Business Task Force Report Discussion

Make-up Meeting #2

March 22, 2012

Present: Lyell Asher (English), Keith Dede (Foreign Languages), David Ellis (Vice President and General Counsel), Kristin Fujie (English), Jim Grant (Incoming Associate Dean), Jane Hunter (Associate Dean), Curtis Johnson (Political Science), Tuajuanda Jordan (Dean), Janis Lochner (Chemistry), Gary Reiness (Incoming Associate Dean), Terri Banasek (Recorder).

Dean Jordan opened the floor for discussion.

Professor Johnson: I know you’ve had other sessions – how many have there been and how many attended?

Dean Jordan: I’m not sure; I will know when notes are posted. Every department has had representation. I have received e-mails from folks unable to come; those will be posted along with the minutes of all of the meetings.

Associate Dean Reiness: About 40 to 50 faculty members have participated.

Professor Asher: Why did the Board decide or how did they come to the conclusion that what the college needs is an emphasis on business or entrepreneurship? In the past, other Trustees (including Pamplin, Fields, and Miller, who were all businessmen) didn’t think we needed that. It is out of sync with what I think the needs of college are. The Board’s perception has been somewhat blinkered. For instance, the Board believed that students with religious beliefs felt they were ostracized, and it turned out to be not true. What research did the Board do to come to this conclusion?

Vice President Ellis: There has been no resolution passed by the Board – no Board action. A large percentage of the Board is enthusiastic, but it didn’t come in the context of a resolution. Your assumption is right that a number of Board members are in business of some sort. A handful are alumni who went through the business program here when we had one. They see in their work experiences students, young people coming to work for them of all stripes. Their best employees come from a liberal arts education; they think more broadly, are more conversive. There are many reasons why they stand out. A lot is anecdotal. One trustee’s son wouldn’t come here because there was no business, but I don’t know if that is the trustee talking or the son talking.   
  
The Board didn’t really have a vision of what it is they think we ought to be doing until Dean Jordan presented at the last meeting about entrepreneurship. Her presentation moved most of them off the business program/major/minor way of thinking towards something that is more Lewis & Clark, more entrepreneurship. That’s the genesis. Some of them have been talking about doing something to give students more practical skills and more confidence in taking their liberal arts education into whatever the next phase of their life is; they have been talking about it for a long time.

Professor Dede: My recollection is that the origin of the whole idea was in the Hochstettler administration. We are bad at alumni giving. The Board says that if we can create alumni who can make a lot of money, they will then give to college. Was that part of the task force?

Professor Grant: We didn’t have any conversations about alumni giving. There has been pressure from the Board for a long time to do something in the area of business education. I don’t know if the Board or the task force knew what they wanted. Business became a hook to hang concerns on. It may have started as the direction the task force was assigned to pursue. It didn’t end up being where the task force ended up recommending or suggesting. It was more the notions of connecting our students with the abilities, training and knowledge they acquired here with their next steps. One of the recommendations out of the task force was in the business direction, but it also had to do with a different direction for student advising and for providing opportunities for entrepreneurship on campus. It is after the work of the task force and Dean Jordan giving the direction of entrepreneurship that is channeling the interest of the Board in this idea.

Vice President Ellis: I have heard the comment that if we had more alumni with more money it would accrue to our benefit. I can’t argue with that. I wouldn’t suggest we focus our curriculum on creating alumni with more money.

Professor Asher: Some time ago that was a topic of discussion.

Vice President Ellis: I would love to have the next multibillionaire technology entrepreneur to come out of LC and to be grateful for what the college did. It would be wonderful. It’s not just about how much money our alumni give – it’s how **many** alumni give. We need to address both. Providing these kinds of opportunities for students when they are here enhances the affinity and connection to the school after they leave.

Professor Asher: The general education task force was talking about writing. What strikes me about the Board is evidently how little they’ve done about learning about what we are doing well. Two years ago I was working on the general education task force and talking about writing. E&D is supposed to take care of it, but it isn’t. Nothing is. Not all students graduate with the ability to write competently. I look forward to small classes at the freshman level – capped at 14 students – with real writing instruction that are not incentivized to keep standards low. We need to be able to do something that would make LC stand out – one year of small writing courses that are difficult . The student would be an excellent writer when he/she came out. I don’t see it happening. Dean Jordan is sympathetic is emphasizing writing – the book, *Academically Adrift*, makes the point. A traditional liberal arts curriculum addresses all the needs. When I see the presentation by the task force, I see it as out of sync with what students need. We don’t do nearly enough to make that transition happen. I agree with part of this, but there are other serious problems here that are not being addressed. I am concerned about what will be spent out of endowment. That money could be better spent

Professor Lochner: I have concerns related to funding. An observation: when you have a program created from the top, they will continue to invest to make it a success, providing more resources to make it a success. There are different standards. They will continue to invest until it is successful. What about alternative models? PSU is going to establish something similar, hiring someone to write grants to raise money to establish the program. The onus is on the program to get started.

Dean Jordan: From my point of view as the new college leader, I don’t know about the previous president. All I knows is that it is important to me that students have, and understand they have, the tools to be successful. Providing entrepreneurship as an option, is an opportunity to take what they have learned and to apply it in the real world to be successful, whether in the for-profit or not-for-profit sector. You could look at this as top down, but I don’t see it that way. The Board had an idea for many years, but there was little movement. It came to a point where they said something must be done. Some students are still floundering when they leave here. How do we define it so that those students who are interested can identify it? My job is to provide the framework for those opportunities to be available to our students. This is not business – I have been saying that from the beginning. But it has to be something. I came up with entrepreneurship – multidisciplinary and defined within our own context – and put it out for faculty to see. We have had excellent conversations. The faculty has to grow the curriculum – that’s where it has to come from. It has to be faculty-driven, but not all faculty members have to be involved. It must be adaptable to every discipline, but not every department has to mandate involvement. It has to be available to all students.  
  
Writing and entrepreneurship are not mutually exclusive. There are multiple ways to accomplish tasks. People need to be creative and innovate in getting there. This provides students with the curriculum and co-curricular activities to do that. How to fund? There are many models to provide funding. I let the Board know how much it would cost; it is up to the Board to say how it is funded. My expectation is that the Board is going to give money to start it; there needs to be fundraising to sustain it. As a leader of the college, I will not perpetuate programs that are not excellent programs.   
  
If faculty members are growing the program, there is faculty buy-in there. The faculty won’t grow a crappy program. If a bad program comes forward, my responsibility is to stop it. I only know about my interactions with the Board and what is going on across the nation with good liberal arts colleges.

Vice President Ellis: I saw the story from PSU, too, and I like that model, too. I would like to see someone here who went to a great liberal arts college and went on to be a successful entrepreneur and who now wants to teach. A grounding in the liberal arts is important to help the faculty here think about how the liberal arts translate into entrepreneurship. I don’t have those answers and don’t think many faculty members do either. That person would also need to be a fundraiser. We would need money for that person. I don’t know what comes first.

Associate Dean Hunter: In my experience with grants, you usually apply to get something started, and then you raise money to keep it going. I would be more comfortable raising money to do this without making a commitment to a grant. We get in trouble with short-term grants; ending up with a structure that we can’t sustain. Dean Jordan put a dollar amount out there so that the Board would see this would need funding.

Professor Johnson: I still am having trouble figuring out faculty sentiment about this proposal. The water cooler conversations seem to be skeptical. I have skepticism myself stemming from my understanding of liberal arts education and what is being doing elsewhere. I heard you say that this is going to happen. Is that fair to say? If many faculty members are skeptical or opposed, you are not going to have a program. Is this a done deal?

Dean Jordan: Something is going to happen; but I have no idea what that “something” is. We are moving forward to create some type of program to help the students who want to learn how to translate this great education into something with which they can be successful. The Board gave me a directive, and I accepted that challenge. My job is to find something that will work at LC. That’s why the faculty has been invited to participate in these conversations. Some departments are very interested. There are individuals across disciplines who are very interested. This process will allow them to get together and have conversations. They will bring to me what they think will work best.

Professor Johnson: I share Lyell’s view about the nature of a liberal arts education. I think this is going to involve tradeoffs with other parts of the program. I would prefer resources going into writing. I am concerned about the Board setting the direction of a part of curriculum. I heard it accompanied by a threat that if we don’t do this, they won’t do that. The curriculum should come from the faculty; if the Board takes over, the faculty will lose its one area of sovereignty. It would set a bad precedent.

Vice President Ellis: I never heard anything like that from the Board. They have been talking about business for some time without articulating what that means. The Business Preparation Task Force was established by Jane Atkinson to find out what that might mean. The Winterim came out of that. There were no threats. It would be very uncharacteristic for our Board to do that. It doesn’t work that way.

Professor Johnson: Perhaps threat is not the right word. Could something be construed that way?

Vice President Ellis: Not that I know of. If something is construing a threat, there might be an individual Board member who would give to business but not to something else.   
  
I understand the top-down thing, and that that is not the way we want to operate. The Board has not resolved to do anything, but they are attracted to Dean Jordan’s idea. It is up to the faculty to create something that satisfies the majority of the faculty.

Professor Asher: I heard that there is a quid pro quo – they may not give money for other things. I asked at the faculty meeting about the $14 million in endowment. This is not the Fred Fields money, right?

Vice President Ellis: That money is going into endowment to generate scholarship funds. This is Board-designated endowment.

Professor Asher: The fact is, the Board can do what it wants with the money. It can go right into endowment, and they fund what they want out of the endowment. Last year the Board gave us $800,000; this will require $14 million. It is a fool’s bargain. It will take 15 years of giving at current rate. We are likely to be in for a rude surprise.

Vice President Ellis: It is not in the cards that the Board is going to give all of the money for this. Trustees give for a variety of things, and they haven’t turned off the tap while they are waiting for action on this. They will continue to give to things that interest them. If this goes forward, they will help us raise money from other sources. Regarding grants, there are opportunities out there for that. I understand your concern – Board will hear from me, Dean Jordan, President Glassner, and others that using the Fields money for this is not a good idea. The college’s most pressing need is money for scholarships. We can’t stop them for doing it, but I don’t see it happening.

Professor Johnson: We also need a couple of new buildings.

Professor Reiness: I have been listening at all meetings, and I have been surprised at the level of interest across the faculty. We need to give our students a leg up so they can take the important critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership skills they learn here and apply them. We know the students have the skills, but they don’t know they have the skills. It will benefit them without taking anything away from the liberal arts education.

Professor Lochner: I like that there is a price tag – too often we don’t know up front what it will cost. I would be hypersensitive to development of a new program. I heard about the discount rate going up and the library budget going down. As the discount rate is going up, we have to keep to our commitments. There is a new sliver in the pie – this program. This concerns me. The discount rate is squeezing other things. We need to be very cautious – things that are precious to us are being cut, especially the library. It must be incredibly difficult dealing with budget issues. One more piece in the pie is dangerous.

Dean Jordan: Thank you for recognizing the difficulties of building the budget. For the timelines, within three years we would offer a pilot of a certificate in entrepreneurship. It would require four courses as well as internships and workshops. It won’t cost much at all. We are already doing each of the courses. We need to identify partnerships to create internships. I am trying to be very purposeful – figure out what we need to do, test it, determine student interest, and determine faculty interest. That will determine if we do it and what it will be. We are trying to identify what the potential pitfalls are and the anticipated results and potential solutions. How we are going to do this is to put all the information out there, identify people who will do due diligence to determine sufficient buy-in by using data, not emotional response. I will not force anything. I will put it in the faculty hands and give all of the faculty a voice. I understand it is painful, but it is an evolutionary kind of thing. My job is not to force it but to shepherd it without in any way decreasing the experience of students. We need to find the funding to do the best for our students.

Professor Johnson: I would like to test the assumption that our students who are graduating are struggling in the professional world. The alumni with whom I am in touch are doing quite well. They didn’t need any entrepreneurship training. How many of our students aren’t making it after they graduate?

Dean Jordan: I can’t give absolute number. They are looking into it as part of strategic plan. I am not saying we are doing a poor job. Some of our students need more guidance, and we need to give that to them as part of their LC experience. We have to provide opportunities and options for **everyone** to have that possibility.

Associate Dean Hunter: What we want to be encouraging across campus is a little more support for and conscience catalyzing of thought processes of how to leverage liberal arts skills after graduation – how to connect their major with the real world life. Some of our students benefit from these conversations early on. This would not be a requirement – it would be an option. Liberal arts students have a lot to offer in terms of ideas and ideals. I would like to help inspire that thinking process about what next so that the lag time that accompanies our students upon graduation can be shorter. Adding options and a way of thinking we do not currently have would add a lot to the mix here.

Professor Fujie: I am struck by overlap of concerns of the Board and faculty. This should be about making points of connection between what students are learning and what they want to do. Maybe the problem with the disconnect between faculty and the Board is the word “entrepreneurship.”

Dean Jordan: That could be what it morphs into. Entrepreneurship is not just about business. It’s about putting things together and solving problems. There has to be a way that any student can see that it is available – a track to put these things together. We have not done that. The outside world needs to understand what we do here. The Board is part of that outside world. How do we package it so that people see that every student has the opportunity to develop those skills?

Professor Lochner: My gut tells me that if I had a child interested in this, I would not tell them to get a certificate but to get an internship. Is the Board interested in providing paid internships? A certificate might be less useful than a good internship experience.

Associate Dean Hunter: Why a certificate? In some sense it suggests that a student should be able to articulate what their goals are, where they want to go, and what skills they bring to it. Students have to be able to say what they know, what they learned, and where they are going. A current Board member and her husband are providing paid internships for Pell-eligible students. We also are looking toward paid internships in Asia. I can see that working in parallel or in tandem with taking the cluster of courses.  
  
The first page of the Business Preparation Task Force report is the consensus report. The rest is other documents that were not agreed on by entire group.

Professor Grant: Of the things that came out of the task force, the narrowly defined business major has been dropped.

Associate Dean Hunter: What I wrote was intended as a report from task force, but the task force didn’t agree. My attempt to distill consensus from a lively debate was not the best way to go. People wanted to see the products of their work. I created a consensus report and attached the rest as working documents.

Dean Jordan: It then evolved into what was presented to the Board to get them away from business.

Professor Asher: One of the problems is that everyone thinks different things when they hear entrepreneurship. When I think of entrepreneurship, I think of someone who comes up with a new widget. Entrepreneurship can be even narrower than business. If it’s a matter of nomenclature, don’t let that stop you.

Dean Jordan: Social entrepreneurship is not the business context at all. We need to get the discussion started.

Associate Dean Hunter: We will put the Winterim postcard online as well. It may help to bridge the communication gap.