Business Task Force Report Discussion

Departments: Art, Biology, Rhetoric & Media Studies, Sociology/Anthropology

March 01, 2012

Present: Kellar Autumn (Biology), Paulette Bierzychudek (Biology), Greta Binford (Biology), Peter Christenson (RHMS), David Ellis (Vice President), Bob Goldman (SOAN), Daena Goldsmith (RHMS), Jim Grant (Incoming Associate Dean), Deborah Heath (SOAN), Jennifer Hubbert (SOAN), Jane Hunter (Associate Dean), Matt Johnston (ART), Tuajuanda Jordan (Dean), Oren Kosansky (SOAN), Gary Reiness (Incoming Associate Dean), Cara Tomlinson (ART), Sarah Warren (SOAN), Tamara Ko (recorder)

Dean Jordan: What are your thoughts on the Business Task Force report and its evolution – you have also received my presentation to the board of trustees.

Professor Bierzychudek: Like it or not, we have a board whose members do not universally recognize how a liberal arts education differs from other colleges. I thought the business task force did a great job of sidestepping that complicated issue and dealing with some things that we ought to be able to agree on. Our graduates going out in an economic climate that is uncertain and if we can give them better tools for coping with that world, we should. I think that’s part of our responsibility. I don’t think that should be in the form of a business major, but neither does the task force. I can certainly get behind initiatives that we might take to better help our students be financially savvy; it can benefit them to be better leaders.

Professor Kosansky: Question about role of board in initiating curricular discussions; precedent for that here? What is the extent to which this initiative is of curricular or a broader set of initiatives? What’s the role of the board in initiating such discussions?

Vice President Ellis: I’ve been doing this job since 2004 but would have to research historical precedents. This topic really has been the only curricular thing that the board has wanted done differently from what the College is doing. As you know, curricular decisions in the CAS rest with the faculty while policymaking and governance rests with the board. My absolute desire is to not get in a tug of war between faculty and board as that would not work well for either side. Tuajuanda has done a tremendous job of managing this issue, having been dealt this task by the president and the board, and steering this towards something that we’re really good at, which is being entrepreneurs. We want to continue to steer the board towards being proud of our entrepreneurial nature. If we do that, we can keep them away from thinking we have to have a business major. The board was very supportive of Tuajuanda’s presentation and view it as concrete steps towards doing something that can be translated into solid opportunities for our students.

Professor Heath: I know something about our board benefactors and it is absolutely right that we want to avoid getting into a tug of war with them. I was on the board when the business task force report was originally presented and I agree that it was really well done, and laid the groundwork for where Tuajuanda is taking us, which is the focus on entrepreneurship. My personal preference is to strike the term “business” and to focus on entrepreneurship in order to make the umbrella as broad as possible. Business framing is ideological; entrepreneurship on the other hand, allows us to make a move that is already supported by the board. Social entrepreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship are allowed. We already do social entrepreneurship and there is co-curricular support for it. I would tweak Tuajuanda’s presentation just a little bit and separate experiential learning from the academic domain. Field research is experiential. What happens in the class-based internships courses is a kind of experiential learning that is framed academically. I hope we don’t take a solid curricular focus on this but a co-curricular focus that supports life skills we hope to give to students. Locating within our disciplines for areas that we are providing these skills to them.

Dean Jordan: Multi-pronged approach in my presentation. Board will not be happy if we make it totally co-curricular and so I tried to strike a balance. Types of internships/partnerships/fellowships that will be offered are all co-curricular things. There are more opportunities and different ways in which those things can go. Curriculum is already there; what is happening at this phase is that we have to get faculty buy-in and enhance and expand those co-curricular pieces.

Professor Hubbert: Are we at a point where this is a bit of a done deal and our task is to figure out how to implement this in ways that are amenable to board and faculty?

Dean Jordan: I don’t know if I would say done deal but I guess in a practical sense, yes. We have to get something done – the question is to find a way that makes it work with the faculty.

Professor Hubbert: I do a lot of work with China and am trying to construct a business/anthropological course rather than teaching people how to do business as I am not an expert. There is a critical look at the ethnography of business in my courses. What kind of support will there be for implementing something similar in the curriculum? There could be a separate internship component.

Dean Jordan: Faculty would be provided stipends to develop courses that are associated with entrepreneurship but it would be by department, to reach an agreement that this is something that needs to be done.

Professor Hubbert: Will there be any training available for faculty?

Dean Jordan: What form the stipends take depends on where we want to go. I told the board that faculty will need support in order to make the transition and they support that. The type of support will be determined later. Several board members told me after the presentation that if we get this going, they promise there will be money to support it. Endowment will grow and everyone at the College will benefit. That is on them. Of course, that is not to say that we’re not going to have to find a foundation to support some of these efforts but the board indicated that they would fully support us.

Professor Hubbert: This is not funding coming out of our current programs, right?

Vice President Ellis: The funding will not be coming from the endowment.

Associate Dean Hunter: What about the gift from Fred Fields?

Vice President Ellis: President Glassner told the board that the most important thing for the College right now is building the endowment for scholarships and finding money for endowed professorships; as a consequence, that 10 million from Fred Fields will be going to the endowment.

Professor Christenson: This [report/presentation] is general, as it should be, and I support the sense of this. I think it is something we need to do. I am convinced by the argument that this would be attractive to a student we may not attract as well right now. The idea of ideological is appealing to me. In addition to attracting a different kind of student, I think we also benefit from having that kind of student come here and then moving onto a successful career. What we do need to have is a name, identifiable and not just something we hide subtly. We have to put it in our catalog and say that this is a program you can pursue; otherwise it won’t attract students.

Professor Heath: We will all gain if we can set this up in a way that doesn’t dichotomize the students we already attract. We need to expand in a way that can include the full spectrum.

Professor Biezychudek: I had hoped to see in the report whether schools with a business major had a different sex ratio.

Dean Jordan: The answer is no.

Professor Bierzychudek: The reason why calling this business or something like it is not so appealing is that it seems to exclude participation from students in lots of fields. You don’t want students to self identify that in order to cultivate these skills, you have to be in this field. I do agree with Peter about needing an identifying name but we want to distinguish in a way that is open.

Professor Heath: Grantsmanship.

Associate Dean Hunter: Dean Jordan put that down as an offering of 3CE within the curriculum.

Professor Heath: We have this fabulous showcase, which is the SAAB grants and they peer tutor.

Professor Bierzychudek: There are courses here that teach students how to write effective grants. Do the trustees know that?

Dean Jordan: Some of these technical writing courses require more advanced courses/prerequisites. There are skills offered through 3CE that make it more widely accessible and without any prerequisites.

Professor Goldman: I wanted to echo some of Professor’s Bierzychudek’s comments as I’m a little puzzled by what business is all about. Understand concepts of leadership and innovation; would love to see a program that emphasizes those things throughout the College. However, not so keen on seeing a centralized module though as it seems more like putting the cart before the horse. Entrepreneur activity usually doesn’t start out as an entrepreneur activity but rather became one as it went along. I don’t think we do a lot of innovation here; we become set in our ways and not compelled towards new things. We figure out what works and then just repeat, and our students do that too. In that regard, I think this is an important initiative to make us start thinking about new ways of doing. Figure out how we can enthuse that throughout the body.

Professor Kosansky: Going back to the relationship between curricular and co-curricular, that’s going to be the devil in the details. Grant writing in my classes is not done as technical writing but rather as a practical application – the challenge will be having faculty understand that what they do is related. Figuring out what goes where will be a great challenge in this process. 3CE will do one thing and we’ll do something else that is quite different, both which will contribute to the process.

Professor Autumn: I’m going to take a slightly different tact and not talk about the reasons why I’m excited about this idea. I have the experience of teaching a new course – Technologies of the Future – for nonmajors and focused on innovation and technology. Students work together in teams to collaborate based on own interests and experiences with science consultants, who are TAs from chemistry and biology. Focus on new products and patents, inventions, venture capital networking event, and I know the board would like to attract a different kind of student but what I can say is that our current students seem to really like this. Most of the leaders in these new mock events are women. Many of them have never thought about a profit-making venture before and they seem to really like it. The first batch of products started off as saving the world/impractical and wouldn’t find the marketplace. Second batch was dramatically different, still with an undercurrent of social conscience but there is a real change as students are aware that the world is a critical place. There is a chance of this succeeding with our current students.

Professor Goldsmith: Felt relieved and reassured that there were ways we can do this in comparison with our peer institutions. Nice, rhetorical function in displaying our courses to the board in showing how we already do this, and how our students do draw such functions. One thing I would like to see is a little more scaffolding and help for showing our students and making those connections.

Dean Jordan: Our board is there and realize that there are a lot of things we already do but if you look at our catalog, you don’t see them. We need to find a way to package and display those things. Minimal impact but if we really want to be innovative and think about what if and what else, that’s what these discipline-specific courses could do. Board supportive of the fact of internships for faculty; give them opportunities to go out and learn and be better advisors for students. Board is genuinely supportive of anything we come up, as long as we make consistent and significant process starting immediately.

Professor Reiness: Remark about visibility triggered me; typed pre-business and a few things came up. Seems like we could fairly cheaply get a pre-business advisor and type up some paragraph on the website

Associate Dean Hunter: Oberlin program on entrepreneurship which seemed very exciting in all the ways that Tuajuanda’s presentation talked about – I certainly believe in a liberal arts education but I think this has the power to put some legs under what students do in all our different departments, to encourage them to take their idealism and skills in a direction that will be fulfilling and good for them and for us. Bringing these ideas back to the major/faculty, thinking with students about how we can all move this forward. The fact that the board is willing to embrace a model now proposed by Tuajuanda – substantive – hugely exciting to me. They’ve morphed a lot and a tug of war between board members on business side versus academic side. Enhance what our image already is. Hate the idea of trying to rewrite us; take who we are and give it a little bit more juice in terms of thinking about the practice part.

Professor Heath: Just thinking about innovation and reminded of one of our alums who just got an award for his innovation in mobile health; using cell phone technology to manage health data in area countries.

Vice President Ellis: Part of Tuajuanda’s presentation did envision a faculty member; here’s the question: if that money were to come in and a faculty line was opened up, how would that be received by the faculty? How can we make sure that it’s not viewed as too top-down but as part of the group that would play well together?

Professor Johnston: Where would his/her home department be?

Vice President Ellis: Good question.

Dean Jordan: This person cannot go into the departments we have right now; might have to use ENVS as a model (as something interdisciplinary). We may also need someone to open up his/her own department so the new position can have some space.

Professor Hubbert: Seems to me that hiring somebody first predetermines the kind of programming you’re going to do. Shouldn’t you have the program first?

Dean Jordan: In one sense, yes but the very first thing on the list is to get faculty buy-in and you will provide the sense of direction. Have to think about the home department.

Professor Grant: These information sharing meetings that we’re having right now; if they all go as well as this one appears to be going, should we take that as a significant indication from the faculty as a whole that we should be pursuing finding an evangelist and not caring particularly about which home?

Professor Goldsmith: Any chance that it could be someone who is already here?

Professor Grant: Have to decide on what we want; I don’t think there’s anyone on campus who has that entrepreneurial training.

Professor Heath: I think it may be problematic to bring in someone who’s supposed to do the leadership. What we need is a kind of research director to help faculty develop.

Professor Christenson: But why would someone object to a new, exciting person? That seems to be part of the job description to know about corporate and social entrepreneurship.

Professor Goldsmith: Such a person might be very expensive, and when faculty members aren’t getting raises and there are no available tenure-track lines, that person might be frowned on.

Dean Jordan: After getting a sense of faculty response, I was going to get a small group together as there is a timeline on this issue. It can be that we can get someone to direct but we still have that question about whether or not that person is academic or 3CE type. What direction this takes is going to come from the faculty committee. Regardless, we have to understand that some people get paid more than others. If we’re going to have an excellent program, we can’t just take someone off the street. They have to be paid properly.

Professor Goldman: This topic is at the heart of innovation and leadership to me; those are the areas that we should be engaging in these conversations.

Professor Autumn: This shouldn’t be rocket science to look at other institutions and ask them how they started doing these programs. We don’t have the money though.

Associate Dean Hunter: The idea is that money is going to be raised; this is not coming out of current funds.

Vice President Ellis: If a new person is hired, then it’s important that faculty is really involved in that process.

Dean Jordan: I am doing my best to engage people at every single level. My hope that the faculty will be fully engaged and the committee will make sure that faculty get input on what direction the program is taking, with the mandate that they must continue to make progress.

Professor Heath: In terms of figuring out what sort of staff we have to oversee something like this, it is hard for me to imagine what realm of expertise we should look at to hiring this position. I can imagine inviting some of our successful alumni to come in to serve as role models and catalysts for faculty.