

Enriching Intellectual Life at DePauw

Topics and Questions for Faculty Consideration

October 2008

Overview

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 our 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.

In order to engage the faculty on the topic of intellectual enhancement in meaningful and legitimate ways, the faculty governance structure must be utilized consistently and meaningfully. We must, however, develop ways to involve all faculty and students in this discussion.

In order to engage the faculty in this broad topic, we must by necessity rely on specific questions sent to specific committees. A quandary emerges, however, when one seeks to divide up the components of a university or college's intellectual and creative life into manageable parts. Can curricular issues be separate from issues of student spaces and student time? Can one committee take up the issue of Winter Term while another considers the topic of developing common student intellectual experiences? The current Faculty committees most likely to engage in discussion on intellectual and creative life are:

- COF (Committee on Faculty)
- FDC (Faculty Development Committee)
- MAO (Comm. on Management of Academic Operations)
- CAPP (Committee on Academic Policies and Planning)
- COA (Committee on Administration)
- SLAAC (Student Life and Academic Atmosphere Committee)

The Faculty Governance Steering Committee will be called on to "assign" the questions below to the appropriate faculty governance committees. The FGSC will also work with the Office of the President to see that the complexity of the issues and topics set forth below are understood and dealt with in concert.

Issues/Topics

1. Faculty Time and Faculty Engagement: How do we best support a culture of interaction between faculty and students? To what extent would moving towards a standard 2/3 teaching load have a positive effect on faculty's capacity to engage students, and each other, more fully in the intellectual and creative life of DePauw? How might we best deal with the potential negative effects of such a change (must we rely on larger class sizes, or will we be forced to offer fewer courses)? How would movement toward such a course load affect the current model for offering teaching relief via faculty development?

***Charge:** Please address the reported sense of overload on the part of many faculty members and the ways in which potentially excessive obligations harms faculty interactions with students outside of class. Specifically, please consider whether -- using the existing array of available resources -- a change to a 3/2 load is advisable? If thought to be desirable, how best to implement such a teaching load system to maximize benefit for faculty and student intellectual and creative life while minimizing disturbances to the curriculum?*

2. Balance between the traditional "liberal arts" and career preparation: DePauw is a bit of a puzzle. From one perspective, it is a remarkably effective liberal arts college enhanced by its union with a school of music. From another, it is more like a small university, with a number of specialized tracks that encourage students to start off their education thinking of themselves as already engaged in specific work: a media track, a management and leadership track, an information technology track, and a science research track. Does the presence of these selective programs suggest that only selected students have access to our highest-quality educational options in specific fields? Are we encouraging students to consider their professional aspirations before they have had a true chance to explore all their intellectual options? DePauw is also well known for providing students with a wealth of internship opportunities. Do these internships generally support the overall liberal arts education we provide? In a number of ways, then, we have bridges designed to connect the liberal arts to one's career preparation. Are these consistent? And, are they consistent with our core mission?

***Charge:** Please discuss the role of specialization in our academic structure and make recommendations concerning any steps that should be taken to ensure that all of our students have access to the wealth of choices DePauw makes available. (Specific attention should be paid to internships.) Please also discuss what might be the best way to effectively bridge academic and creative work with a strongly-felt desire to prepare for specific careers.*

3. Winter Term: The reports on Winter Term's contribution to DePauw's academic life have been mixed. Some faculty report extremely meaningful academic and life experiences for students and

faculty that would be unavailable without this separate term, while others express concern about the inconsistent standards for Winter Term work, the faculty burnout that comes from not having time to devote to preparing for the spring semester, and the implications of under-structured winter days for our students. Should DePauw eliminate Winter Term? Should we enforce more demanding academic standards for Winter Term work? Count Winter Term work as courses? Would DePauw be better off with an optional May term that would allow some students to begin summer internships earlier in the year?

Charge: Please consider changes to Winter Term that would address the concerns regarding inconsistent standards, under-structured student time, and faculty burnout while maintaining what is meaningful and valuable about Winter Term as currently constituted.

4. Student Requirements: Are we currently overloading students with graduation requirements to such an extent that there is very little room for intellectual exploration? There is obvious value in setting a rigorous standard for students graduating from DePauw, and in requiring a fundamental baseline for the breadth of student learning, but students frequently seem to find themselves acting with a “checklist mentality” in selecting courses. They have W, S, and Q requirements, major requirements, minor requirements, group requirements, winter term requirements, etc., all of which can work together to discourage exploration.

Charge: Please examine the current set of student requirements and recommend any desirable changes to allow time and opportunity for greater intellectual exploration.

5. Building a “common experience”: Faculty report with some consistency that the First Year Seminars (FYS) successfully call on students to do interdisciplinary work that spans departments, encourage intellectual exploration, and provide a common experience for DePauw students. Can the strengths of this program be better coordinated with the out-of-class programming of depauw.year1? Once students have completed their first two years at DePauw, their focus on their majors and possible study abroad makes it harder for them to join in a shared intellectual experience with their classmates. Are there ways to build on the success of this program to extend it into future semesters?

Charge: Please discuss possibilities for providing more unifying experiences that encourages intellectual exploration through all years of students’ DePauw studies, building on the strengths of the First Year Seminars and the depauw.year1 programming.

6. Social space that encourages the life of the mind outside the classroom: Faculty have reported concerns about the limited venues and opportunities for both faculty and students to engage in discussions, and other activities sparked by DePauw’s academic life, outside the classroom. For their part, students have also complained about the absence of suitable social space on campus for some

time. What kinds of spaces and venues would foster intellectual and creative activities outside the classroom? Are there options that Greencastle does not currently provide that it might, or which DePauw might provide in its place? What is missing from the range of options available to students and faculty to meet outside of class?

Charge: Please consider those enhancements to our environs that might best promote greater interaction among faculty and students and enhance our intellectual and artistic community generally.

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