The Content of Curricular Renewal

The Curricular Renewal Work Group has set in motion a number of initiatives that are in the process of transforming the curriculum at the college. Some of these have taken the form of changes to the curricular rules of the faculty, while others are pilot programs testing out new ideas for curricular and co-curricular changes. The CRWG recommended changes in the Distributional Requirements, the Language Requirement, and the Quantitative Requirement to the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum, and the Curriculum Committee brought proposals that were then approved by the whole faculty. The CRWG also recommended the formation of pilot programs for a new model of Writing Intensive Courses and a new model of advising for undergraduate students, and it encouraged the formation of a group to explore interdisciplinary teaching, which has resulted in the Kaleidoscope pilot program. The CRWG also formed subgroups to consider ways, both curricular and co-curricular, to encourage global education and leadership at Bryn Mawr. All of these initiatives were undertaken as practical steps towards the ideals articulated as the goals for the Bryn Mawr liberal arts education.

Language Requirement:

The language departments play a critical role in the College's goal to prepare global citizens through both the teaching of language and their upper-level offerings in literature, theory and culture. Bryn Mawr has had a long hiJ/T1<u>0</u>rs()Tj/T at Brynhas j /TT4 1 Tf [(Br(Tf [(Br13.37 /T1sTj /T3.601

develop this skill and how important it had been to them in their current successful positions. Faculty in most departments identified communication as an important educational goal at our faculty retreats, but also expressed concern that we were not meeting this goal (as did some students who presented their concerns at a faculty meeting). Results of the COFHE senior survey data suggest that Bryn Mawr seniors on average feel that their writing has grown stronger over their time at the College. In fact, Bryn Mawr's average score for this item was comparable to women at COFHE women's colleges and higher than the average woman's rating at the COFHE co-ed colleges. While this data is encouraging, our faculty evaluation of this area and some qualitative and anecdotal feedback from alumnae and potential employers made us want to revise the curriculum to do even better. Given the importance of this goal and the opinion that we could do better, we sought to improve this area of the curriculum, and most of our attention focused on the three levels of the writing curriculum: the freshman writing seminars, the senior capstone experience, and the courses in between these end points that also concentrate on writing (see appendix).

Freshman Writing Seminars:

The College requires that all first semester students take a College Seminar. The purpose of these seminars is to teach students critical thinking about broad intellectual questions within and/or across disciplines through close reading and interpretation of substantial written, visual and material texts, as well as to provide instruction and practice in writing as a flexible tool of inquiry and interpretation. In spring 2008, an external committee composed of directors of writing programs reviewed the College Seminar Program. The review produced several recommendations relevant to curricular change. The team concluded that the College Seminar program was very strong overall, but that it would benefit from some revision and renewal. Specifically, the visiting committee recommended that the College:

¥ more clearly articulate the program's goals;
¥ adopt a broader view of what kinds of courses might constitute a College Seminar;
¥ increase its commitment to the program through more resources and a commitment on the part of the continuing faculty to teach in it;
¥ develop a better mechanism for assessing when students need additional instruction in writing after the course is over; and
¥ rename the program to signal to both the internal and external community that the program diff(a)Tj/f1 11.447 0

the field from its roots in philosophy. The deans also report that some students navigate the requirements so as to avoid certain approaches to inquiry completely, for example, a social science student who takes particular humanities courses to avoid doing close reading and analysis of texts. Thus the CRWG concluded that our general education requirements were falling short of uniformly meeting our goal of training our students in multiple habits of mind. In response, the CRWG produced several new models of general education requirements and brought them to a faculty meeting in April 2009. Based on faculty feedback, the CRWG chose one model to pursue and revised that model to reflect the input they received. The CRWG submitted this model to the Curriculum Committee in the fall 2009. The Curriculum Committee then brought a refined version of this model to the General Faculty for discussion on several occasions, and the faculty approved the new set of requirements at the end of the spring of 2010. The conversations throughout the process were vigorous and raised issues about such things as the role of content versus method in giving students breadth, the importance of exposing students to the natural sciences, and the need for students to sample fields that they did not have access to in high school.

The new model replaces the current divisional requirement with the requirement that each student must take at least one course in each of four approaches to inquiry (see appendix).

!. Scientific Investigation (SI): understanding the natural world by testing hypotheses against observational evidence.

2. Critical Interpretation (CI): critically interpreting works, such as texts, objects, artistic creations and performances, through a process of close-reading.

3. Cross-Cultural Analysis (CC): analyzing the variety of societal systems and patterns of behavior across space.

4. Inquiry into the Past (IP): inquiring into the development and transformation of human experience over time.

We believe it is central to our mission to expose students to a variety of approaches to inquiry and to promote the idea that liberal education must be more than a strong training in one discipline. Under this new requirement, all appropriate courses at the College will be identified as providing an introductory experience in one or two of the four approaches. Courses taken to satisfy the requirement would not only employ the relevant approach, but would also thematize and articulate it, stressing the need for awareness of the process as well as mastery of the content. That is, courses will satisfy the requirement if and only if they teach the problems and possibilities that arise in the practice of these approaches.

An Enhanced System of Faculty Advising for First and Second Year Students

The changes in the distributional and language requirements put more responsibility on students to make good choices in selecting their courses, as opposed to what we fear is the present tendency to check off boxes without much reflection. Reducing the number of courses required to meet the distributional requirement from 6 to 4, and reducing the number of courses to meet the language requirement from 4 to 2, means a substantial reduction in the number of required general education courses and a corresponding increase in the opportunity for thoughtful curricular choice. Because

another goal of the new requirements is for students to have a deeper understanding of the goals, purposes and meanings of a liberal education, CRWG proposes that faculty become morTf(have)Tj/T1_01Tf()Tj/
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Course levels and trajectories:

In response to questions about the categorization of course levels and the trajectory through the major, some common patterns emerged. Most departments see 100 level courses as introductions h/T101Tf()Tj/TT21Tf2.250Td[de)0.5(part)0.n[t.J/T101que)0.5yiT70.57-16Plw0.5(pa1Tf[le)0.5(ve)

graduate programs investigate developing interdisciplinary and/or team-taught courses along the model of the GSEMs. Such interdisciplinary courses might work well with the social sciences as well, bringing in Psychology and the GSSWSR.

Although the opinion of the CRWG was by no means unanimous with regard to all these possibilities for expanded cooperation, we would recommend that the Curriculum Committee convene some groups of faculty, both from the departments with graduate programs and from other departments, to brainstorm possibilities for increased collaboration. We also suggest that CAP, along with the Provost's office, consider ways to create incentives to encourage such innovation and collaboration.

Kaleidoscope Interdisciplinary Programs:

In conjunction with the CRWG consideration of interdisciplinary programs, an ad hoc group of faculty explored another approach to interdisciplinarity. In collaboration with the Provost, this group of faculty initiated a flexible interdisciplinary pilot program called Kaleidoscope. The Kaleidoscope program proposes a new arrangement of interdisciplinary and interactive educational experiences for students and faculty. This program builds on a strong institutional history of learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom walls yet situated within a rigorous academic framework. The Kaleidoscope program connects multiple courses, their students and faculty in a single semester through common problems, themes, and experiences for the purposes of research and scholarship. A Kaleidoscope project entails a cluster of courses offered in a single semester that possesses five characteristics:

1. Kaleidoscope offers an interdisciplinary experience for students and faculty. The Kaleidoscope program views interdisciplinarity broadly, allowing each cluster to develop its own explicit definition. What is central is that these faculty members engage problems using different approaches, theories, prior data and methods and that they are explicit about that as they seek intersections across disciplines.
2. Kaleidoscope projects will unify courses and coursework by a focused theme or research question.
3. Kaleidoscope projects will engage students and faculty in active and interactive ways in a non-traditional classroom experience. This could occur through "data gathering" trips, praxis-like community based partnership/learning and/or intensive laboratory activity.
4. Kaleidoscope projects will encourage students and faculty to reflect on these different perspectives in explicit ways. Connections across courses are made explicit, shaped by collaboration among faculty members, and explored reflectively among faculty and fellow students.
5. Kaleidoscope participants will enrich the entire community by sharing their work with the community through such activities as poster sessions, research talks, web postings, panel discussions and/or data sharing.

Both the Kaleidoscope programs and the data they produce will be archived for later use by others. Within three months after the completion of the program, faculty and students in each program will provide a written evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the experience, with concrete recommendations for future projects. We are proposing to pilot the Kaleidoscope project for the next three years (see appendix for description of the pilot and the first Kaleidoscope). After the

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the work force suggest that companies and institutions are also interested in students who have training in, and experience with, applying their knowledge in the real world. To address these concerns, the CRWG assessment and revision. Specifically, we recommend continued examination and action on the following areas:

- ¥ The faculty and administration should take advantage of the change in the general distribution requirements to better ensure students' exposure to a broader range of approaches to inquiry.
- ¥ The faculty and administration should take advantage of the change in the quantitative requirement to include a quantitative literacy component so that all Bryn Mawr students graduate with quantitative skills that will be an asset to their life and work and so they can better take advantage of the College's offerings while they are here. The CRWG recommends that the Curriculum Committee form a working group that can continue the work of the Q subgroup in developing the most appropriate diagnostic instrument for entering students, in developing the quantitative literacy course (QSEM?) that would best address problems of the students who need it, and in setting the standards for the new Q courses.
- ¥ The faculty and administration should continue to facilitate the participation of continuing faculty in the Emily Balch seminars.
- ¥ The faculty and administration should explore the possibility of a "WI" requirement—a writing intensive course in the major, or, alternatively, making effective written communication skills a more concentrated focus of the major spread across more courses. The CRWG recommends that the Curriculum Committee and CAP form a working group to help all departments try to meet these goals, either by creating writing intensive courses or by better incorporating the goals of these courses throug1Tf6.0510Td[c)0.5(re)0.5(at)0d1970Td[t)0.5(he)0.

- The CRWG recommends that Curriculum Committee expand its efforts to ensure coordination between campuses in the introduction of new courses and in the alteration of curricula, and we would recommend that CAP press severely on those departments who are neglecting (or even refusing) the opportunity to make better use of the college's resources by increasing cooperation. We recommend that the Curriculum Committee convene some groups of faculty, both from the departments with graduate programs and from other departments, to brainstorm possibilities for increased collaboration. We also suggest that CAP, along with the Provost's office, consider ways to create incentives to encourage such innovation and collaboration. such