Business Task Force Report Discussion

Make-up Meeting #1

March 22, 2012

Present: Moriah Bostian (Economics), David Ellis (Vice President and General Counsel), Jim Grant (Incoming Associate Dean), Jane Hunter (Associate Dean), Tuajuanda Jordan (Dean), Jim Proctor (Environmental Studies), Gary Reiness (Incoming Associate Dean), Molly Robinson Kelly (Foreign Languages), Liz Safran (Environmental Studies), Ellen Seljan (Political Science), Heather Smith (International Affairs), Todd Watson (Psychology), Terri Banasek (Recorder).

Dean Jordan opened the floor for discussion.

Professor Safran: I am interested in how leadership skills might be defined. I am in favor of enhancing those, and I see diverse ways that could go. There are possibilities of promoting that in various ways beyond entrepreneurship – social political.

Dean Jordan: Leadership can come in many forms. There are many ways our students can develop those skills in the curriculum. Students don’t always recognize those opportunities. Many are co-curricular. The way to put that in an entrepreneurship program will be to ensure that all students have those opportunities – to be able to make decisions, recognize problems, and address tangibles and intangibles.

Associate Dean Hunter: Any time you have students doing group work you are training in this way. Something that has come up in several meetings is that this would be a good way for students to learn to work in teams. Part of that is figuring out how a group is going to work. We could all be a bit more articulate in our classes to point out to them that this is a skill and that leadership is a critical part of a liberal arts education.

Professor Robinson Kelly: How are business and entrepreneurship being defined? What distinguishes entrepreneurship?

Vice President Ellis: I’d first like to give a history of where this came from. It was emanating from the Board – an interest in seeing the undergraduate program have more business skills training. Over a period of a few years, there was discussion in small groups about how that might work. Jane Hunter, Jim Grant, and others were appointed to work with trustees to define how that would work at someplace like LC. There are many things taught here that fit into the practical skills topics – either in the classroom or elsewhere. We were able to convince the trustees on the task force that if we were going to add something here it had to fit. It had to build on strengths. They get that. They get that faculty is in charge of the curriculum.   
  
A business curriculum might have entrepreneurship as a course or emphasis, but in a business major you are going to be studying marketing, accounting, management, advertising, etc. Entrepreneurship might be an elective. Entrepreneurship is more the study of how problems are solved. How do you (either for profit or for social change) assess how to bring skills and resources to bear to successfully solve a problem? It could be an app for a smartphone or a need for safe water in a developing country.   
  
Dean Jordan has quite artfully moved the needle from the Board towards something that she and I believe we can do well. It is not disciplinary. It is not tied to business rules. Leadership cuts across all kinds of different fields of study and fits in any topic – to be learning what happens when there is a failure of leadership.

Professor Robinson Kelly: I see how that would fit a lot better with LC.

Professor Proctor: How does that answer fit via the task force report? Where are we in our collective feeling?

Dean Jordan: We have evolved beyond the business preparation task force. It came first. The faculty didn’t know what was presented to Board, and rumors abounded. There was uncertainty. In the interview process, I was told we needed a business major. In my brain I knew a business major was not good for LC. We all read reports that business leaders want liberal arts degrees. They still need certain skills. How do we make that available in the context of liberal arts? Use creativity to solve social problems. We have evolved very quickly from the task force report and are looking at how we can integrate entrepreneurship across the curriculum. The task force report should be archived. How do we do entrepreneurship at LC? In my PowerPoint, I talked about the skills people need to be successful whether or not you are in business. Education should be holistic – curricular and co-curricular. If you are trying to level the playing field, how do you make something that is clearly identifiable by students? Entrepreneurship has to be curricular and co-curricular, but it has to be accessible. And it has to fit at LC.

Vice President Ellis: It has to fit LC as a college and who we attract. Anecdotally, I hear that there are students that bypass the great LC education because there is “no business.” I hear that from students who chose LC regardless and who are happy, but I hear that from Admissions as well. Having entrepreneurship in the catalog as something that can be pointed to will work to attract additional students without telling the traditional LC student that this isn’t the place they want to go. It drives it down the middle. Many don’t know what they want but are being told. Having these courses will attract another sector of graduating high-school seniors.

Professor Safran: Is the time and place to discuss specific ideas?

Dean Jordan: We can if you want, but I would rather that discussion not include me. If someone has preliminary ideas, we can discuss them here. (Notes from all meetings will be posted very quickly after today; will also post information from Associate Dean Hunter about what other colleges are doing about entrepreneurship). What I presented was a hybrid of what others are doing. I surveyed students asking them about their interest. In fall, 80 percent of students surveyed wanted entrepreneurship, not business.   
  
I hope that after the faculty reads the notes and thinks about them, a group of faculty will be appointed to look at all of this information and come up with what LC is going to do. It will be a faculty-led initiative. The dean’s office job will be to ensure they stay on task and get something developed. I do not have to have 100 percent buy-in to make this happen. I will utilize interested departments to move it forward. It IS going to move forward in one way or another. I hope the faculty will bring something forward that is attractive to faculty.

Professor Seljan: Many political science students are not interested in business in the private sector. I think that is unfortunate. I am excited about building leadership skills. I get nervous about trying to attract new students specifically for this program. We need more research there.

Dean Jordan: I don’t know if it is going to attract a different kind of student. We just need to see what happens. We are not going to throw out a major. We have a retention problem. Some students come here thinking they can do something. They can’t – they leave. This is a way to keep those students if we can attract a student who is very bright and they get that they can get a certificate in entrepreneurship. We aren’t going to dilute anything. We still are going to offer a strong liberal arts education. We will be giving students options when they get there. Options are things I am focused on right now. I did a mid-term report from Strategic Planning Group 4 – a huge spreadsheet – we are lacking in many things.

Professor Watson: Which departments do you see that naturally align with this and would like to contribute?

Dean Jordan: All departments can contribute. When you think about social entrepreneurship, there are many areas of humanities and the social sciences that can offer this. Multidisciplinary. There has been at least one individual from virtually every department who is excited about this.

Professor Smith: In international affairs, our students plan on the Peace Corp or getting a Fulbright. Then they want to go into international business. I am excited that this might mesh with what IA majors ultimately see themselves doing – to have a better sense of what they might be doing five years down the road instead of one.

Associate Dean Hunter: Entrepreneurial thinking is a new way of thinking about how they can leverage their major, sills, and interest into something they can carry into the future. I am 100 percent behind a multidisciplinary perspective. It offers something that our students need. Students from a liberal arts background offer things that business students don’t. It is a leveraged advantage but only if they can figure out how to put the legs under it. It is a potentially exciting addition that I would like to see in every department. There is a whole range of ways of making a life after LC.

Professor Robinson Kelly: It is exciting to have this be something that is in addition to their major. There is a weakness in the liberal arts model – we give them a wonderful education, but they don’t know how to market it. We don’t show them, and they don’t know how. It can take several years for them to be able to do it. The main problem is pragmatic. I am not qualified to teach a course. Who would teach these courses? Cross listed? Minor?

Professor Safran: That is a good question. We can’t plop it all into a course. We need lots of different elements, including maybe a mini-grant program which would stimulate innovation across the campus. I think an interdisciplinary program or clusters of programs could start that kind of development.

Professor Robinson Kelly: Maybe if there was some kind of a course that was defined like a practicum – arts entrepreneurship, etc. – students from different majors could come to that course.

Dean Jordan: It fits in with my PowerPoint – discipline-specific courses and practica. Who would teach a basic course in entrepreneurship? It would require at least one other body on campus who has that kind of expertise. Where would that person be housed? There are lots of questions. We need to educate the faculty about the connection between the liberal arts and entrepreneurship – perhaps a workshop for faculty to help them make those connections. We could provide internships for faculty – work with entrepreneurs during the summer and bring that information back to students. No one should feel excluded from the conversation. We have to be creative about ways to provide this for students in and outside the classroom.

Professor Proctor: I am happy this is forward thinking. It is reassuring. I’d like to toss in one more player – the new CIO. Utilizing new tools to solve problems is central today. Adam is excited about helping our faculty in curricular and co-curricular ways. What is exciting at LC is our alumni who do lots of cool entrepreneurial things. We could bring them back – interesting advice and inspiration for students.

Vice President Ellis: On April 3 at 5 p.m., the student alumni association is bringing entrepreneurs to campus for a panel. Little things like that are happening, but it needs the connective tissues. Someone needs to be watching over it. [Vice President Ellis told Pat Mahaffy’s story]

Professor Smith: I am on the strategic planning group for international education. We just submitted our mid-term report, and we left out dreams. We are now working on international centers that are thematic across the campus. In India there are programs for grad and law. We are looking at an internationally themed entrepreneurship program. The hope is eventually to have centers around the world that could work with the entrepreneurship program here.

Dean Jordan: The Board wants an international segment of this.

Associate Dean Hunter: We have many loyal international alumni, and almost all of them are in business. They would be available potentially for internships and programming on which we need in-country help.

Professor Safran: There are also convergences between environmental problem solving and international work. I can see lots of work in that area – green culture, diversifying, problem solving clinics involving students from all three schools.

Associate Dean Hunter: Environmental studies already is thinking about working in the real world.

Professor Safran: Students are hungry for that – being able to solve these problems.

Professor Proctor: We are almost too in the middle of this. It involves slowing down the “green” business that is coming up – how to find creative exciting space in the middle of all of the other ideas. We need to think smart.

Dean Jordan: Technology of the Future is offered in chemistry and biology for non-majors. There was a program a couple of weeks ago where students had to sell ideas to venture capitalists. Some were bland, but some were phenomenal. It is good practice for students – develop a product and sell it. This is real-world experience – solve the problem and convince people that your idea is the best idea. Write, speak, and sell your idea – it all fits in.

Professor Bostian: We seem to be moving away from core bus courses. Are we planning those things to be playing a supporting role? Where will they get the skills going into entrepreneurship course?

Dean Jordan: It depends on thinking about content. Many existing programs do not require business courses. The intro entrepreneurship course will include the basics. The Economics department does not want LC to make them the centerpiece of anything that is about entrepreneurship. I agree with that. An entrepreneurship evangelist would be expected to teach the intro course. He/she would need to know the basics of management and accounting. Chris Stevens (who led the Winterim) and I talked about that. It is absolutely possible to not have to do any formal accounting or finance course.

Vice President Ellis: Some basic principles that could be covered in an entrepreneurship course will be enough. It is important for someone who is going to start something to know that they need to surround themselves with people who understand those subjects more deeply. They don’t need to get down “in the weeds” of accounting or law.

Dean Jordan: The core of this has a basic business principles course that would not require an undergraduate faculty member. Someone at the law school is willing to open his class up to undergrads –

Vice President Ellis: business principles for lawyers. It is basic business stuff; it is now being taught for law students, but the professor is willing to open it up. It would be interesting for our students to study alongside law students.

Associate Dean Hunter: We won’t presume to teach students everything they need to know about running a business. My thought is to whet their curiosity and to get them enthused about the possibilities – motivate them to consider degrees they might have never thought about – an MBA for instance. We don’t want to convince our students they know all they need to know. We don’t do that in any field. We inspire them to go out and get more education or training.

Professor Grant: Jane is about right. My department worries about misperceptions and misconceptions that economics is what entrepreneurship is all about.