Business Task Force Report Discussion

Chemistry, International Affairs, Philosophy, Theatre

March 9, 2012

Present: Anne Bentley (Chemistry), Rebecca Copenhaver (Philosophy), Jim Grant (Incoming Associate Dean), Jane Hunter (Associate Dean), Joel Martinez (Philosophy), Jay Odenbaugh (Philosophy), Michael Olich (Theatre), Tuajuanda Jordan (Dean), Gary Reiness (Incoming Associate Dean), Terri Banasek (Recorder).

Dean Jordan: There has been an evolution from thinking about pure business to something more entrepreneurial on the campus. There will be two make-up meetings in a couple of weeks for those who have not been able to attend. Minutes will not be posted until all meetings have taken place.

Professor Copenhaver: I wanted to talk about why I am so reticent. I agree that we owe it to our students to do a much better job of preparing them for employment. My worry about introducing this into the curriculum is that it won’t serve that function. I look at empirical evidence. Business programs are the lowest performers at undergraduate student learning. In addition, students who are attracted to business majors are consistently the lowest performing students. The next step, is encapsulated in sentence from report: “ … graduates who were among the 20 percent of lowest-performing students on the CLA were three times likelier to be unemployed in spring 2011 than were those who performed in the top quintile (9.6 percent of the former were in search of a job, compared to 3.1 percent of the latter).” I would rather be more responsible about reaching out to all of our students about being successfully employed. Our department does a good job with our students, starting early in their careers on campus.

Associate Dean Hunter: In terms of what she says, I am thrilled that we are not talking about a traditional business major. It is not what we want to do. Entrepreneurship would not be stand alone – it would be integrated into the liberal arts so that we instruct students how to take their liberal arts education into a successful life.

Professor Grant: Becko is preaching to the choir. Dean Jordan has done very nicely in the process of educating the board about what this thing we are calling entrepreneurship – I don’t know what we are going to call it, integrating what they are learning here and presenting it to the world later in life, maybe a nicer word is agency. It is not a stand-alone program. It will be a liberal arts program.

Dean Jordan: It has to be both academically rigorous and accessible to all students regardless of major and where they are in their path. It has to have a curricular piece and co-curricular and extracurricular pieces. We have to ensure that it is academically sound, up to our standards, and prepares the students for whatever is next. We want our students to explore and discover, but sometimes they are still confused when they leave. This gives them a way to try things out. We don’t know what form this will take. Initially the conventional wisdom was that we had to have a business major. I have convinced the Board that we will not have a business major, and they are fine with that. But if it is amorphous, they are not okay with that. This is just an effort to make something more tangible to them.

Professor Olich: I am here to react to the task force report. Theatre is left out of the list of strengths. Everything we do in our building except for personal finance is what we do. Our competencies are in line with this report. Making theater is not about having butts in the seats. It’s about leadership, team work and organizational finance. We are sharing that with all of our students. There is an oversight here. They are in a lab experience everyday entrepreneurially.

Associate Dean Hunter: What is on the cover page is what we all agreed to. What is after that are working documents that others brought together to discuss. They don’t represent consensus or opinion of committee as a whole.

Professor Olich: Addressing the Board.

Associate Dean Hunter: Focus on the cover sheet – it is the consensus of the task force. Members came from very different vantage points. We were hoping to find a middle, but what we found was the cover page and what we agreed upon. I am very worried about anyone thinking that this represents the committee as a whole, because it doesn’t.

Professor Olich: Reporting to the Board that theatre is in the business of entrepreneurial training every day.

Associate Dean Hunter: I started out with a document that I thought was great; David Ellis liked it, but other members of the committee didn’t like it. The final version was a short document that was something to submit and included working papers. The real triumph was Dean Jordan’s recently to get the Board to find this vision that works well for us that is a good acknowledgement of their concerns.

Professor Olich: We are talking about “them” – they are not in the room. They need to understand that we are not as devoid as they think. This is an action plan, moving forward from context onto goals. I am pitching that the theatre department is in action right now. I am speaking for one lab experience.

Dean Jordan: Many of us recognize that there are disciplines here that are entrepreneurial. That’s why I want us to get past that document. There have been a lot of rumors about what was included and what it meant. I am trying to dispel that. I am trying to move the Board. What does business mean, and how do you integrate that into LC? Some faculty members are concerned because there are specific courses. They are not etched in stone. We need something in a formal sense that students can understand. We have provided a basis for giving students a certificate in entrepreneurship. It shows that it is academically rigorous. It’s a pilot ... test it out. Pilot a minor and test it out. Show the Board that we are going to move in certain directions to better prepare students to use their educations to live. LC is not the only liberal arts college trying to do this without moving away from a liberal arts identity.

Professor Olich: In looking at reports of cohorts, I didn’t find “it” there.

Dean Jordan: What you are doing in theatre is primarily for theatre students.

Professor Olich: This is not about a job. This is team building. I don’t see that being addressed. I don’t see coming out of that the essential center of “it.” I am seeing market-driver security terms that we can be comfortable with.

Professor Copenhaver: One way to think about this is you might reject the notion that those sorts of skills can be taught in a vacuum. Those skills are only taught in the context of a discipline. I think the explanation is that there is no coherent way.

Professor Olich: That is the case to be made for the liberal arts because there is no recipe we can name. We need to gather a holistic sense viscerally for every learner. You can’t put a name on that. If we champion and catalyze a diverse collection of experiences for students, they can connect the dots – personal problem solving

Professor Grant: That wasn’t the purpose of the document.

Professor Olich: There aren’t any models from other cohorts.

Professor Grant: One of our jobs is to make this an LC program. Oberlin is a great place to start.

Professor Olich: We can do better.

Professor Reiness: There are lots of places on campus where students are getting this, but not all. We are not making it as visible to either our prospective students or our other constituencies. Are there ways we can highlight things we are already doing? Not only a life well lived but a way to make a living. Evidence is not so good that students make connections without some guidance.

Professor Olich: The heart of what we are talking about is guidance – mentoring.

Professor Reiness: Formalize the way in which we guide students to see the connections that are here.

Professor Copenhaver: That why I’m confused. When I hear that, I can get on board. No freestanding program, but I see that developing. I am on board with content but not with structures.

Professor Grant: Is gender studies or EAS free standing? ENVS? No. All are integrated.

Professor Copenhaver: You are talking about minors and majors.

Professor Grant: I’m not sure we are. Sure we are talking about a program that has solid academic curricular components …

Professor Copenhaver: I doubt that is possible. Gender studies may not be freestanding, but those are genuine disciplines to be studied. Business is not.

Associate Dean Hunter: Technology of the Future – that course definitely has an interface.

Professor Bentley: It is a snapshot of the student body. It is a nice mix of all kinds of students who are really creative. It is a Category A lab science quantitative reasoning course. The students are all non-science majors. Talking about disciplinary strengths. There is a scientific component. Students are writing press releases, selling their products. Students are very positive about the course. One student said that now he can talk to his dad – the student is an English major and the dad is a biochemist. The course is extremely interdisciplinary. We are not claiming to be experts in everything; we bring experts. For example, we brought in Lydia Loren to talk about patent law.

Professor Copenhaver: It sounds fantastic. Michael and I are not being articulate. That is really being done with coherent disciplines. Could we do it better? Yes. Do we want to work together? Yes. It is not accidental that it occurs in real disciplines. Having a certificate, minor, or major makes it seem like these skills are transportable out of a major or discipline. That’s an empirical claim.

Dean Jordan: Why can’t you do an experiment? We are trying to envision what it would be and allow it to grow. Envision where it could go and figure out how to get there. How do you create? Disciplines were not born, they were formed. Disciplines can evolve.

Professor Bentley: I can see how my course could be stronger if we had more collaboration and more interactions.

Professor Copenhaver: More interactions are perfectly consistent. A certificate, etc., would be at cross-purposes. Bait and switch. We need to do it for all students.

Professor Martinez: As a faculty member, I am trying to understand the perspective of someone else. We all recognize the problem and want to address it. The phrase “pilot it” – once we had a pilot, what criteria would we use to determine it how it worked? I know how to do that in philosophy. We might run into very different conceptions of the liberal arts down the road.

Dean Jordan: In one sense, we have these things that are the curricular pieces. There are no restrictions on who could take them. Are there students who are going toward those courses that haven’t been before? You can look at registration. Are they going for internships? Are there more? Are we establishing more relationships with people offering internships? Are we getting more support for the college because of that? Are students forming groups? If it’s popular enough and the quality is good, then is it time for future discussion? Are faculty interested? We have to provide opportunities for faculty. Look at trends and bring in experts on making the integration between entrepreneurship and the liberal arts.

If faculty want first-hand experience with entrepreneurship, they can get that in the summer and then bring it to their students. I want to reduce potential barriers to people who want to make this work. I want to give them the opportunity to create something and see how it goes. There is a timeline included. We will try to figure out along the way how it is working – get feedback from faculty, students, and stakeholders.

If you look at the course, everything that was listed as potential is already here. We have to find a way to identify them to students. We have things that are working, and we know it, but the outside world does not. What is “it” and who wants to play with “it”?

Professor Odenbaugh: Adonica DeVault told me that current employers won’t look at our students in general if they have not had an internship. It opened my eyes. I am on a Strategic Planning committee. Why are we trying to be Reed? I am strongly supportive of giving our students skills to help them to be successful and competitive. I am sympathetic to what Becko says, but I see the need for our students. At UCSD, I taught a course for science majors to look at many things. I enjoyed it. Business ethics has to be the most boring class ever. We need to find our own way of doing it our way. I want to pull out resources for our students that they are asking for that I don’t have.

Dean Jordan: The Board has nothing really in mind. They said that in the past they had in mind a business major because that’s what they knew from when they were in school. They told me that they trust me. Whatever I need, I will get it. The faculty have to decide and commit to it. We have to stick to a timeline. We have to get it out so people can think about it. I have to report back at every Board meeting about where we are. I understand that it seems in some instances that the Board is mandating.

Professor Odenbaugh: Regarding certificates – in programs that give certificates, do we know how that impacts job placement? However we structure this, I want it to help students get jobs they love.

Associate Dean Hunter: One hypothesis – one of the things the certificate will do is that it will give a student the ability to talk about what they have learned. They have pulled some things together and integrated them. A corollary.

Dean Jordan: Especially if the certificate program is well-defined, students can articulate what they did. If it’s from a reputable place, it gives students an advantage.

Professor Copenhaver: [to Dean Jordan] I appreciate your leadership on this and the relationship you are developing with the Board. It has not been there in the past. There is a lot on consensus here. No one wants to put energy into this without a timeline. I worry that the timeline might push us in a direction that may not work. I want to make sure we move forward from your PowerPoint rather than what is beyond the first page of the task force report. I want to move forward with your leadership.

Dean Jordan: It was an evolution. I had to put the document out there. It will still be there for people to see. Everything will be up for people to see. Everyone has to have a voice.

Associate Dean Hunter: I’m thinking about Venn diagrams – the three divisions. The place of intersection is something we draw a line around and call it entrepreneurship. Originally it was about sciences. I like the model that is integrative – moving science from creativity to a marketable idea.

Professor Olich: Fear and hope. We’ve cited a number of case studies that currently exist for “it” but I have heard no story for my understanding of the “it” – the spiritual core of what we are talking about. We can’t go forward with case studies without a contextual framework. Internships don’t make sense unless they have context. We have to craft the story in order to have anything. The picture will be the student’s to create.