

ON THE FUTURE OF DEPAUW

Board of Trustees Meeting

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OVERVIEW

With full faith and hope that together—faculty, Board of Trustees, alumni, students, and staff—we can create at DePauw University one of the most vibrant intellectual and creative environments in the nation, an undergraduate institution of true reach and reputation, I offer the following preliminary response and reactions to the faculty report on DePauw’s intellectual life as well as some open-ended thoughts about the future of DePauw.

I committed myself to listening to and learning about DePauw during my first year on this campus. I remain so committed. This response then is a report on what I have learned from the faculty and from other constituencies not only through written reports such as the Faculty Governance Steering Committee Report (“FGSC Report”), but through the many conversations I have been privileged to have during my time on this campus. I expect these conversations with the faculty, students, staff, and alumni to continue in earnest throughout the spring, much as my conversation with the Board will continue, so that, together, we can develop a compelling and coherent vision of DePauw.

In the FGSC Report, the faculty note that the “faculty sees many opportunities for improving the intellectual atmosphere at DePauw and is enthusiastic about dedicating itself to driving these changes.” The report also notes, however, that “many faculty members believe that our responses to [the individual questions of the report] will be most effective if they follow from a clearly articulated vision which transcends individual questions, one based on the current state of the University as reported herein, but also taking into account DePauw’s historical strengths and traditions.” This paper represents a first attempt to set forth some features of that vision. Again, however, I wish to emphasize that this vision will emerge as we continue to work together.

I want to thank the faculty, and students and staff, for the work they have put into the intellectual life conversation and into the development of a vision for DePauw. This report represents my effort to add to this crucial conversation.

Background: Launching the Conversation on DePauw's Intellectual Life

In the late summer of 2008, at the annual “Faculty Institute,” I asked DePauw’s faculty to consider the state of the University’s intellectual life. I wanted the first significant conversation I had with the faculty to be focused on this topic for two reasons. First, the lessons of history and my own experience at a number of institutions have convinced me, fully, that the long-term health of any college and university depends overwhelmingly on the quality of its intellectual life. A college or university *must* remain intently focused on the institution’s core mission of teaching, learning, creativity, and the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge if it is to survive and flourish. These activities, which together constitute the intellectual life of an institution, must be constantly reviewed and the institution must be committed to their perpetual improvement. Without such focus and such commitment an institution loses its way, and loses its soul.

I also wanted to start this conversation as soon as possible because of the pervasive, implicit messages contained in the discussions I had during the presidential search process and during the spring and summer of 2008 as I was learning more about DePauw. An extraordinary number of trustees, faculty, alumni, and students indicated that DePauw, while justifiably proud of its many recent achievements and its long history of significant accomplishment, seemed somewhat adrift. The institution had completed a lengthy period of significant growth and expansion during the remarkable presidency of Robert Bottoms. The size of the faculty grew significantly, numerous faculty development programs had been implemented, many new impressive structures had been built on the campus, and the institution’s financial footing—as marked by the size of its endowment—had grown robustly. Several academic departments had been renamed and reconfigured and interdisciplinary programs were added as new areas of knowledge came to the academy. During this same period a variety of curricular and co-curricular programs had been developed (or if created prior to the Bottoms’ administration, developed further in this period). Among the most notable of these were those programs that have come to be known together (despite the rather significant differences among them) as the “Programs of Distinction.” (These are the Management Fellows Program, the Media Fellows Program, the Honor Scholars Program, the Science Research Fellows Program, and the Information Technology Associates Program.) These programs generated considerable excitement among the students, faculty, and staff involved in the programs. They are thought to be, for some, signature programs and among the most powerful tools we have to attract students. To many students and faculty, these programs are unique ways to educate the whole person,

methods through which students deepen their understanding of the approaches first studied in the classroom. To others, however, the programs seemed to be so many mouths to feed, operations to be managed, requirements to be met, more layers within what is, by nearly every measure, a small institution.

The many new programs, while appealing to various audiences and energizing segments of the campus, seemed not to create a coherent whole. To newcomers or those looking at the institution from the outside, no single vision—no overarching pedagogical theory, no endorsed approach to connecting the liberal arts to the preparation of students for life’s work, no overriding ethos—seems to animate the curriculum or provide coherent foundations for the University’s co-curricular life and residential system. One can only agree with observation in the FGSC report that “over time programs have evolved in a piecemeal fashion; these resulting accretions have fragmented and diffused (but certainly have not destroyed) our original liberal arts vision.”

The lack of focus seemed to be undercutting the institution’s energy and possibilities. More alarming, perhaps, the lack of a clear and communicable animating spirit seemed to be blurring the institution’s image in the world at large. Emerging troubling Admission data seemed to confirm this lack of a coherent image or compelling experience.

The questions put to the faculty at the August 2008 meeting were as follows:

The intellectual life of any college or university is the core of its mission, and yet it can be the most challenging aspect of an institution to talk about, because it is simultaneously pervasive and intangible. It is also the aspect of an institution most difficult to effectively convey to students and the broader world. What are we talking about, after all, when we talk about DePauw’s intellectual life? Certainly it is the strength of our classroom teaching, the engagement of our students in their own educations, the depth and diversity of our curriculum, the health of our libraries, and our faculty research and scholarship, but it is also a myriad of other elements, from advising, to interdepartmental collaboration, to our information technology resources, to the integration of academics into students’ overall campus life. Many of these elements do not lend themselves to a simple or streamlined conversation.

Recognizing these challenges, what can we say is the current state of intellectual life at DePauw? How do you believe it can be enriched most effectively and how may it best be communicated to potential and current students, and to the world at large? What do we do well, and where can we do better? To continue to thrive we must be able both to identify and support our intellectual successes and to make them more widely known to the world outside DePauw. Our conversations today should be a first step in focusing our energy and resources in this direction.

In order to allow the faculty to begin this discussion, and with the significant help of the Faculty Governance Steering Committee, these larger questions were broken down into six more specific questions designed to focus the faculty's attention on some of the more pressing issues of the campus. These six questions were sent to the faculty with the following charge:

Beginning with the 2008 Faculty Institute meeting, DePauw has begun a conversation about its intellectual life, a realm defined by the scholarship and artistic work of the faculty and students and by our curriculum, but also by discussions outside of classes and between departments, by our focus on diversity, and by the spaces we provide for thinking and learning and creativity. Progress on the project of enriching DePauw's intellectual life will depend on faculty review, consideration and (most importantly) leadership. Our task is to see whether, using our considerable resources and aspirations, we can create one of the most vibrant intellectual and creative environments in the nation.

The six questions put before the faculty addressed faculty time and engagement, the balance between the liberal arts and one's preparation for a career, Winter Term at DePauw, student curricular requirements, common social and intellectual experiences, and the extent and quality of physical spaces that encourage the life of the mind outside of the classroom.

With considerable energy and stunning organization, the faculty took up these questions through numerous special faculty meetings and gatherings, on-line surveys, and regular faculty committee meetings. The faculty also provided students and staff numerous opportunities to participate in the discussion. In December of 2008, the Faculty Governance Steering Committee issued its report to the Office of the President. The report is now available to all faculty and has been given to the Board of Trustees of DePauw University as part of their January 2009 Board Retreat materials.

The December 2008 Faculty Report: Overriding Themes

The preliminary thoughts and topics for further discussions identified in the faculty report are now available and worthy of *extensive* review and discussion. Throughout the spring of 2009, and in meetings of the Board of Trustees we will consider the report's observations. This faculty report will remain one of the guiding documents for our further planning.

To summarize, however, in a broad way, the concerns identified by the faculty in their report and in their discussions on the topics put before them, I would include the following:

- In many ways, for our students, the “culture of doing” appears to have become detached from the “culture of learning” at DePauw. Students deeply cherish the many opportunities they have to experience the world beyond DePauw's campus and its classrooms—to engage in internships that introduce them to life's work, to take Winter Term courses that expose them to topics and endeavors not typically found in a traditional curriculum, and to travel abroad to experience foreign cultures firsthand. While many of these experiences add richly to the intellectual depth of the campus and enliven the work of the classroom (a field trip made over Winter Term allows students, for example, to engage in true geological field work rather than simply reading about others' work in the field), many do not. Many are regarded simply as experiences to be gathered, obligations to be met, items to be listed on a resume, or diversions that have little serious requirements or consequences. To many, what ought to be *co-curricular* activities have become *extra-curricular* activities.

- The very number and variety of the programs designed to connect students to life's work or the world outside of DePauw (the Programs of Distinction, Winter Term courses, Winter Term trips, internships) seem to have confused the campus, and left the University without an overarching theory about the role of the liberal arts in today's world and for today's students. Many recognize that in today's world we *must* show how the liberal arts do, truly, connect to the making of a meaningful life; we must also develop explicit ways to make those connections palpable for students. But we seem to have no coherently expressed “one way” on how to most appropriately achieve this.

- These programs (the co-curriculum we have created over the years) seem to have emerged from a variety of motivations. Their mixed origins have, it seems, contributed to the

sense that they form no coherent whole. Some appear to have been developed as marketing and admissions tools, others developed out of external funding opportunities. They exist now in a variety of relationships to the curriculum, and the faculty, itself. Thus the ways in which these programs contribute to the student's intellectual and social development seem mixed. At the same time a sense of fear about the programs has emerged. If we modify them, will we harm the best way DePauw has to attract leading students?

- There is a profound sense of overbureaucratization in the University. Faculty feel themselves to be enmeshed in a complex, and occasionally baffling, world of requirements, committee obligations, forms to be completed, and teaching load requirements. (One of the consequences of the creation of Winter Term is that some faculty are engaged in instruction for roughly 18 weeks beginning in January, a significantly longer period of time than the typical 12-13 week time frame seen at peer liberal arts institutions.) The concern is that these burdens prevent faculty from having the time and energy to meet with students as fellow scholars. There seems to be a lack of oxygen in the culture, a sense of burden and exhaustion unrelated to some larger purpose.

- The students themselves quite often experience the curriculum as a series of boxes to be checked off, obligations to be met. With six group requirements, numerous competencies to be met (the "W" requirement, for example) and their tendency to seek numerous credentials (through double majors, minors, completion of the requirements of various Programs of Distinction), students rarely feel that they can "afford" to take a course that does not meet the needs of a specific program, undercutting a spirit of exploration and inquiry. They express a sense of anxiety about their obligations and a sense that they must garner as many certifications of achievement and accomplishments as possible.

- Students and faculty both seek more common experiences (moments when the campus comes together in intellectual or social endeavors) as well as the time and space to have more quiet moments of reflection and discovery. If a key characteristic of a small liberal arts college is the sense of belonging to an intentional community created through common purpose, shouldn't there be numerous moments where community is experienced directly? Conversely, students and faculty also seek moments of quiet refuge when the work of the mind can be engaged in deeply. It is at these moments when the intellectual self is created, when creativity flourishes, and where maturity is garnered. The campus seems not designed to meet either need appropriately.

- If the curriculum feels burdensome in its complexity and unclear in its overarching purpose, the world that students have created for themselves in their residences does not. The residential units, particularly the traditional Greek units, appear to offer students a clear and compelling sense of community, comradeship, purpose, and tradition. The students view their residential life as a world apart from their intellectual life. We have not created an intellectual culture as coherent and compelling as the residential culture our students have created.

- Finally, and perhaps more importantly, there is a sense among the faculty that DePauw might be at a crossroads. After many years of faculty expansion, increases in faculty development programs, and implementation of many new programs, the institution may not quite know what it is. Sometimes this is expressed as a concern about our marketing efforts (do people know what we are?); sometimes this is expressed in conversations about the curriculum (what does a DePauw education mean?) Fortunately there also appears to be enthusiasm to tackle this question of identity among most of the campus constituencies.

Proposed Guiding Principles

At this point in the ongoing campus-wide discussions about DePauw, it is time for DePauw to become more certain about what it is (and what it is not), how it believes the liberal arts should be connected to life's work, how we are to create and sustain a true and dynamic academic community, and how we are to learn from the best liberal arts colleges while building on those characteristics that have made DePauw unique and beloved by many.

I offer some guiding tenets and principles that might shape this discussion about DePauw's future. These tenets are based on what I have heard from the faculty and from Board members, as well as my own thoughts and reflections on what I have heard. It is my hope that they contribute to the conversation about DePauw that will continue through the spring of 2009.

1. DePauw as a Liberal Arts College.

DePauw should strongly affirm—or reaffirm—the institution's commitment to the liberal arts college form. The hallmarks of a liberal arts college—small scale, an emphasis on residentiality, a focus on the creation of a community of scholars, the obtainment of critical analytical and creative skills as the primary function of the curriculum, mentoring through close student-faculty interactions, the emphasis on the development of the student as a “whole person” rather than an emphasis on the obtainment of specific career skills—should be DePauw's hallmarks.

While DePauw is, *and must continue to be*, unique, it would be well served if it understood itself to be part of the nation's proud collection of small liberal arts colleges, institutions with a different ethos, mission and culture than that found at Indiana University, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University, to name but a few traditional, large research universities, or that found at Butler University or Miami University of Ohio, which are comprehensive institutions.

2. An *Ethos* of Inquiry and Discovery.

The curriculum, and the supporting co-curriculum, should be structured so that it encourages a culture of inquiry and discovery as well as the mastery of necessary skills and the callings of a discipline. Through the curriculum, students should be encouraged to approach their educations with a sense of excitement, discovery, ownership, and commitment. All efforts should be taken to prevent the curriculum from being regarded simply as a means to garner multiple credentials.

3. A *Place* of Inquiry and Discovery.

The habits, patterns, and spaces that provide the foundation of a community of inquiry should be fostered consciously. All efforts should be made to bring a sense of inquiry and discovery both into and outside of the classroom. DePauw's classroom spaces, public spaces, and residential spaces should be thought of, and designed to encourage, a community of learning.

4. A Residential Community.

DePauw must develop a theory and an approach to residentiality that supports a culture of inquiry. We have, it can be argued, built a complex residential structure in an ad hoc way. While many of our peers have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that their residential life directly supports the sense of an intellectual community, I do not believe that we can say, with clear conviction, our complex residential structure is fully and deeply organized to support the life of the mind and the sense of community inherent in a liberal arts college.

5. The Curriculum Leads and Guides the “Co-Curriculum.”

The ways in which we prepare students for life's work should be *through* the curriculum and the intellectual life of the campus. DePauw must, therefore, clarify the relationship between the curriculum and those co-curricular and extracurricular programs designed to connect students to life's work. All such programs—including the Programs of Distinction, Winter Terms programs, internships—should be designed such that they are enhancements of the curriculum and the intellectual development of students.

SOME POSSIBLE CHANGES

From one perspective, it is still early to move from these preliminary discussions about the current state of DePauw to speculations on the concrete steps the University might take to change its curriculum and co-curriculum. On the other hand, high-level and abstract discussions of what DePauw might be in the future would be well served, now, by some grounding in the specific. With this in mind, I set forth here some possible changes to the curriculum, to the co-curriculum, to our administration, and to our residential structure.

I. Create a unique, discrete, and comprehensive First-Year experience.

The First Year should become a time explicitly dedicated to exploration and discovery, a time for new students to develop the habits of an intellectual and social community.

Proposals:

First-Year Campus. DePauw might, for example, consider the creation of a unique First-Year residential zone, or campus, in which all First-Year students reside. Dedicated first-year residence halls and ancillary buildings could include residences for faculty who would be charged to serve as intellectual leaders and models for the First-Year Students who would develop programming for First-Year students. These buildings could also be retrofitted to provide spaces for First-Year seminars. These residential structures could, early on, instill in our students the notion that their development as students, and thinkers, and leaders, need not be left behind once they leave class.

Delayed Entry into Programs of Distinction. We might also consider delaying entry into any Program of Distinction (or successor program to the Programs of Distinction), until the Sophomore year both to instill the notion that the First-Year is a time for unfettered discovery and to allow more rational self-selection into those programs.

Better Connections between the College of Liberal Arts and the School of Music. To as great extent possible, the walls between the College of Liberal Arts and the School of Music should be made more porous for First-Year students, if such a wall is necessary at all.

Faculty Oversight. It will ultimately be up to the faculty to see that the First-Year experience is engaging, challenging, and coherent. We must make sure we have the appropriate administrative structure to allow for such oversight.

II. Review and significantly revise graduation and curricular requirements so as to allow more room for exploration and intellectual discovery while also generating more common intellectual experiences.

The FGSC Report offers two possible, significant changes to the curriculum:

- The *first* calls for a simplification of the current six-group structure to a structure based on four groups (Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Languages). Students would be required to take two courses in each, potentially three in the Humanities (which might better be entitled “Arts and Humanities”). This model eliminates the current requirement of at least one-half course in physical education, and removes the specification of one course in literature and one science course with a laboratory component. This model retains the competency requirements (W, Q and S.)
- The *second* proposed model calls for an open system through which students meet a set of guidelines as they, supported by a strong advising system, map their own intellectual journeys through DePauw.

Each proposal requires extensive deliberation, which should be undertaken by the faculty in the spring. In fact, it is very likely that either more proposals will emerge, or that these two proposals will undergo significant change as a result of faculty discussion. I strongly encourage these conversations to continue.

I offer one slight additional thought:

Proposal:

Move the Physical Education courses to Student Life as part of their charge to oversee wellness on the campus. Instead of requiring physical education courses for credit, create at DePauw a robust program of instructional and recreational programs to promote student wellness.

III. Reconfigure DePauw’s current Programs of Distinction such that they all serve as curricular-based “bridges” connecting the liberal arts to the world outside the academy.

DePauw’s “bridge” programs could become a unique feature of the DePauw landscape, offering challenging and coherent ways in which students prepare for life’s work and for the

complex challenges of the world into which they are about to enter. Students would begin their intellectual work within the traditional liberal arts and would complete an approved major, but through these bridges would begin to see how their work within the liberal arts might be applied to the pressing concerns of the day. These programs should be multi-disciplinary, rigorous, and dynamic. The animating spirit of these programs should be an emphasis on how the liberal arts, and the skills developed through a liberal arts program (critical inquiry, questioning, logic, argumentation), best prepare one to address the world's most pressing problems.

Proposals:

All "bridge programs" should be based on the curriculum. All such bridge programs should have strong curricular foundations. (ITAP thus should be reconfigured such that it has a strong curricular component.)

These programs should serve as the structure through which internships, Winter Term activities and (potentially) unique senior theses are organized for those who choose to enter them. Students in such programs should be required, or strongly guided, to have their Winter Term and internship experiences guided by the programs they select, thus making these co-curricular experiences more rational and better configured to deepen the student's intellectual experience at DePauw.

Create more such programs where the curriculum, faculty interest, and student interest allow. If DePauw is to embrace the notion that, in addition to traditional academic departments and disciplinary based majors, we have a number of multi-disciplinary "bridges" that connect the work of the academy to the world at large, we should consider the creation of more such bridges. Right now, we have significant faculty work in such areas as Ethics and Community, Sustainability and the Environment, International Study and Public Health (to name but a few examples) that might join with the Management program and the Media program as compelling "bridge" programs.

IV. Replace the Science Research Fellows program with an Office of Undergraduate Research and Internships that serves all (science and non-science) students.

Two signature features of DePauw's academic program are the internship programs and the extensive opportunities provided to students to engage in original research projects with faculty. In order to strengthen these programs, expand them to more students, and ensure that they are intellectually challenging and rigorous, we might consider the creation of an Office of Undergraduate Research and Internships. This new office would be either directed by a faculty member, or directly overseen by a faculty committee.

All students should have the opportunity, and the encouragement, to work closely with faculty in original research. By expanding this SRF program to more students, we will help support a culture of true discovery.

The faculty should also reconsider how these experiences are “credited” within the curriculum and noted on the transcript. Further, we should carefully consider how faculty involvement in these activities is considered when measuring faculty workloads.

V. DePauw’s extensive co-curricular structure (including, but also beyond, the Programs of Distinction) should be made more explicitly connected to the curriculum and the work of the faculty, and managed as a related whole.

Proposals

Faculty Oversight. DePauw’s co-curricular structure (the Programs of Distinction, internships, Winter Term, independent studies) should be overseen—truly “owned”—by the faculty. These programs should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are intellectually rich and challenging, and supportive of the intellectual development of students.

Ensuring Quality. Winter Term courses and internships must be programs of true quality and depth. It will be up to the faculty to do three things: (1) approve only those projects that add to the intellectual depth of the campus, (2) articulate the ways that projects directly relate to the intellectual life of the University, and (3) counsel students so that they can articulate the ways in which their lives have been affected by the experience.

Comprehensiveness. Whatever faculty oversight structure is created to govern them, the entire array of the co-curricular programs (the Programs of Distinction, internships, Winter Term, Career Advising) should be regarded as connected. Students should be able to see that these programs are, together, enhancements to the curriculum, tools to help them shape their intellectual lives within DePauw, and foundations for their life after DePauw.

Winter Term courses should be thought of as regular DePauw courses, with grading requirements seen in courses offered in the semester. These courses will be approved and reviewed as all DePauw courses are.

Internships. If DePauw is to remain committed to semester-long internships for credit, then all students should be guided as to how best to pursue them and how best to design them such that they enrich their intellectual growth and development. This task must rest fully in the hands of the faculty. Students have a lifetime to develop their career skills; they typically only have a short time to engage in an intensive undergraduate educational program.

Transcript Modifications. If we are to modify the internships, research experiences, and Winter Term programs such that they are more directly connected to the curriculum and more rigorous, the student transcript should be expanded so that it can communicate the academic nature of these experiences

A Note on the School of Music and the Arts

A rather large part of DePauw's culture not addressed specifically in this report is the ways in which DePauw can more fully embrace the arts, and how we can best strengthen the School of Music. We are truly blessed to have a strong School of Music as a centerpiece of the University. We must continue to explore ways to strengthen the school and increase interaction between the School of Music and the College of Liberal Arts. As the faculty considers the curriculum, and proposed changes in our residential and co-curricular structures, I would suggest that we must always keep the role of the School of Music at the forefront of our minds.

A Note on Additional Topics

Not fully addressed in this report are the issues of space and the campus, the Winter Term, and Common Experiences. It is my belief, and hope, that how we think about the campus—and potentially modify it over the next several years—will be driven by the campus planning process to begin in the Spring of 2009. Similarly, it is my hope that the discussion on how we may best create compelling and meaningful common experiences will be driven by our discussions on the curriculum and the co-curriculum.