**The Future and the CPC**

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The CPC has struggled to respond adequately to core elements of its charge. It has not yet undertaken an incisive, qualitative investigation of curricular changes over time and this has hampered its efforts to assess new curricular initiatives for their long-term curricular implications. This difficulty is compounded by a lack of clearly articulated educational values that are sufficiently decisive to justify hard choices about the future of the curriculum.

While members of the CPC have done outstanding work accumulating data related to unit staffing and enrollments, the committee has not yet had the opportunity to delve deeply into the substantive intellectual content of the curriculum. Unit titles (i.e., German, Political Science, Biology) have generally functioned as sufficient descriptions of what is taught. FTE and enrollment data, accordingly, are taken to indicate how much of each unit’s content is taught and to whom. But the CPC operates with little sense of the shifting intellectual trends that are represented on course syllabi and in faculty research.

Clusters of units may share the impact of major theoretical and technological innovations, for instance, but such impacts are largely invisible to the CPC. Nor is there an institutional record of the variations of such impacts over time. Which scholars, theories, texts, technologies, and methods are taught most frequently across units and divisions? Which time periods, geographical areas, and populations receive the most attention? What was once taught widely but is now less well represented? What has never been represented in the curriculum at Williams, but has been prominent at peer institutions? What is on the horizon? The CPC has not yet investigated the curriculum in a manner that can provide answers to these questions. Some information of this kind emerges through targeted studies (the reports on Science and Technology Studies and Asian American Studies, for instance) or as a result of unit initiatives (i.e., Psychology’s petition to switch divisions), but without long-term perspective across units these reports and initiatives will always lack essential context.

Unfortunately, even if the CPC had a vivid map of intellectual life at the college, we would still lack the most fundamental resource needed to deliberate about FTE requests from a long-term curricular perspective: a decisive educational vision. A decisive educational vision would be substantive enough to provide clarity and direction when we are faced with difficult curricular choices. In lieu of such a vision, the committee generally attempts to assume a posture of neutrality, to relate to each unit requesting FTE as if it were an equal contributor to the curricular goals of the college. But this is an awkward and unsustainable posture for the CPC. The college does not teach every subject that might be taught to undergraduates and we already invest in some disciplines drastically more than others. A posture of neutrality merely codifies the implicit values already embedded in a curriculum with enormous disparities that has developed over decades of *ad hoc* responses to cultural, political, and economic forces.

Without a rich picture of the intellectual content of the curriculum, lacking recourse to decisive educational values, in a strained posture of neutrality, CPC members are left to rely on their own predispositions, anecdotal recollections, their sense of “the word on the street,” and inevitably patchy institutional knowledge when considering FTE requests. A further consequence of this situation is that discussions of FTE requests often default to considerations of enrollment disparities. The starkness and simplicity of numerical data about FTE and enrollments offer a weighty anchor where efforts to make qualitative judgments are left entirely unmoored. Over-enrollment and under-enrollment certainly have curricular implications, and they have grave implications for equity of workload among the faculty, but enrollment numbers are not helpful resources for determining the state and future of the educational *vision* of the college.

Another substitute for informed qualitative judgments about curricular values is evaluation of the unit’s written FTE request itself – asking, in a sense, “how well did the unit do the assignment?” Political pressure, whether from student movements, faculty members, or administrators, also fills the vacuum. As do non-curricular considerations related to the logistical functioning of units and their particular histories. Since the CPC is not engaged in deliberation about the long-term educational vision of the college and how to get there with FTE allocations, there are often few interesting divergences between the rankings of FTE requests submitted by the CPC and the rankings decided by the CAP. One might expect fruitful divergence given that the CAP will have to weigh the demands of the day heavily against long-term curricular goals, while the CPC should be free to contemplate the curriculum without such constraints.

The Strategic Planning process promises to supply more clarity of purpose to college endeavors. This will be enormously helpful for the CPC if it specifies genuinely decisive educational values or commitments. What is needed are clear reasons to continue to grow some units, limit the growth of other units, and shrink still other units over time. Given that there will likely be little appetite to state explicitly, “we are a college that prioritizes the undergraduate study of economics, math, biology, and computer science,” or “we are a college that specializes in the critique of dominant ideologies,” or “we are a college that promotes, above all, love of the intellectual life,” or any other vision so forthrightly, it may be helpful to concretize the impulse to neutrality that seems to be a consistent default for members of the CPC.

Attempting to ensure that every unit eventually has the same number of FTE is not advisable or realistic. It may be reasonable, though, to establish two or three stable categories of unit size. For instance, we might decide that each unit should be placed in one of three categories: 4-6 FTE, 7-9 FTE, or 10-12 FTE. Units could shift categories over time. New units could be formed with a particular category of size in mind. Establishment of these categories would give the CPC strong reasons to assure that no unit falls under 4 FTE and no unit exceeds 12 FTE. It would give the CPC a clear reason to help guide units that have well beyond 12 FTE to this benchmark over the long-term. It would also allow these units to plan how they intend to operate with a 12 FTE cap. And it would force the CPC to consider dissolving units that are currently very small, shifting their faculty into other units, if it is determined that the college is not prepared to sustain the unit at 4 FTE. Were this model to become the norm, it would be important to recognize the value of curricular clusters, “pop-ups,” concentrations, and the like, which do not have official FTE. Opportunities for faculty to contribute creatively to small but vibrant curricular initiatives that make limited demands on college resources are crucial to fostering curricular flexibility and innovation.

It is easy to imagine that institutions never really make decisions on the basis of values, commitments, and ideals. They gesture rhetorically to lofty goals, only in the end to make whatever *ad hoc* decisions accrue reputational accolades and as much money in the bank as possible. So, what might decision-making guided by educational values look like? Consider course design. When faculty set about to design a course, we ask: what do I want students to experience? What do I want them to think deeply about? What kinds of relationships do I want to cultivate between students and this material? What should they learn how to do? Which theories should they be exposed to? Who should they read? And so on. Inevitably, and perhaps most agonizingly and importantly, we have to ask: *what should I leave out?* We make these decisions all of the time. Subfields, skills, scholars who we know and love, major controversies and ongoing debates, elements of context – however painful it is for us, some of these don’t make it onto the syllabus. When we feel good about these judgments, it is because we have made them with purpose. In the best cases, even with lingering regrets about intellectual sacrifices, we feel invigorated by the educational vision that we have conceived.

Such creative, idealistic thinking about educational goals is not something possible only for the individual scholar alone. It is also undertaken by faculty members when they design and teach courses together. And it is undertaken when faculty in their units revisit their major requirements or otherwise assess their unit’s curriculum. When faculty members design courses or assess our unit’s curricula, we raise intellectual questions and we answer these questions with intellectual justifications. Our scholarly knowledge, intellectual breadth, and pedagogical commitments are the bases of these justifications. The CPC could be a committee where elected faculty members ask these kinds of questions and deliberate with this kind of reasoning about the state and future of the college curriculum.

In order to do this work, the CPC needs two key texts: a vivid account of the intellectual content of the curriculum and a ranked set of decisive, long-term educational priorities. However, having these texts in a file somewhere will not be sufficient. They will need to be living documents. The detailed “map of the curriculum” will need to be updated regularly and the core educational priorities will need to be revisited periodically (with due caution) as well. What is more, CPC members will need to develop the habit of assessing FTE requests through deliberation and judgment based on the interpretation of these texts if they are to play a role in facilitating the charge of the committee. If the CPC is not equipped to engage in this sort of long-term reflection on the educational vision of the college and make curricular judgments on this basis, it is difficult to understand what purpose it serves. And yet, without some designated institutional body with its eyes fixed on educational ideals, the college is in danger of devolving into a merely reactive stance, desperately trying to meet consumer demands under the cover of fashionable higher education platitudes. If not the CPC, who?