

## Strategic Planning Group: Curriculum

### Final Report

6/29/12

The strategic planning group on the curriculum has focused on a few broad issues that shape the scope and content of the curriculum, as well as the way in which it is delivered.

I. We recommend that we work toward greater *integration* in a Carleton education in the following ways:

1. Encourage students to more fully integrate what they learn throughout their four years at Carleton.

- In keeping with the recommendations of the SP group on advising, make reflection on the interconnectedness of courses an explicit part of academic advising conversations.
- In accord with the recommendations of the SP group on competition, devise “pathways” or “clusters” of courses that both help students chart their own course through the curriculum and connect their interests to OCS opportunities, internship possibilities, and potential career paths. These “clusters” should also become an explicit part of our advising program.
- Provide incentives for faculty to develop more interdisciplinary courses, including senior seminars that would include students from a range of majors, requiring them to bring their knowledge and skills to bear on questions that invite study from multiple disciplinary perspectives. In addition, we should promote the development of more dyad/triad course clusters that highlight the interconnections among different fields.

2. Promote greater reflection among students on the ways in which critical thinking skills, information literacy and the capacity for ethical reflection develop within and among their courses throughout their Carleton career.

- As part of the advising program, require that students write a short reflective piece on the ways in which their course work and/or other pursuits have contributed to their liberal arts education. This piece should be the basis of a conversation with the student’s adviser and could be included in his or her writing portfolio.
- Create a series of LTC-sponsored faculty workshops that help faculty think about how to model meta-cognitive skills and to make the development of critical thinking skills a more explicit part of their courses.
- Offer LTC programs and workshops for faculty that focus on ways of engaging ethical issues that arise within their disciplines and introducing them, as appropriate, within their courses.
- Offer more opportunities for public deliberation on important moral issues from a range of perspectives through speakers, public symposia and faculty-student discussion groups. This might be coordinated through EthIC.

3. Encourage students to more fully integrate curricular and extra-curricular learning.

- Student Life staff and faculty should collaboratively design programs to help students integrate the skills they learn in extra-curricular activities (athletics, volunteering, student leadership, etc.) with their academic work, and vice versa. Increasing the level of faculty participation in peer leadership training programs (e.g., for RAs, WAs, prefects, SWAs, OIIL peer leaders, etc.) and, conversely, making faculty aware of the various advising roles played by Student Life staff would be good first steps.
- Consistent with the recommendations of the SP group on advising, integrate exploration of and reflection on extra-curricular activities into an expanded academic advising system.

4. Enhance support for programs and experiences that connect the education students receive on campus with communities beyond campus--locally, nationally and internationally.

- Provide greater financial and administrative support for community and civic engagement work and for programs that contribute to global and intergroup understanding.
- While the overall level of participation in OCS programs at Carleton is very high, require all departments to review their major requirements to ensure that they do not unintentionally preclude students from having an off-campus experience. Especially in majors with many sequential courses, we encourage faculty to develop OCS programs that would contribute to the major and to work toward greater flexibility in the scheduling of required courses.
- Create workshops or other programs that provide opportunities for students to prepare for or reflect on their off-campus experience in order to integrate it more fully with their education on campus. Students should be required to participate in one or more of these programs that help them to fully realize the educational benefits of off-campus study, just as they are required to attend pre-trip sessions regarding health and safety.
- Actively encourage students to travel to areas of the world that are becoming increasingly important (e.g., Africa, Latin America and the Middle East) and that have been underrepresented in terms of OCS participation.
- Continue to explore creative ways of allocating faculty resources (e.g., two or more faculty members splitting responsibility for leading a program) to enable more faculty to develop and lead OCS programs.
- Encourage faculty to integrate sustainability issues into the curriculum, as appropriate, in accordance with the recommendations in the College's Climate Action Plan.

5. Emphasize student research as an integral component of a Carleton education.

- Expand opportunities for student research (both independently and in collaboration with faculty) through additional grants and incentives for faculty. We should particularly emphasize student research in the humanities to complement our well-established support for research in the natural and social sciences.

- Expand and extend our current annual student research celebration to two days, perhaps one in the fall (tied to trustees weekend), and another in the spring. These days (presumably Saturdays) should feature symposia and poster sessions in which students share their research, and a public celebration of student research across all the disciplines. Printed programs and websites showcasing student research should be widely distributed and utilized as part of admissions and faculty recruitment efforts.
- Provide more financial and logistical support for students to attend conferences where they present papers and share their research.

6. Consistent with the recommendations of the SP group on life after Carleton, create more intentional and sustained connections between the curriculum and the lives students will lead after graduation.

- Expand and “rebrand” the work of the Career Center in ways that tie it more closely to the curriculum and to faculty members
- Integrate planning for “life after Carleton” into an expanded advising system that includes both academic and career advisers and that spans all four years of a Carleton education.
- Create more internship opportunities and draw more extensively on the experience of alumni to expand students’ networks (e.g., “Engagement Wanted” program) and give students experiences that could help them choose a career path and land a first job.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop a “life resume” that highlights both their extra-curricular experiences and the skills they have acquired in their academic work, and then links them more clearly to skills they will use throughout their lives.
- Provide more resources to expand Carleton fellowship opportunities that would be available to students both before and after graduation.
- Provide students with regular opportunities to reflect on ways that their learning at Carleton prepares them to face ethical decisions in their lives.

7. We recommend the creation of a full-time position of “Coordinator of Student Learning and Leadership.”

- This individual, by analogy to the director of the LTC, would be tasked with helping to coordinate the many different programs and activities that currently take place largely in isolation from one another. Having a single “address” for integrated student learning and leadership would insure that student research and off-campus study, community and civic engagement and peer mentoring, academic advising, internships and planning for life after Carleton were integrated and mutually reinforcing.
- This Coordinator of Student Learning and Leadership would have the same high visibility among students that the director of the LTC currently has among faculty and staff. Indeed, it might make sense to have this position included within an expanded LTC, though it could also be located in the Dean of the College office.

- We suggest that we seek funds to launch such a position as a 3-5 year pilot program, which would then be evaluated.

*Metrics: Our progress in these areas can be measured through a variety of means.*

*A. We should track responses on student surveys to questions about the effectiveness of the advising they received, and on alumni surveys about the extent to which they feel their Carleton education prepared them to face the challenges they face after graduation.*

*B. We should add questions to surveys of current students about the degree to which they feel that their educational experiences inside and outside of the classroom are integrated and mutually reinforcing, as well as the degree to which they benefitted from their off-campus experience.*

*C. We should track the numbers of students who go on OCS programs, especially math and science majors who have generally participated at lower rates than their peers.*

*D. We should track the numbers of students who undertake independent and faculty-supervised research projects, especially humanities majors who have generally participated at lower rates than their peers in the sciences. We should also track the numbers of explicitly interdisciplinary courses, dyads, etc. that we offer.*

*E. We should create some focus groups of students, much as the Director of CARS did as part of her research, that would enable us to get direct feedback from students about the degree to which we are achieving the goals articulated here—more extensive integration, greater reflectiveness and more sustained connections to communities and awareness of issues outside the campus community.*

*F. We should make assessment a regular part of any new programs that we provide, e.g., of pre- or post-OCS programs, as well as faculty workshops and student internships and research experiences.*

*G. The Coordinator of Student Learning and Leadership should submit an annual report to the Dean of the College and that position should undergo a comprehensive review at the end of the pilot period.*

II. There are many factors that contribute to the way in which the curriculum is delivered. The economic and competitive environment in which we operate will require that we become even more *efficient, flexible, and creative* in the way we structure the learning environment.

1. Carleton's distinctive calendar, like all academic calendars, has its pros and cons. We believe that, on balance, the current calendar serves us very well in a number of respects. The potential benefits of a semester system do not seem to us to outweigh the costs involved (especially as regards the need for more facilities) of changing our calendar at this time. We do, however, recommend:

- That we actively promote more creativity and flexibility within the calendar by offering more 5-week and 15-week courses, especially if this facilitates longer research projects, more sustained engagement with community partners in civic engagement courses, and/or more collaboration with St. Olaf.
- Continue to consider creative ways of using winter break, not only for faculty development workshops and two-week off-campus programs, but also for internships, student research opportunities and other initiatives.

2. Explore online learning models, as suggested by the task force chaired by Andrea Nixon.

- Provide increased instruction for faculty to help them utilize the resources already available for “blended” courses that include elements of online learning (e.g., Moodle).
- Continue to study the effectiveness of both established and emerging online courses created by other academic institutions and for-profit entities.
- Explore on a trial basis collaborative models with other peer institutions that would include courses or course modules that could be provided live in one location and accessed online in others. This might be especially attractive for courses and/or programs with especially low (or high) enrollments. Some online courses could also enhance the richness of our curriculum by enabling us to tap into faculty expertise on other campuses.

3. Expand the discussion of curricular development on campus in order to foster a more institution-wide perspective on new initiatives, allocation of FTE and external challenges and opportunities facing the College.

- The Dean of the College office should prepare a summary of curricular developments, enrollment patterns, numbers of majors and concentrators and other information relevant to the evolution of the curriculum. Such a summary could be prepared and distributed approximately every 2-3 years and could become the basis for periodic public discussions of our curriculum.
- The Dean of the College and the FCPC should take over from the Faculty Grants Committee the task of approving curricular development grants. This would create a unified system whereby the same group that has the most comprehensive view of the curriculum and who are responsible for considering and approving proposals for FTE also makes decisions about the development of new curricular initiatives.
- The Dean of the College and the FCPC should consider soliciting informal input from others (perhaps including Admissions, alumni and/or trustees) with perspectives on the ways in which our curriculum is meeting the needs of our students both before they matriculate and after they graduate. Alumni who have chosen careers in academia might be particularly well-positioned to help us think about long-term trends and challenges that we should be addressing.

*Metrics:*

*A. We should track of the numbers of online courses or modules of courses that we offer, as well as solicit feedback from the students enrolled in them about the educational value of their experience.*

*B. We must also create assessment tools that will enable us to determine the extent to which students have mastered the material covered in online modules, and then compare the results both across time and in comparison to students who have studied the same material in a traditional classroom setting.*

*C. We should track the numbers of 5 and 15-week courses we offer and determine whether we are missing opportunities to promote them further.*

III. Faculty development will be crucial in keeping the curriculum strong and developing it in the ways outlined above. Given the changing nature of the disciplines, the institution of tenure, rapid

developments of technology, and the need to help students connect their curricular learning with other parts of their lives, faculty must have opportunities to grow and develop in their disciplines, as well as to make connections beyond their disciplines.

1. Provide increased funding for FDE and Targeted Opportunities grants. It has been appropriate to target available funding in recent years toward younger faculty preparing for the tenure review, but faculty vitality throughout their careers is also critically important.

2. Provide faculty development opportunities that enable established faculty members to retool in response both to changing enrollment patterns, the development of new subfields, or new technologies. This is critical for ensuring that our curriculum can continue to evolve even with a relatively stable faculty.

3. Continue to seek grants that foster interdisciplinary initiatives by bringing faculty together across disciplinary and program lines (as QuIRK, VIZ and Global Engagement have done). Other smaller-scale initiatives could include interdisciplinary team teaching, interdisciplinary winter break seminars, or international study tours.

4. Provide more opportunities for faculty teaching circles in order to foster further conversation about and innovation in pedagogy. As faculty know more about what their students and advisees are learning in other classes, they will be better prepared to help students achieve their goals of integration.

5. Encourage curricular and other institutional collaborations between Carleton and St. Olaf, including shared faculty development programming and targeted incentives for collaborative work with St. Olaf colleagues (e.g., small FDE grants, curricular development grants).

*Metrics:*

*A. We should track and publicize both the number of internal faculty grants given and the overall amount of money granted, with attention to the rank of the faculty who receive them and the general purposes for which they are given. This would enable us to notice any patterns that emerge and correlations between grants awarded and curricular initiatives undertaken. Special attention should be paid to the number of interdisciplinary and collaborative grants awarded.*

IV. Opportunity Costs. We are cognizant that there are opportunity costs involved in every new initiative we undertake. We offer the following recommendations to lighten the burden on faculty in some ways as we call for more responsibilities in other areas (e.g., more intensive advising, more supervising of student research, etc.)

- Devise a system whereby faculty who regularly supervise student research either receive teaching credit or are relieved of some other responsibilities. The same might be done for faculty who voluntarily take on additional advising responsibilities or who have especially time-consuming committee responsibilities (as is currently the case for some committee assignments)
- In accord with the recommendations of the SP group on administrative functions, we propose that we
  - reduce the number of committees and task forces while expanding their mandates,
  - reduce, where appropriate, the number of faculty serving on these committees, and

--with the exception of key committees that address ongoing and essential functions of the College (e.g., ECC), set termination dates for committees whose work can be completed in a finite period of time

- While we recognize that creating “sunset” provisions for concentrations and other curricular initiatives is unworkable for a number of logistical reasons, we encourage the Dean of the College to continue working with other groups (ECC, FCPC) to revisit periodically the viability of such programs in light of enrollment patterns, financial costs, faculty turnover and opportunity costs.
- In a similar vein, we encourage the Dean of the College to manage the growth of the curriculum by approving new programs and initiatives that require significant investments of faculty time sparingly. A general (though perhaps not iron-clad) policy might be adopted that new programs will be approved only as others disappear, to ensure that we do not spread ourselves too thin by growing our curriculum in ways that are unsustainable.