that demonstrates competence in a liberal arts and sciences discipline as well as an expressive medium such as film, photography, narrative journalism, public history, and audio and broadcast journalism.

As the attached Documentary Studies proposal indicates, the College already offers a broad range of courses that might contribute to a Documentary Studies curriculum, but to implement fully the Documentary Studies program, the Center for Integrative Studies will need to develop several core courses that are not currently offered and, working with existing programs of study, assure access to coursework that is either in short supply or currently unavailable to non-majors. In addition, pending the outcome of the current College-wide assessments of instructional technology and space utilization, we estimate that the full development of the Documentary Studies curriculum will require a significant investment in new equipment, facilities, software, and maintenance. Fortunately, most of these expenditures will also support and enhance other programs of study.

Performance Studies

Performance Studies is a rigorous academic program that employs performance as an organizing rubric for the study of a wide range of practices and behaviors, spanning traditional theater, public spectacle, and quotidian ritual. This program does not seek to train professionals in any live or mediated performance subgenre; rather it is intended to prepare students with theoretical, critical and practical tools derived from such disciplines as acting, aesthetics, anthropology, cinema studies, comparative literature, dramaturgy, ethnomusicology, political philosophy, semiotics, and social psychology to study and produce performances as a means of understanding both art and social, historical and cultural processes. Senior projects may be academic research papers, documentary films/videos, plays/screenplays, happenings/performance events, theatrical productions or websites.

As the attached Performance Studies proposal suggests, course offerings and distribution requirements in this program can be organized in three sub-field categories: theater, performance art and interactive media, and performance of/in everyday life. The principal goal of the minor course of study is to familiarize students with the history and core theories of the performance study discipline, and to offer students an overview, by means of four required courses, each of which includes a practicum, of the ways these theories have contributed to meaningful scholarly, artistic and other cultural praxes. The major course of study similarly insists upon a broad general preparation in theory and practice, which would provide the foundation for a more focused exploration and culminate in the senior project.

Full implementation of such a broadly defined Performance Studies curriculum would require development of a series of four new introductory core courses, but the College already offers many of the other courses that would constitute the major program of study. Indeed, the first of the suggested sub-fields in theater is largely parallel to our existing program in Drama Studies. It is not our intention to dismantle the Drama Studies Board of Study, which clearly offers work of value and interest to our students, nor is it to create a parallel or redundant board of study. Rather, we seek to complement the existing Drama Studies program with a broader array of student choices in the realm of Performance Studies, which we believe will bring new students to our campus and promote new kinds of collaborative practice. Given sufficient resources, this curricular augmentation would not be a difficult stretch for the Purchase faculty. We urge the Center for Integrative Studies, working with the Deans and the Office of Academic Affairs, to find an institutional framework within which this augmentation can be realized.

Visual Studies

Our sense of sight has become increasingly privileged in contemporary culture. Visual empathy – the ability to comprehend the underlying meaning of visual form and structure – is requisite to engaged participation in society, irrespective of one’s vocation. Digital technologies, often manifested predominantly through visual modalities, extend cultural development and influence our perceptions of self and the world. A Visual Studies program of study gives students exposure to a wide variety of disciplines that inform our understanding of visual perception: philosophy, art history, psychology, cognitive science, the social sciences, film, video, art and design. Students gain skills in both the interpretation of visual culture in light of social, economic and political processes as well as in the ability to write about the multiplicity of visual phenomena surrounding us. Visual Studies is a multi-disciplinary program that integrates theoretical and methodological insights with practice in art and design.

Throughout its deliberations, our Task Force has conceived of Visual Studies an essential component of a successful Center for Integrative Studies at Purchase College. Drawing on a broad range of our current disciplinary excellences, a broadly defined Visual Studies curriculum could foster a host of valuable student learning outcomes: proficiency in the observation and analysis of visual experience; the ability to interpret verbally the meaning of visual formulations; proficiency within and among the theoretical, historical and cultural disciplines that offer perspectives on visual experience; basic studio proficiencies learned through practicums (film, video, digital imaging, design and color). To date, however, we have not yet developed a viable focus for such program of study – one that promises to develop the desired student outcomes, highlights the multi-disciplinary strengths of the College, and captures the imagination of its faculty members.

Very late in our deliberations, we considered a proposal for a program in Visual Literature, which has the considerable virtue of focus and specificity, drawing on long-standing faculty interests and expertise especially in the School of Art + Design. Defined broadly as the creation and study of literature that addresses the spatial/visual properties of its text, Visual Literature might usefully become one option within – or even the anchor of – a larger Visual Studies program, but we leave it to the discretion of the Office of Academic Affairs to encourage the further discussion and refinement of these proposals, which

we append to this report, within the curricular laboratory of the Center for Integrative Studies, once it has been established. In any case, the members of the Task Force are still firmly committed to the idea that Visual Studies can and should become an essential ingredient of the curricular interaction and collaboration that we envision for the Center for Integrative Studies.

Conclusion

Throughout our eleven months of work together, the very diverse members of the Provost's Task Force on Educational Initiatives have been motivated by the shared conviction that Purchase College stands at the beginning of a new era of promise – what President Schwarz has very aptly called our second founding. Firmly rooted in the original vision of a single College in which artists and scholars challenge and strengthen one another through sustained interaction and collaboration, the recommendations for action we have articulated in this report seek to adapt this vision to a new digital age of global interdependence and responsibility. By consolidating and strengthening our previously disparate efforts at curricular integration within a Center for Integrative Studies, by offering a new range of foundational learning experiences in integration and collaboration to all our students, and by developing a broader range of choice in integrative studies curricula, Purchase College can, we believe, not only emerge as a national leader in post-secondary education for the twenty-first century, but more importantly, equip our students with the ability to integrate and collaborate, to work across disciplinary boundaries, and to join in new ways what they learn in the classroom with what is happening in the world.

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