

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Phase IV of the Academic Restructuring Process: Renewing the Curriculum

Discussion Paper

by
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A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this short discussion paper is to set the stage for Phase IV of the academic restructuring process (renewing the curriculum).¹ It begins with a discussion of the rationale for changes in the College's curriculum and graduation requirements. It then proceeds to describe Macalester's distinctive educational purpose and mission. Next, it articulates the specific 'learning outcomes' that are entailed in that mission. It concludes with a discussion of the issues that will have to be addressed as we renew the curriculum in ways that enhance our ability to realize these learning outcomes and otherwise deliver a high-quality liberal arts education.

B. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Recognizing the importance of the curriculum as both the hallmark and cornerstone of the College's educational enterprise, EPAG has established curricular renewal as its highest priority for 2003-04 academic year.² The decision to revisit and renew the curriculum at this juncture arose out of a variety of factors. First, over the past few years the Macalester community has been engaged in a strategic planning process aimed at enhancing academic quality at the College. From the very beginning of this process, the curriculum – which reflects and embodies both the values of the faculty and the aspirations of the College – was identified as being a key focal point and emphasis of strategic transformation. Subsequently, both the *Strategic Directions Document* and the Task Force on Academic Quality and Structure emphasized the crucial importance of renewing the curriculum so that it more deliberately incorporated the intellectual skills/competencies articulated in the 1995 *Statement of Purpose and*

¹Phase I refers to the reorganization of the faculty governance structure; Phase II, the adoption of new allocations guidelines; and, Phase III, the design and implementation of a new academic structure.

²The term 'curriculum' is notoriously difficult to define. It is used here to refer to the specific combination and sequence of courses required to graduate. The major elements of a liberal arts curriculum are the 'concentration' (major/minor), the 'general education' sequence or program, and the First-Year/Senior-Year programs.

Belief. In a very real sense, then, the current curricular initiative should be viewed as the culmination of a multi-year effort to more purposefully align our curriculum with our *Statement of Purpose and Belief* in order to enhance academic quality.

The second reason to renew the curriculum now has to do with the impending accreditation review. As many of you are aware, the College will be preparing for and undergoing an accreditation review over the next few years. A key element of this review will be an evaluation of how well we actually do what we say we will do in our *Mission Statement* and *Statement of Purpose and Belief*. This being the case, we need to review our curriculum now to ensure that it clearly and effectively embodies the fundamental educational goals and priorities articulated in those documents.

The third reason to renew the curriculum has to do with faculty interest and the closely related issue of what might be called the ‘faculty ownership’. Simply put, over the past several years faculty themselves recognize the need for curricular innovation. Indeed, the recent past has seen Macalester faculty take practical steps in this regard by introducing new courses, proposing new interdisciplinary programs, creating new emphases within existing majors, and developing innovative new programs (such as QM4PP). They have also participated actively in a range of formal and informal discussions (many sponsored by the CST) focused on finding ways to strengthen the existing curriculum (examples include the ‘writing across the curriculum’ faculty seminar and the ‘public scholarship’ faculty seminar). Taken together, this activity suggests that there is considerable support and momentum within the faculty for curricular renewal.

Related to this is the issue of faculty ownership of the curriculum. Despite the efforts of a wide range of faculty to introduce innovations into the curriculum, the fact remains that the existing curriculum was designed by an earlier generation of faculty. This is highlighted by the fact that, of the faculty members who were at the College during the Year of Academic Planning in 1991, only about 1/3 are still here. This means that the vast majority of the current faculty were not involved in designing the existing curriculum; nor were they involved in the discussions or debates that supported this process. In short, the curriculum does not belong to them. Given the (admittedly intangible) benefits that flow from faculty ownership of a curriculum, this would seem to suggest that the time is ripe for a curricular renewal process that engages the current Macalester in the collective scholarly enterprise of determining the specific combination and sequence of courses that our students will have to complete in order to graduate.

Finally, and most importantly, renewing the curriculum now is recommended by the fact that it is in the best interests of our students to do so. While it is true that new curricular elements (diversity, capstones, etc) elements were introduced into the curriculum in 1991 an attempt to advance the goals of academic excellence, internationalism and multiculturalism, it is increasingly obvious that we have not kept up with curricular best practice at our peer institutions.³ Simply put, in the years since the existing

³See Annex 1 for an overview of the College’s curricular history.

curriculum was adopted, the fields of higher education and the liberal arts have seen at least one major wave of curricular innovation and may be on the cusp of another. Given this, if we wish to avoid curricular obsolescence in the near future we need to act now to develop and adopt a new curriculum that – while consistent with Macalester’s mission, values and traditions – is informed by the curricular best practices of the nation’s top liberal arts colleges. Only if we take steps now can we ensure that our students continue to graduate with the very best liberal arts education we can provide.

Taken together, these factors – coupled with the momentous changes that have taken place in the world since the existing curriculum was debated and adopted in the early 1990s – signal that the time is ripe for a comprehensive review of the curriculum. What is needed now is a serious and sustained effort on the part of the Macalester faculty to build an innovative yet rigorous curriculum that more purposefully cultivates the intellectual competencies and ‘habits of heart’ that we have decided are emblematic of Macalester’s distinctive identity and vision. Developing such a course of study will be the main thrust of the EPAG curricular renewal initiative over the next academic year.

C. CURRICULAR FIRST PRINCIPLES

The fundamental educational goals and priorities of the College are derived from three basic sources: the nature of the liberal arts and sciences; the College’s *Mission Statement*; and the Macalester *Statement of Purpose and Belief*. This section provides a brief overview of these curricular ‘first principles’. The following section will articulate the ‘learning outcomes’ that derive from these principles.

1. The Nature of the Liberal Arts and Sciences

A review of the historical practices of – and theoretical reflections on – the liberal arts over the past few millennia suggests that there is no single or coherent tradition of liberal learning. The debates between Plato and Isocrates, between proponents of the Classical versus Christian vision of liberal studies, and between those promoting a contemplative vision versus those holding a more practical view of the liberal arts are familiar enough that they need not be rehearsed here. Such a review also reveals, however, that there are a number of key practices or goals that are woven – albeit in complex patterns – through the entire history of liberal studies/liberal arts. In no particular order (and recognizing that these goals have had different labels in different eras), these are:

The Development of the Educated Person: Throughout the long history of the liberal arts, the development of the ‘educated person’ has been an enduring theme. Minimally, such a person has been defined as someone who:

- is capable of leading an ‘examined life’ and taking charge of their own thought;
- is liberated from ignorance and unexamined convention;
- possesses the powers of practical reasoning;

- possesses significant knowledge about the world;
- has a capacity for aesthetic inquiry, expression and appreciation; and,
- possesses an understanding and appreciation of the ‘best that has been thought and known’ by human beings seeking to make sense of the human condition.

The Cultivation of Private Character and Public Virtue: Beyond cultivating the educated person, the liberal arts have also been associated with developing private character and public virtue. Although the details have varied considerably across time and space, this has tended to involve:

- developing a mature understanding of the self in relation to both history and society;
- the cultivation of a moral faculty that enables one to discern right from wrong, to make informed ethical decisions, and to lead a life of informed/reasoned commitment-in-relativism;
- the development of character and integrity; and
- preparation for participation and leadership in the public life of the community (as Seneca reminds us, not just the local community, but a multi-civilizational global community as well).

The Preparation for Higher/Professional Education: In practice, the liberal arts have always been about preparation for higher education or professional life (historically, the law, medicine and the ministry). This preparatory dimension of a liberal arts education entails the following:

- mastery of specified body of subject matter (or, in recent times, disciplinary knowledge);
- a facility with certain modes of inquiry and expression; and,
- an understanding of the ‘ethics’ of a discipline or profession.

2. Macalester’s Distinctive Liberal Arts Mission

Another key determinant of the nature of the Macalester curriculum is the College’s mission statement. According to the *Mission Statement*:

Macalester is committed to being a preeminent liberal arts college with an educational program known for its high standards for scholarship and its special emphasis on internationalism, multiculturalism and service to society.

3. Macalester's Statement of Purpose and Belief

A final source of the College's curriculum is its distinctive *Statement of Purpose and Belief*, which was debated and adopted by the faculty in 1995. This statement reads as follows:

At Macalester College we believe that education is a fundamentally transforming experience. As a community of learners, the possibilities for this personal, social, and intellectual transformation extend to us all. We affirm the importance of the intellectual growth of the students, staff, and faculty through individual and collaborative endeavor. We believe that this can be best achieved through an environment that values the diverse cultures of our world and recognizes our responsibility to provide a supportive and respectful environment for students, staff, and faculty of all cultures and backgrounds.

We expect students to develop a broad understanding of the liberal arts while they are at Macalester. Students should follow a primary course of study in order to acquire an understanding of disciplinary theory and methodology; they should be able to apply their understanding of theories to address problems in the larger community. Students should develop the ability to use information and communication resources effectively; be adept at critical, analytical, and logical thinking, and express themselves well in both oral and written forms. Finally students should be prepared to take responsibility for their personal, social, and intellectual choices.

We believe that the benefit of the educational experience at Macalester is the development of individuals who make judgments and interpretations of the broader world around them and choose actions or beliefs for which they are willing to be held accountable. We expect them to develop the ability to seek and use knowledge and experience in contexts that challenge and inform their suppositions about the world. We are committed to helping students grow intellectually and personally within an environment that models and promotes academic excellence and ethical behavior. The education a student begins at Macalester provides the basis for continuous transformation through learning and service.

D. REALIZING THE COLLEGE'S LIBERAL ARTS MISSION: LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE 'MACALESTER IMPRINT'

This section of the paper proceeds by defining the distinctive competencies (which, taken together, we might call the Macalester 'profile' or 'imprint') that derive from the curricular first principles articulated above. For discussion purposes, these competencies are organized under the four rubrics articulated in the *Mission Statement*.

1. Academic Excellence in the Liberal Arts (Core Competencies)

Given the basic nature and purposes of a liberal arts education articulated above, the cornerstone of a Macalester education is – and should remain – academic excellence in the liberal arts. While this is difficult to define in the abstract, in practical terms it can be defined in terms of a number of core *areas of knowledge, cognitive/intellectual skills and practical competencies*.

Areas of Knowledge

First, academic excellence in the liberal arts implies that all graduating students should possess:

- a deep understanding of a specific field of inquiry (including an understanding of substantive knowledge and the key disciplinary methods/modes of inquiry);
- a broad understanding of the multiple modes of inquiry/expression through which people have sought to make sense of the natural and social worlds in which they live (minimally these include scientific/social scientific; interpretive/hermeneutic; normative; and aesthetic modes);
- an engagement with a significant sample of the ‘best that has been thought and known’ about the human condition and the physical world (across both the multiple modes of inquiry/expression mentioned above and the multiple cultures and historical eras that comprise the human experience);
- an understanding of the values, histories and struggles underlying democratic norms and practices (in the US and elsewhere).

Cognitive Skills

Second, academic excellence in the liberal arts implies that all graduating students should possess:

- a well-developed capacity for higher order reasoning (analysis, synthesis; critical thinking; reasoned evaluation/judgement; ethical commitment-in-relativism);
- a capacity for creative problem solving;
- the ability to ask important questions and explore them rigorously;
- the ability to understand and appreciate perspectives different from one’s own;
- a capacity for aesthetic appreciation and creative expression;
- an ability to compare and contrast approaches to knowledge in different disciplines; and
- a capacity to place narrow disciplinary issues/problems in their broader political, social, historical, cultural and ethical contexts;

Practical Competencies

Third, academic excellence implies that all graduating students should possess:

- an ability to acquire, evaluate and apply information from a variety of sources;
- an ability to convey information, analysis and persuasive arguments clearly and effectively in a variety of written, oral and visual formats;
- a level of competence in qualitative and quantitative methods/modes of inquiry appropriate to each student's research interests and the demands of contemporary social, political and professional life;
- a capacity for meaningful independent research;
- a capacity for independent, self-directed and lifelong learning; and
- a capacity for effective collaboration with others, including those from different backgrounds and cultures.

2. Internationalism

Internationalism is a defining element of Macalester's distinctive liberal arts mission. It is also crucial to a first-rate, 21st century liberal arts education in that it prepares students for effective citizenship and humane leadership in a multicultural and globalizing world; provides them with an opportunity for critical and constructive reflection on their own culture/society; and generally provides them with the sort of encounter with other cultures that is a crucial part of the 'examined life'.

Given the centrality of internationalism to a 21st century liberal arts education, all graduating students should possess the following related skills and competencies:

- a basic competence in at least one language beyond English (as well as a basic familiarity with one non-anglophone literature);
- an informed and empathetic understanding of one or more non-US/non-Western cultures;
- a capacity for further inquiry into cultures and societies beyond the US;
- a working knowledge of the key actors, structures, institutions and historical dynamics that constitute the contemporary world order.

3. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a defining element of Macalester's distinctive liberal arts mission/purposes and a key element of first-rate, 21st century liberal arts education. It is important in that, like Internationalism, it prepares students for effective citizenship and humane leadership in a diverse society; provides them with an opportunity for critical and constructive reflection on their own culture/society; and generally provides them with the sort of encounter with other cultures that is a crucial part of the 'examined life'.

Given all this, each of our graduating students should possess:

- an appreciation of the diverse/multicultural nature of US society;
- an understanding of the historical construction of racial, ethnic, gender and other differences that characterize US society;
- an informed and empathetic understanding of one or more non-majority US culture;
- a capacity for further inquiry into domestic cultures other than one's own;
- an informed and reflexive understanding of one's own 'situatedness' within US society;

4. Civic Engagement and Ethical Leadership

Given the history of both the liberal arts in general and the American liberal arts college in particular, preparation for a life of responsible civic engagement and humane leadership (civic and professional) is clearly a key element of a 21st century liberal arts education. This being the case, all graduating students should possess:

- a mature self-understanding and an integrated sense of one's personal identity;
- a capacity for ethical reasoning, judgement and commitment;
- the qualities of character required to act on the basis of this ethical capacity;
- a capacity to discern the consequences – including the moral consequences – of one's decisions and actions and a willingness to be held accountable for those decisions and actions;
- the habits of mind and heart necessary to participate in – and contribute to – the public life of the local, national and/or global communities in which we live;
- a well-developed capacity for (collaborative) public problem solving;
- a well-developed capacity for practical democratic deliberation; and,
- the basic skills necessary for effective and humane leadership (whether in civic or professional life).

E. REALIZING THE OUTCOMES: RENEWING THE CURRICULUM

Following a statement of the principles that ought to guide any systematic and deliberate process of curricular renewal, this section addresses the question of how the key elements of the curriculum might be redesigned to realize this goal and thus enhance educational excellence at Macalester.

1. How to Renew the Curriculum: Guiding Principles

We are likely to be more successful in this endeavor if our efforts are guided at all times by the following considerations:

- the enduring/evolving nature of the liberal arts;
- the College's distinctive liberal arts mission (as articulated in both the *Mission Statement* and the *Statement of Purpose and Belief*);
- any weaknesses that we can identify in the existing curriculum;
- the best practices that have been developed at other preeminent liberal arts colleges as well as in the liberal arts programs/colleges of preeminent research universities;
- the insights into the nature and dynamics of curricular transformation found in the secondary literature on curricular design/reform;
- the insights to be found in studies such as those undertaken by the *National Student Engagement Survey* and the AAC&U's *Greater Expectations* report;
- relevant insights from Macalester staff, students and alumni;
- the creativity, experience, values and practical knowledge of the Macalester College faculty.

2. Elements of the New Curriculum

Cultivating the learning outcomes that flow from the nature of the liberal arts, the College's *Mission Statement* and its *Statement of Purpose and Belief* will require the creation of an integrated curriculum comprising the following elements.

The General Education Program

The keystone of any liberal arts education is a robust and rigorous general education program. Simply put, the purpose of a general education program is provide the common core of learning that an institution's faculty members agree is essential to the type of education they are trying to impart. While there is no consensus about what that learning should entail (or even about the appropriate balance between substantive content versus intellectual skills development), such programs typically involve both 'breadth requirements' and requirements related to specific competencies or subjects. Generally speaking, general education programs tend to be organized according to a 'distributional-elective' model *or* (less commonly now) a 'core curriculum' model. There are several variants of each.

Currently, Macalester employs a distributional-elective model, which requires students to take between four (4) and eight (8) semester hours in each of the divisions (Humanities, Fine Arts, Natural Science and Social Science). In 1991, we added to this a requirement that each student complete one course designated 'domestic diversity' and one course designated 'international diversity' prior to graduation. While relatively common in higher education, this model has fallen into disfavor in recent years as a result of the growing realization that simply requiring students to select one or two courses in each of the divisions in order to fulfill some vague 'breadth'

requirement does not necessarily provide an effective framework for intellectual development or liberal learning. In light of this, Macalester should consider restructuring its general education program in ways that more purposefully cultivate the knowledge, cognitive and other competencies entailed in our distinctive liberal arts mission.

Contemporary best practice at other institutions of higher education seems to suggest that there are two ways in which Macalester might renew its general education program. The first involves abandoning our current distributional-elective model in favor of ‘core curriculum’ comprising a specific set of courses (typically transdisciplinary and thematic in nature) that a student would have to complete before declaring a major. These are typically special-purpose courses that are not disciplinary in nature and that cannot be counted toward completion of the major.⁴ The core requirements can be fulfilled either by taking a single common sequence of transdisciplinary courses (as at Fairleigh Dickinson University) or by choosing from a range of courses or course sequences (as at Columbia).

The second way to renew our general education requirement is to revise our current ‘distributional-elective’ model so that it more purposefully fosters the learning outcomes central to the College’s distinctive liberal arts mission. This would be achieved by replacing our current *divisional distribution* and *diversity* requirements with a new set of requirements that are more directly and systematically reflective of the learning outcomes described above.

Several examples provide a more concrete picture of how such a ‘learning outcomes’ or ‘competency based’ model might work in practice.

Example #1: At Princeton, the undergraduate general education program involves the following requirements:

- Freshman Writing Seminar (one course)
- Foreign Language (several courses).
- Epistemology and Cognition (one course)
- Ethical Thought and Moral Values (one course)
- Historical Analysis (one course)
- Literature and the Arts (two courses)
- Quantitative Reasoning (one course)
- Science and Technology, with laboratory (two courses)
- Social Analysis (two courses)

⁴Colgate, for example, has a liberal arts core that is organized along these lines.

Example #2: At Pomona College, the general education requirement is called the ‘Perception, Analysis, and Communication’ (PAC) requirement. In order to meet this requirement, Pomona students must take ten courses, each of which is specifically designed to develop one of the following competencies⁵:

- Read literature critically (PAC1);
- Use and understand the scientific method (PAC2);
- Use and understand formal reasoning (PAC3);
- Understand and analyze data (PAC4);
- Analyze creative art critically (PAC5);
- Perform or produce creative art (PAC6);
- Explore and understand human behavior (PAC7);
- Explore and understand an historical culture (PAC8);
- Compare and contrast contemporary cultures (PAC9);
- Think critically about values and rationality (PAC10).

In this system, courses may carry only one designation (for example, PAC5); and, in order to qualify for this designation, courses must be approved by a committee that ensures that they embody the appropriate content and pedagogy. At other institutions adopting similar models, some scope for ‘double-dipping’ (allowing a course to count toward two competencies) is permitted.

Whether the faculty decides to adopt a true ‘core’ or modified ‘distribution’ requirement, it will be necessary to design a general education program that (as part of a broader revised curriculum) purposefully and intentionally cultivates the learning outcomes that we have identified as constituting the Macalester imprint. Indeed, one way of thinking about the general education program is as a kind of major concentration in its own right – one that focuses, not on producing disciplinary competence, but on cultivating the intellectual arts and practical competencies associated with a liberal education. This is not, of course to suggest that the general education program should be the only site of liberal learning in the curriculum – clearly, this should take place across the curriculum. It is, however, to argue that, like the major, the general education program should involve a coherent and purposeful sequence of courses designed to achieve a clearly articulated goal.

It is worth noting that the general education requirement typically accounts for between 25% (as at Harvard) and 50% (as at Chicago) of a student’s overall courses load.⁶

⁵Students must also complete a first-year seminar, a writing course a language program.

⁶NB: Harvard is in the midst of a review of its undergraduate program, including the core.

The Major Concentration

Currently, a disciplinary major consists of between thirty-six (36) and sixty-eight (68) semester hours; an interdisciplinary major, between forty-eight (48) and sixty-eight (68) semester hours.

As we proceed with curricular renewal, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed regarding the nature, purpose and structure of a Macalester major. The most important of these has to do with purpose: how should we envision the role of majors in realizing the learning outcomes that constitute the Macalester imprint? To pose the question in slightly different terms: should majors be just about ‘depth’, (pre)professional training, and graduate school preparation? Or should they consciously go beyond disciplinary content/method to develop liberal learning skills?

Once we have sorted out this issue, we will need to attend to the structure of the (generic) major.⁷ Issues that will have to be addressed in this connection are:

- the number of courses comprising a major (min/max);
- the differences, if any, between the requirements for ‘disciplinary’ and ‘interdisciplinary’ majors;
- curricular coherence and course sequencing;
- the nature of an ‘emphasis’ within a major;
- the balance between lower division and upper division courses in a major;
- balance between mastery of knowledge, training in a mode of inquiry/method, and the development of a number of intellectual competencies and practical skills;
- connection to ancillary coursework outside the major;
- requirements for experiential learning;
- opportunities for integrative learning within the discipline; and,
- limits on the number of majors a student may declare.

We will also have to be attentive to the inevitable partiality of disciplinary methods/perspectives and the related necessity of structuring majors so that they interact with other disciplines. Ideally, at a preeminent liberal arts college students in a major should learn how to place disciplinary knowledge in broader context, translate insights from other disciplines into the interpretive matrix of the major, and otherwise synthesize learning across disciplines.

The Minor Concentration

Currently, the *College Catalog* states that a departmental minor consists of not less than twenty (20) nor more than twenty-eight (28) semester hours. However, while specifying the number of courses required for a minor, the catalog is nearly silent on the nature, purpose and value of such a

⁷Note that the proposal here is that the faculty-wide discussion of majors and minors be limited to defining the *generic* structure of these concentrations. Determining the *specific* requirements for each major/minor should remain the primary responsibility of the relevant department.

course of study. As we renew the curriculum we should develop a clear statement of how we see minors contributing to the learning outcomes derived from our *Mission and Statement of Purpose and Belief*. We should also specify:

- the number of courses/credit hours required for a minor (min/max);
- whether and how to pursue curricular coherence within a minor;
- the relationship between majors and minors;
- the obligation of departments to offer minors;
- how many minors a student may declare.

The Language Proficiency Requirement

Currently, in order to graduate, all students are required to demonstrate a proficiency in a second language equivalent to four (4) semesters of college-level study in a single language. As part of the curricular renewal process, we should consider carefully how this advances the College's distinctive liberal arts mission/purposes. We should also consider the specific level of competency we require of our students and the means by which we cultivate this competency.

The First-Year Seminar

Currently, First-Year seminars are simply limited-enrolment departmental course offerings that have been lightly modified to 'encourage' the development of certain basic skills and to establish a relatively close faculty-student advising relationship. This, however, is not the only way that quality liberal arts colleges organize such courses. Many of our peer institutions have much more ambitious purpose-built courses (some of which are inter-disciplinary or thematic in nature) designed to provide a more deliberate introduction to the liberal arts or otherwise cultivate desired learning outcomes. As we renew the curriculum, we might explore the possibility of creating a much more ambitious First-Year Program – even as we need to be mindful of the resource constraints facing the College and the importance of not unduly burdening the faculty or departments.

It might be useful as we tackle these questions to draw on the following resources:

- the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/>).

Learning Communities

Currently, 'learning communities' are not a regular feature of the Macalester curriculum. While there are many different types of learning community, all involve a cohort of students taking a cluster of thematically linked courses as a group (in other words, they involve the same group of students taking several courses on the same topic – say, world hunger – in several different departments at the same time). The benefits of such communities are that they foster integrative learning and fellowship – both of which have been demonstrated to deepen student engagement and learning,

enhance retention, and enrich the students' connection to the institution. Learning communities can be organized around regular departmental course offerings, making them attractive even in times of financial constraint. A variant on this is the *living-learning* community, in which students both live and take thematically linked courses together (this might be particularly appealing as part of a First-Year program). As we proceed with the restructuring process we should at least explore the potential costs and benefits of making learning communities a more regular feature of the Macalester curriculum.

It might be useful as we tackle these questions to draw on the following resources:

- Learning Community Commons (<http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/>).

The Honors Program

The honors program is currently highly decentralized, with departments responsible for designing specific criteria and procedures. As part of a general curricular renewal, we could consider adapting to our distinctive context several alternative models (such as the Swarthmore program) which seem to be much more challenging and rewarding to high-caliber students.

The Capstone Experience

The capstone program is also currently highly decentralized, with little consistency in terms of how it is implemented (and to what ends). As part of a program of general curricular renewal, we should revisit the issue of what we are trying to achieve in the capstone and then design a program that more intentionally and purposefully realizes these goals. While we may decide that we don't need to change the current requirement, the wide range of practices both on the Macalester campus and at our peer institutions ought to provide us with a number of alternative models that might merit some serious consideration.

Undergraduate Research Program

Currently, some departments (especially in the Natural Science Division) maintain a robust program that integrates undergraduates into faculty research projects. There is also the Keck Faculty-Student summer research program, which provides opportunities for faculty across the college to engage in similar forms of collaboration. As there exists considerable research that demonstrates the pedagogical value of involving undergraduates in faculty research, we should consider ways in which the College might deepen its commitment to this practice. Alternatives include supporting a more decentralized approach in which departments assume responsibility for developing such programs to centralized programs in which the College or Division assumes responsibility. Many examples exist in both first-tier liberal arts colleges and first-tier research universities that might guide our deliberations in this regard.

Academic Advising

Following considerable work during the course of AY2002-03, the College's Committee on Academic Advising submitted a strong recommendation that academic advising be revised in conjunction with the curricular renewal process. The reason for this is that, ideally, the curriculum and academic advising should provide mutually supportive structures for intellectual growth and development in our students. Accordingly, as we proceed with the curricular renewal process every effort should be made to ensure that we develop an advising system that is relevant to the new curriculum, effective, and sustainable over time.

ANNEX 1

AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR CURRICULAR REFORMS AT MACALESTER

Compiled by Dan Balik

1961 – Stillwater Conference of the Trustees

At this conference, the strategic decisions were made that ultimately led to the introduction of the 4-1-4 academic calendar and the course unit credit system in the fall of 1963. Among the specific recommendations that came out of this conference were the following:

- the college would offer only a BA degree in the liberal arts;
- the college would seek to attract and admit students of high intellectual ability;
- the college would seek a broader geographical distribution of students and have three to five percent come from “foreign lands”;
- at least 75% of the student body would live on campus;
- the college would seek to improve the rate of faculty with a PhD quickly to 50% and then eventually to 65% or higher;
- faculty on tenure after six years of service would be eligible for a sabbatical;
- the college would raise salaries as quickly as possible to deserve a rating of good when compared with the best colleges in the US

1980 – Summer Curriculum Review Committee

This round of curricular review produced what came to be known as the “Rainbow Reports” because each section was distributed on a different color of paper. Members of this ad hoc committee were Jim Smail, (chair), Don Betts, David Itzkowitz, and Karl Sandberg. Essential curricular recommendations made by this committee included the following:

- an increase from one to two social science courses to be completed in order to meet graduation requirements, an increase from one to two math/natural science courses to be completed, and increase from two to three humanities and fine arts courses to be completed (later approved);
- a new graduation requirement that a “W” course containing formal writing instruction be required for graduation (not approved);
- a new graduation requirement that an “M” course containing a significant mathematics component be required for graduation (not approved);
- in the instance of double majors, a total of at least 15 different courses (60 semester hours) must be presented (not approved);
- elimination from the curriculum of the core concentration (not approved then, later approved in 2002);
- continuation and improvement of the all-college writing program;
- continuation and further definition of the freshman seminar program (that was not then involved with graduation requirements in any way);
- continuation and further refinement of the curriculum offered during the Interim Term (January) endorsement of a model for emphasizing the value of taking foreign language courses but no recommendation of any graduation requirement in this regard;
- proposal for offering elective general education courses at the sophomore level (withdrawn with no action taken at a faculty meeting);
- recommendations regarding the academic advising program;
- recommendations about grading practices: allow awarding plus/minus grades (later approved), require midterm grades for freshmen and sophomores (later approved), issues related to S/D/NC grading (later deferred);

1991 – Curriculum Committee Proposal for New Graduation Requirements

In this round of curricular discussion and change, the Faculty made the following curricular changes:

- abolished the practice of allowing core concentration to substitute for a major in terms of meeting the graduation requirements (approved);
- established the requirement that all major concentrations must include a senior “capstone” experience (approved);
- established the graduation requirement that all first year students take a “first year course” with characteristics defined in the motion in their first semester of attendance (approved);
- established the graduation requirement that each student complete a domestic diversity course and an international diversity course (approved);
- established the graduation requirement that each student be able to demonstrate proficiency in a second language equivalent to two semesters of college study (approved and subsequently increased to four semesters of college study).