Business Task Force Report Discussion

Departments: English, Environmental Studies, History, Political Science

February 27, 2012

Present: Andy Bernstein (HIST), David Ellis, Kurt Fosso (ENG), Susan Glosser (HIST), Jim Grant (ECON), Karen Gross (ENGLISH), Jane Hunter, Tuajuanda Jordan, Jessica Kleiss (ENVS) Gary Reiness, Terri Banasek (recorder)

Professor Bernstein: The report presented a bunch of options. It was noted that there was recognition that there are some trustees/alumni who would like a business major. To what extent did that message get across that faculty control the curriculum? Do they accede to that?

Associate Dean Hunter: I gave a talk on the planning process last year which showed a flowchart of administrative responsibilities of the dean’s office – the faculty was not on the chart because the reporting relationship is a collegial one. In terms of what the board heard early on, they heard this message. The Board is clear about what it wants, which creates a certain amount of pressure.

Vice President Ellis: I totally agree that board gets that distinction. A couple of years ago, they would have said “do this.” They now understand that the faculty controls the curriculum. They have heard it meeting after meeting. They get that. But they are very interested in doing things that will benefit our students. They are continuing to push, trying to find out what we should do as an institution.

Professor Fosso: They know we had a business major and that it was not a good fit. What is their reaction to that?

Vice President Ellis: Some were students in the major and one taught (John Bates). My guess is that John didn’t agree with that decision. It was made in the early 90s.

Professor Glosser: Perhaps one reason to look at it is why the business major was cancelled. The economics department initiated it.

Professor Grant: The department didn’t initiate it. It came from the president’s office. It would be helpful and informative to look at the records of that.

Professor Glosser: My feeling, from students I deal with – it’s about social entrepreneurship. I see logic in providing courses or perhaps a certificate. I am leery of making it a minor or a major. It would means lots of classes that take students out of the liberal arts. I am reluctant to lose classes they need for a broad liberal education. Ben Westervelt suggested strategic policy – offer it in the summer similar to what they did in Winterim. Students would be paying full freight. I am concerned about the amount of money this would cost us. Down the line – it would mean 2 FTE. We are strapped for teaching resources. I like giving them two courses – many students would benefit.

Professor Fosso: It could be cast as working in the non-profit sector. I am concerned about the figures. I have heard it would only be advising, then I heard $4 million, then $13 million. We are a cash-strapped institution.

Dean Jordan: I would encourage you to put the worry about the money in the background. The reason is that I have had conversations and have no doubt that no money will be taken from the current endowment to fund this and that it will bring in money to the college, and our endowment will grow. I have been guaranteed. If the endowment grows, other things grow at the college as well and we have more resources. It is important to focus on whether or not this is something that should be done and how can we do it. The faculty makes the curriculum, but I would imagine that decisions are not made about the curriculum in isolation. Talk to students, listen to the board, pay attention to trends. Ensure the curriculum is dynamic and is resource responsible. But it has to address certain needs. That’s what we should be thinking about.   
  
Talking about a certificate or doing it in the summer – when you think about equity and are upset because students had to pay for Winterim, why would we shunt it to summer? As far as taking away from liberal arts, we don’t have any mandated minors – it’s a student’s choice. It gives them an extra option rather than taking away from the curriculum.

Professor Glosser: To me it’s the same as when we looked at the environmental studies major. I was reluctant to do that because of the number of courses. It limits the breadth. If it becomes a minor or major, if it is not liberal arts, it is something else. It’s a tradeoff. I don’t think we are talking about change for the sake of change. It is even difficult already for double majors. I take your point about summer term – it creates inequity.

Professor Bernstein: For the summer and winter proposals, I like what Stephanie Fowler did. There are ways of providing funding for students in the summer. In terms of liberal arts, I saw articles about what CEOs want, and not many of them said business majors. I am afraid of narrowing of the scope. There has been a lot of critique recently of business schools. It is worth thinking about where things are heading – including what business leaders want. In terms of our culture and identity, we don’t have a pre-professional identity.

Dean Jordan: I agree that LC should not have a bona fide business program or business major, but I made a presentation to the board to try to find a compromise. There are certain things our students want and that I believe they need that they are not getting in our curriculum. The compromise I see is entrepreneurship, and the Board fully backed that compromise. That very general plan I presented was supported. Nothing said business except for one course – Basic Business Principles. We are being directed to do something.

Vice President Ellis: That course is already offered at the law school. The professor who teaches it (the director of the business law program) would love to open it to undergrads. This is an existing piece to make available without incurring costs. There are barriers beyond the norm in having undergrads attending classes in the law school.

Professor Fosso: I could understand for an English major to cobble together some classes to create a minor. What about students majoring in economics? How do you create a minor for them?

Professor Grant: Economics and entrepreneurship are different animals. They are different worlds.

Professor Fosso: But for an entrepreneurship minor – macro and micro economics would be part of it, right?

Professor Grant: Intro to macro and micro is a one-semester course. That’s probably all they would need to have for an entrepreneurship minor – not so much economics.

Dean Jordan: We have some really cool things that students interested in social entrepreneurship might want to take already on the books. When we are thinking about these things, the program I laid out provides a road map so that the courses are clearly identifiable to the students. Our job is to provide those readily identifiable paths by offering choices.

Professor Grant: Entrepreneurship is providing students with structure for integrating what they are learning with the real world.

Professor Glosser: I like the social entrepreneurship.

Professor Gross: Along with Susan, Kurt, and Andy, I feel this is an area we need to work on; I was glad Winterim happened; I am excited about money for internships. Looking at peer institutions – regarding identity – there are a lot of peer and aspirations institutions that are not on here. Claremont McKenna, Grinnell, Pomona. I haven’t thought of Washington and Lee or Depauw as peers. Is that what we want to look like? I think we need entrepreneurship and to have our students be able to say to employers what skills we have. I would like to see money for departments to rewrite web pages and liaise with local businesses. In recruitment, if there is this pressure to be building a major, hiring people with business backgrounds, is this pressure to change our profile, why worry about it now when we also are doing strategic planning?

Dean Jordan: It is embedded in the strategic planning. Group 4 is looking at this. They are doing full-blown strategic planning for the college. The 2 FTE has nothing to do with potential majors. There are short-term and mid-term needs. They are to handle the increased potential interest in certain courses – discourse and technology. It could be in the form of adjuncts. When I did an estimate, I was trying to ensure that we didn’t come up short. I increased load in certain anticipated directions.

Associate Dean Hunter: The peer list is the standard list that was put together that has some relationship to endowment size. In terms of peer schools, we do like to compare ourselves to, Oberlin has a successful, but light, program.

Dean Jordan: We have looked at Pomona and Claremont McKenna. A business minor done overseas has been looked at. We are trying to figure out a middle-of-the-road thing and had to look outside the list. We are looking at what the top schools are doing. We compared the curricula of the top 10 schools, as well as the northwest 5. We will not transform into something else. How do you make sure we have a curriculum that addresses the needs of students? We can look at other schools for models, but we have to be true to what we are and the students we bring in.

Professor Fosso: This strikes the right balance. Embrace our quirkiness.

Dean Jordan: What is our strong identity?

Professor Fosso: Our students come here as real explorers who want to change their minds. They come here ready to have their minds changed.

Professor Grant: Many of them don’t come here thinking that but find that’s what they want when they get here.

Professor Fosso: We want to do more for our students about making sure they understand what they leave here with. They develop certain kinds of skills based on what they learn here. There are gaps – grant writing, for example – but they gain skills that are marketable. We can stay LC and forge this kind of path.

Professor Bernstein: In history, we encourage internships. We could do a much better job at that. We have to get students to step back and identify their options. When I looked at core competencies, we do these things already. I worry about certain subsets of students getting isolated.

Dean Jordan: A lot of labels come from an adult point of view, not a student point of view. My presentation was circulated to the Dean of Students. This has to be integrated, and integrated with student life. Students did bring out that they can feel the divide with certain things. One athlete gets a certain disconnect with faculty members because of being an athlete.

Professor Fosso: There is a real need to integrate this within majors or departments. We need to find the hours to put this together. My concern is that by focusing on entrepreneurship, we may feel we have done enough – we need to integrate with disciplines.

Dean Jordan: A minor can be adaptable to all of the disciplines that are on campus. How you spin it depends on discipline.

Professor Reiness: The message I took from the book given to us by President Mooney is that the tension is that education is for the sake of learning versus education as going out and doing good for fellow citizens. Developing leaders is a core part of the liberal arts. Thinking about developing leaders is not foreign to the liberal arts.   
  
Also, there was a report by the AACU several years ago on a survey of business leaders. They want critical leaders and thinkers with the ability to work in groups and be responsible. These are habits of minds that we to try to inculcate in our students. Scientists have to be able to talk people into giving them money – leading and persuading others of the value of the enterprise. They have to apply what they get from a liberal education and apply it to their own situations.

Professor Glosser: This could be very important in helping the humanities. Students don’t come in pre-professional. If you show them what they can do with a discipline, they can be more successful. Can a donation to an endowment be restricted?

Vice President Ellis: Absolutely. When we get money, we prefer it to be unrestricted. It is totally up to the donor. Endowment also is created by the Board. The $10 million gift from Fred Fields was unrestricted; the Board said it is going into endowment as unrestricted. The Board can change its mind, but they understand that the most pressing need is scholarship and faculty chairs.

Professor Glosser: How did you suss out student interest?

Dean Jordan: I have been talking with students in many, many venues. I am enlisting help from the Student Life office to talk with students rather than doing surveys.

Professor Fosso: Actual funding to departments to enhance their programs and how they deliver them – integrating in the college and local community – would help, perhaps through 3CE.

Professor Bernstein: Maybe there could be a stipend for a faculty member to work on this in the summer.

Dean Jordan: It’s in the presentation – course development (general document). The money could go to a faculty member or members. There are no restrictions. It would require a specific proposal and deliverables.

Professor Fosso: Gifts can come with strings on them. Is the Board operating on quid pro quo?

Vice President Ellis: No, not in his experience (back to 2004). They have responded in a few cases to needs. Right after he came in as general counsel, they had gotten into a $10.5 million mess. We have recovered most of that, including $1 million from Fred Fields, who was chair when that happened. I would say, however, that there are board members with resources who are very generous with the college who might be generous with this sort of program.

Associate Dean Hunter: The idea of a business program rubbed Julio the wrong way and created friction. Entrepreneurship: teaching students to think this way will make them more successful after graduation. I hope this program will restore the idea that we (the faculty and the Board) are moving in the same direction (faculty and board).

Professor Fosso: We are green – distinguish us in that way.

Vice President Ellis: Portland, sustainability, environmental law - when and if this gets off the ground, that could be a thread. We are missing an opportunity if that is not a thread. Oregon is the only state that recognizes the environment as a stakeholder. Students need to know that.

Professor Kleiss: Among ENVS students, there is a hunger for what they can do when they get out of here. It would be good to bring in people from the community showing what is available – an evening colloquium. They need to see what specific things they can do that are within the stream of this conversation. Integrating into current curricula – looking at ENVS, there are only four core courses, the rest is what already existed. The last course ties it all together. We also need to look at where the ENVS program fails – it (the program) is huge. We need to find a thread that runs through the existing curricula. What is missing is a project. Competition is an interesting motivator. But how do you quantify social change?

Professor Gross: There is a philanthropy competition at Stanford. One trustee who is a philanthropist funds one project.