

Discussion Points for Meeting with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, May 9, 2019

Thank you for this opportunity to have a discussion with you about the curriculum at DePauw. I'm David Alvarez, chair of the Curricular Policy and Planning Committee and Associate Professor and Chair of the English department. It's a real pleasure to meet with you all again, and I'd like to thank the Board of Trustees, and especially this committee, as well as DePauw's administration, Governance, and Strategic Planning committees—with a special mention of Howard Brooks—for all the work that has made this gathering—and future gatherings like it—possible. Special thanks and gratitude to our Vice President for Academic Affairs, Anne Harris, for her inspiring leadership, not just for this endeavor but for all her work leading DePauw's academic enterprises.

For clarity's sake, I'd like to note that my remarks represent not my personal viewpoint but the thinking of the Curriculum committee.

I have been asked to frame a discussion around these questions: "What advice can you give us in communicating academic priorities to the full Board? What should the Trustees know about, for example, the dynamic between university mission and market pragmatics, when we design or update new majors?"

The academic priorities of the Curriculum committee are to 1) build on our curricular strengths and 2) market the successes our students are achieving through DePauw's curriculum and our increasingly more formalized and equitable networking opportunities (e.g., internships, faculty-student research, career preparation assistance).

What are our curricular strengths? Our graduates recognize the value of their liberal arts education. As a recent survey of young alumni (August 2017) prepared by Hanover Research reported, "Ninety-seven percent" of our recent graduates "are satisfied with DePauw's quality of faculty, 93% with the quality of academic programs/majors." We can also measure the success of the curriculum in terms of our students' success: 95%—actually Dave Berque just informed me that is morning that the number is now 97%—of the students in our most recent graduating class were in graduate school, employed or had been awarded a fellowship, within six months of graduation." I know I'm not telling anyone here anything that you don't already know. But these are fabulous numbers that we can all be proud of, celebrate, and market.

The Curriculum Committee has been working on two key ways to build upon and market our existing curricular strengths:

Pathways: A pathway is a set of existing courses linked to co-curricular experiences (i.e., internships, faculty-student research, career preparation assistance). The pathway shows students how to get from here to there, from a liberal arts education to a career and a vocation. Examples would include journalism, marketing, law, teaching, and other careers our students imagine pursuing.

- Creating "pathways" requires no changes to the curriculum

- Relies on existing courses (perhaps interdisciplinary)
- Provides useful marketing materials
- A “pathway” might count for Gold Commitment credit as a “bridge”.
- Not a degree. Does not appear on transcript.
- Our students are already succeeding in these career fields. The Pathways market the value of DePauw’s academic programs to current and new students.

Prototype for journalism is up. The Curriculum Committee will be soliciting faculty members and admissions staff for more suggestions for Pathways and setting up an approval process so that we can launch more of them in the fall. They could appear on a **single** official webpage with links to supporting academic programs. Also, at the request of next year’s VPAA, a summer working group is being formed to consider how to coordinate Pathways with the Gold Commitment.

Themed Minors. These differ from pathways because they appear on a student’s academic transcript (just like a regular academic minor). But a themed minor differs from a regular minor in five useful ways. The committee’s endorsement of Themed Minors is a response to a report from Raymond Barclay that indicated that “Minors at DePauw are not being fully utilized to attract students.”:

- They build upon already existing courses and faculty expertise
- They can be interdisciplinary and are thus more nimble, innovative, and dynamic
 - o can respond more quickly to student interest
 - o can respond more quickly to faculty research interests
- Encourages link between faculty-student research and course offerings (more below)
- They allow for “test-changes” to the curriculum without the big investments needed to start a new program or department
 - o Five-year automatic sunset—successful ones could reapply or make a case for a regular minor or major
- Examples of possible Themed Minors: “Urban Studies”, “Global Commerce” “Refugees and Transnational Migration”, “Food Security”, “Digital Humanities.”
 - o Creating departments or steering committees for new programs not needed.
 - o Adding co-curricular experiences could make for a Pathway.
- Can work to boost enrollments in majors with fewer students (e.g., World Commerce could link courses in economics, anthropology, and world literature; Digital Humanities could link Computer Science to History and English; etc).

Sum up: Both “Pathways” and “Themed Minors” integrate liberal arts learning with real-world contexts. Both take the dynamic between the university’s mission and market pragmatics into consideration by 1) marketing the academic programs and 2) including market research (e.g., “Will students be interested in this new Pathway or Themed Minor?”) and recommendations (e.g., “What should these efforts be named? A Pathway? A Bridge? A Career Catapult?”).

In regards to **new majors**, in this time of contraction the committee has not focused on the development of such big, long-term investments. As mentioned, we think that “Themed Minors” will be useful for testing possible new majors. Through the restructuring of the Modern Language program (Update #4), over the last year the committee did review six new majors and six new minors—all of which were passed by the faculty—but these proposals were all related to the restructuring of the Modern Languages program and our efforts to increase the number of students taking courses in under-enrolled language programs. Based on this work we’re putting into place some basic protocols for approving new majors (e.g., deadlines for submission, etc.).

[Rationale for ML restructuring:

1) allowing for more points of entry for students to get exposed to learning about other cultures and languages, particularly by providing more lower-level cultural studies courses that we hope will inspire students to study these languages

2) Providing fuller autonomy to our colleagues in each program so that they can make the most of their scholarly and pedagogical expertise

3) connecting these programs to other disciplines by including cognate courses in other programs as requirements for these new majors.]

Two other priorities related to marketing DePauw’s academic programs are:

1. Increasing Faculty-Student Research Opportunities:

According to Hanover Research, 71% students reported that independent research was one of the most important experiences (tied for third place with Community Service) that prepared them for life after DePauw, but only 29% claimed to have had access to these experiences. Equally significant, 56% of surveyed employers rank DePauw students’ research skills as somewhat or much better than a typical undergraduate. This is a good number—but with some room to grow. The Curriculum committee has been working with the Centers Council and the Gold Commitment leadership to explore how faculty-student research might be part of the mission of some or all of the Centers.

- o An effort to meet student and employer interest with existing resources
- o An attempt to capitalize on DePauw’s distinctive Centers in relation to the Curriculum.

2. General Education Revision Process:

In response to requests from our colleagues and encouragement from the President, the Curriculum Committee has approved a process for revising DePauw’s General Education Curriculum (Provide email?). The Committee decided that to successfully revise our General Education curriculum it was first necessary to be able to answer this question: **What does a liberally educated citizen need to know?** The committee has solicited responses to this question from all academic departments and programs. Based on this information, data from previous surveys of curricular areas, and input

from students and graduates, the curriculum committee will develop a one-paragraph statement that clearly and concisely answers this question. This statement will then be used as the criterion to revise DePauw's general education requirements.

Goals for this revision process are:

1. Our students—both current and future—need to know what a liberal arts education at DePauw offers them.
2. As faculty, we need a clear understanding of what our students should know in order to be liberally educated.
3. Based on that understanding, we can develop a more coherent general education curriculum, respond to the recent accreditation report's call for DePauw to clearly state its learning goals, and make it possible to plan thoughtfully for future tenure-line hires.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share these discussion points with you. I would be glad to discuss these or other items related to the Curriculum further with you individually, and please feel free to contact me via email.