

CHAPTER 3—TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Committee on Teaching and Learning was composed of faculty members and administrators from around the university, all of whom shared a keen interest in improving the quality of life of the faculty and the quality of education our students receive. From the outset, we were aware that the scope of the charge included most of what any good university considers essential. In order to avoid overlap with the school reports, we focused on four broad areas that affect the university as a whole and seem most in need of attention: 1) faculty status; 2) faculty development; 3) interdivisional collaboration; and 4) general education. As discussions progressed, issues surrounding faculty status were paramount. Faculty development, interdivisional collaboration, and general education could not be adequately addressed until the university regularized the structures, terms and expectations governing the appointment of its faculty throughout the institution. For these reasons, the report begins with faculty status.

PART 1: REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FACULTY STATUS

A Précis of the Problem

Fall 2001, New School University had 1,509 part-time and 156 full-time faculty members (a ratio of nearly 10 to 1). While the number of full-time faculty has grown dramatically in recent years, so have our ambitions for them. Those faculty members now play a more substantial role in the university, but with the equally dramatic growth in the number of students, the need for more full-time faculty is as pressing now as it ever was. Of the full-time faculty in the university, 34 are tenured, 9 are tenure track, 20 are on “extended employment” contracts and 93 are full-time (non-tenure track). No reliable figures exist for the breakdown of part-time instruction. But the ranks vary from adjuncts on year-to-year contracts who teach anywhere from one to three classes a semester; to recurring part-time faculty with longer-term contracts whose responsibilities vary from division to division; to half-time core faculty who are expected to play a greater role in curriculum development, governance and advising. In the past, each school tended to interpret these designations according to idiosyncratic needs, with the result that the responsibilities for each category have tended to differ from school to school. Many colleges have also created additional sub-categories for faculty appointments, further complicating the institutional structure. In addition, a substantial number of full-time administrators direct academic programs and teach in them, but are not designated as members of the faculty.

Benefits and Deficits of a Part-time Faculty

The present composition of the faculty—particularly its extensive reliance on part-time teachers—is a product of rapid expansion over the past 20 years coupled with an historic commitment to making a place for artist-practitioners and non-academic professionals who can bring their accomplishments and expertise to the classroom. Nearly everyone involved acknowledges that the presence of so many different kinds of teachers is the school’s greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Their large numbers provide the institution with an intellectual vitality and openness to the world that defines a New School education. At the same time, having so many part-time instructors does not allow for the long-term commitments to the institution that it must have if it is to plot its curriculum, to draw on faculty expertise for academic and programmatic decisions, and to provide students with access to teachers outside the classroom or with advisors who are familiar enough with the institution to guide them through the thicket of course offerings. Nor can the extensive reliance on part-time faculty guarantee the academic quality New School must have if it is to improve its academic standing.

1998 Reports

In 1998 the university charged two committees with assessing both the “quality of life,” and workload, compensation and benefits of part-time faculty. (Both documents are contained in the Exhibits.) These reports have provided a starting place for thinking about the issues surrounding faculty status. They have the legitimacy of a year’s worth of study by the deans of each division and several other senior administrators. And, with a few omissions (to be discussed later), they accurately summarize the issues. In the preamble to the 1998 *Part-time Faculty Report*, the deans recognized the evolving nature of the university’s mission from its early beginnings in 1919, when it offered non-credit courses to educated adults, to its present status offering graduate and undergraduate courses in a wide range of fields. Similarly, those reports acknowledged the transformation of the faculty from educated professionals who shared their knowledge in a particular field to a greatly expanded faculty of full- and part-time teachers who are increasingly looking to the university to provide their primary academic home and source of identification.

In an effort to create an atmosphere of “respect, institutional recognition, and a sense of community,” the reports ask a number of important questions: What is fair practice with respect to part-time faculty? What are the proper compensation and benefits arrangements? What about teaching loads, and involvement in governance activities? What planning process can be initiated to answer some of these questions? Such concerns go to the heart of the university’s responsibilities to its faculty, and we applaud the institution’s determination to address them.

Progress since 1998

Significant progress has been made on many recommendations. The university has established a number of part-time faculty positions (most notably, The New School added ten new half-time positions); it has dramatically improved the benefits available to part-time faculty (offering full benefits to half-time employees and access to a “cafeteria plan” to almost all members of the part-time teaching staff); it has included part-time teachers on a number of

school and university committees (compensating them \$250 for their work); it has made solid progress in diversifying its faculty; and it continues to improve the quality of its communication (all faculty members now have remote access), logistical and technical services.

Areas to be Addressed

Some topics in the reports deserve elaboration, and we have devoted our energies to them. The most important area is the standardization of faculty appointments. Although the Report acknowledges that the proliferation of part-time teaching titles has “migrated toward chaos,” it does not provide sufficient rationale for standardizing them. Until this problem is addressed, related problems of faculty workloads, research expectations, reappointment procedures and governance cannot move forward.²⁶

Faculty Appointments

The proliferation of ranks and titles makes it impossible to compare apples to apples. This encourages lax supervision within the administration and inequities among the faculty. Moreover, incommensurate faculty categories pose obstacles to interdivisional hiring, where everything from hiring standards, to faculty pay, to reappointment procedures differ from school to school. Where interdivisional hires are accomplished (a goal if the university is to become more cohesive, more like a university), they often result in vastly different expectations of workload, committee assignments and the like. Moreover, the lack of uniform faculty appointments reinforces a “culture of suspicion” that makes it difficult to get cooperation among faculty members from different divisions who often have no contact with people who are in the very same field. Finally, the lack of uniform appointments (along with clearly articulated rights and responsibilities) reinforces the tendency for isolation and insularity within each division, encouraging faculty to become self-protective rather than submitting themselves to the highest standards.

Benefits to the University

The university will benefit from the proposed changes in a variety of ways: 1) Standardization of faculty titles clarifies the organizational structure of the university, making it easier to pool resources and address problems of mutual concern.²⁷ 2) It ensures that teachers understand both

²⁶ Little parity exists across the schools. Parsons allows its part-time faculty to teach as many as six studio classes per year, while The New School is limited to three per year and Lang to two-and-a-half. Allowing faculty to teach what is essentially a full-time load while paying them for piece-work seems unfair and also prevents the university from taking advantage of its best faculty. Many are forced to cobble together jobs at three or four universities, limiting the time they can spend with students outside the classroom, or the kinds of commitments they can make to university life, in general.

²⁷ It is easy for the university to underestimate the symbolic currency it confers on, or withholds from, its faculty through the terms it uses to describe them. The absence of titles contributes to the overall confusion of the university bureaucracy and significantly affects faculty morale. The committee debated possible titles but concluded that such suggestions would be premature.

the rights *and* responsibilities that come with rank. 3) It allows the Provost's Office to establish strict minimum standards and procedures for reappointment for each rank. 4) It offers a small, but important inducement that is useful in attracting good faculty and keeping them. 5) It helps search committees and chairs identify a pool of candidates for promotion (Lecturers for Sr. Lecturers, Sr. Lecturers for Professors) when appropriate lines open up. The lack of clarity around possibilities for professional advancement and terms upon which that advancement might take place is one of the most demoralizing experiences for faculty members. 6) It facilitates joint appointments by allowing faculty and administrators to match half-time positions between divisions. 7) Most importantly, it helps to identify and create a stable core of long-term teachers who are available to plan student curriculum, be there to advise students year after year, and serve as the institutional memory.

Rights and Responsibilities

Each of these designations should come with a set of rights and responsibilities that is uniformly adopted by the schools. Faculty of each rank should know how many classes they are expected to teach; how much advising and committee work is expected of them; how often they will come up for review and what professional accomplishments are expected for reappointment. Current policies are not clearly spelled out and/or communicated effectively. When they are, they often differ from school-to-school, making joint appointments burdensome and confusing.

Reappointments

The process for reappointing faculty members is one of the most ticklish issues. There is a university policy in place, but it is badly out of date and under revision. Presently, the procedures and expectations vary too widely, and are not sufficiently understood by the faculty members that are subject to them. Frequently, no feedback on faculty performance (pro or con) exists as guidance for subsequent reappointment. Because standards for reappointment are unclear, New School has difficulty ensuring the continued quality of its faculty. In some schools, there is little or no peer review. And where there is, it can be self-protective.

Recommendations

1. The university would benefit from sustained deliberations about the possibility of standardizing faculty appointments. (*NB*: This recommendation has been implemented.)
2. The university should adopt a limited number of honorific titles to describe faculty who perform comparable functions.
3. Clear-cut, transparent procedures with institutional safeguards would ensure that appointments are made with due diligence, that they are made fairly and openly, and that the university can scrutinize faculty contributions without fear of legal reprisal.
4. A point system needs to be established (much like the one in place at the Graduate Faculty) to measure faculty commitments to the university and allow administrators to relieve overburdened faculty.

5. We reiterate the 1998 Report's call for a Faculty Center, which would provide faculty with clerical support, access to copying machines, a place to prepare for classes and confer with students.²⁸ This is the single most important way to improve quality of life for part-time faculty.

PART 2: REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

A Teaching Institution, or a Research Institution? Somehow Both

The institution has a distinguished history of fostering scholarly research and artistic expression. Indeed, in the eyes of many, the achievements of some of its most prominent faculty are inseparable from its identity. And yet, like all colleges and universities, New School faces the necessity (and difficulty) of balancing support for these activities with a wide range of other commitments. The value of research and creative expression are periodically subject to doubt because such activities are expensive; because they take faculty out of their classrooms; because the benefits are not always easy for the administration to measure. Compounding the problem is an uncertainty about whether the university is essentially a teaching institution, or a research institution. Clearly, it is somehow both. The committee recognizes the difficulty of supporting research and creative expression with the limited resources. Nevertheless, it affirms its importance.

Currently, the Graduate Faculty is the only academic division where research plays a definitive role in its mission. But other divisions like Milano, as well as faculty in the masters programs at Parsons, The New School and elsewhere think of research and creative practice as an essential component of their professional lives. At present, support for such projects is minimal and yet the expectations for scholarly and artistic production are quite high (as are those of many faculty members themselves). What is needed is a frank and open discussion about the demands of teaching and research as they affect the ambitions of faculty life, and the university's image of itself and its mission.

University Commitment to Research and Creative Activity

The university has made impressive commitments to research and creative activity on what everyone would concede is an extremely limited budget. But these resources are not always distributed equitably across the divisions. Teachers from some divisions receive modest though invaluable funding for research while members from other divisions receive almost none at all. This is readily apparent in the following report that divides the schools into three groups: (1) the two graduate schools (Graduate Faculty and Milano Graduate School), (2) Colleges with and without masters programs (The New School, Lang College and Parsons), and (3) Music and Theater programs (Actors Studio, Jazz, and Mannes).

²⁸ A Faculty Center would accomplish many important goals in one fell swoop: It would recognize contributions to the university; it would provide a central location where they could meet with students, check their mailboxes, obtain logistical and technical support for their activities; and most importantly, it would help to foster an intellectual community by providing a space or "home" where the faculty can gather.

Graduate Schools. As the two graduate divisions with the most tenured and full-time faculty, the Graduate Faculty and Milano have what might be characterized as the most traditional academic cultures among the schools. And since both the Graduate Faculty and Milano place a great deal of emphasis on scholarly research in the hiring and promotion of their faculty, they devote a limited but substantial portion of their budgets to faculty development. For example, both divisions have travel budgets to subsidize faculty presentations at academic conferences. Both have policies that enable faculty to buy-out teaching responsibilities (e.g., to work on a research grant), or to take a leave of absence to pursue fellowship opportunities or take a temporary position at a research institute, public agency or non-profit organization. And, both offer sabbaticals to full-time faculty. (The Graduate Faculty, but not Milano, has a small research fund and provides research assistants for some faculty.)

Despite these efforts at faculty development, no one claims that enough is being done. Funds for travel and research do not match the needs of their respective faculties. As a rule Milano offers travel grants of \$250 to each faculty member each year (though in some years those limited funds have been available only to junior faculty). Welcome though they are, these modest grants do not cover the costs of an average academic conference, which can easily require an outlay of anywhere from \$800 to \$1,200. This makes it difficult for faculty to maintain their academic reputations in their chosen fields or to solicit input and criticism for new ideas as they develop. In addition, too little "seed money" is available for small scholarly tasks such as a visit to a research library or monies to transcribe interview tapes.

Finally, both faculties are bothered by what they perceive to be the administration's "undue emphasis" on enrollments and budgets at the expense of scholarship. Many of the faculty members at the Graduate Faculty and Milano feel strongly that support for research and scholarship appears mainly when hiring, promotion, and extended employment decisions are being made, and tends to evaporate in the interim. They complain of the university administration's lack of appreciation for the requirements necessary to undertake first-rate scholarly research, specifically the need for library facilities, access to offices after hours, financial support and release time. What is lacking, they say, is a "culture of scholarship."

Colleges with and without Master's Programs. The faculties at Parsons, The New School and Eugene Lang College share many of the scholarly ambitions as their peers at the Graduate Faculty and Milano. But the lack of a traditional academic culture, large numbers of part-time faculty, and insufficient resources hamper the former. Most university funding made available to individual teachers comes in the form of curricular support for new classes, or incentives to incorporate new technologies in the classroom. The deans have tried to set aside some money for individual research, but they readily acknowledge that it does not begin to address the need. All three divisions offer their part-time faculty a modest travel stipend (anywhere from \$100 to \$200 at Parsons, \$250 to \$500 at Eugene Lang College), which is awarded on a limited and competitive basis. Faculty welcome the support but complain that it is insufficient and occasionally, self-defeating. For example, decisions about travel grants are often made at inconvenient intervals in the calendar year, making it impossible for a teacher to commit to deliver a paper at a conference and sometimes necessitating their untimely withdrawal if the funds do not come through. At Milano, the money provided is not enough to cover the expenses of an average conference.

In addition to travel subsidies, The New School, Parsons and Eugene Lang College all have sabbatical policies in place that cover their full and half-time faculty. Parsons and Eugene Lang College have the most ambitious sabbatical policies. Parsons offers 6 sabbaticals a year to its full and part-time faculty; Eugene Lang College offers anywhere from 1-3 sabbaticals per year to its full

and part-time faculty (both on a competitive basis). But many faculty complain that these opportunities are few and far between, particularly at Parsons where there are 30 full-time and more than 600 part-time faculty. Despite these opportunities, both teachers and administrators acknowledge that support for faculty development is meager in comparison to the Graduate Faculty and Milano, and speaks to the inequities among schools. How, they wonder, can they overcome the stigma attached to their own accomplishments if they are not given the opportunity to prove what they can do?

Music and Theater Schools. Conditions are even leaner in The Actors Studio, Jazz, and Mannes. Here, full-time faculty members are few. Most rely on adjunct faculty and other professionals. For many of these teachers, New School University is not their primary professional affiliation. They consider themselves first and foremost, musicians or actors. (There is a large group of professionals at Parsons who would put themselves in this category as well.) Teaching is considered an important, albeit secondary, part of their portfolios. While initial hiring might be based on creative accomplishment, promotion is not part of the employment arrangement and thus creative activity is not rewarded after their initial hiring.

Several faculty and administrators from these schools have called for the revival of the Center for Teaching Excellence. For working professionals in non-academic fields (some of whom are first-time teachers), faculty development means help with planning courses, creating syllabi, finding standards for grades, and the opportunity to discuss pedagogical strategies. While the Center for Teaching Excellence was underutilized in the past, its absence has been sorely missed, particularly at Parsons where it played an essential role, providing services to more than 600 part-time teachers. For many non-academic professionals, however, the best form of faculty development would be higher salaries.

University Administration

The university administration plays a number of roles with regard to faculty development, both direct and indirect. The Office of the Provost manages the Faculty Development Fund, which offers small research grants from \$1,000 to \$4,000 to faculty each year. It is competitive, open to both full-time and part-time faculty, and funded at \$41,000 per year. This sum is clearly insufficient if the administration hopes to develop a research faculty outside the Graduate Faculty. It does not really go very far in support of the Graduate Faculty itself. In fact, most of the applicants are part-time members of the faculty from other schools, among whom it serves as an important affirmation of their ambition and worth. The university administration plays an important role in faculty development through the allocation of resources. Although the final decision regarding how much money will be devoted to faculty support is left to the deans, the administration makes decisions that affect budgetary constraints within which the deans operate. The administration should recognize its role in this regard and create financial incentives for its schools to devote more of their resources to their faculty.

In the absence of a major increase in support for the Faculty Development Fund, the leadership could take a number of incremental steps to affirm the importance of the professional accomplishments of its faculty. These might include more endowed chairs, an annual award given out at graduation (much like the teaching award) to the faculty member who has excelled in research, scholarship or creative activity. Public presentations of faculty work, and continuation of the initiative to document the work of the faculty made by Fogelman

Library. The administration could also play a more active role than it does at present in helping the faculty to secure outside funding by housing the grants office in the Provost's Office, and offering more workshops and guidance to the faculty. And the faculty for its part needs to pursue these grants more actively than it has in the past.

Recommendations

1. The committee recommends the establishment of a Standing Committee on Faculty Development drawn from all the schools to serve as an advisory board for the Faculty Development Fund.
2. More money needs to be allocated for subsidizing travel, research and creative activity for full-time and part-time faculty members. A first step should be to increase the funding of the Faculty Development Fund.
3. Finally, the university—its university officers, deans, department and program heads—must pay serious attention to academic culture, i.e., the culture that supports and nurtures the faculty's professional work. Clear signals are needed that faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity are highly valued through the pronouncements, presence and involvement of senior administrators.

PART 3: REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERDIVISIONAL COLLABORATION AND INTEGRATION

Preamble

New School is in the midst of a fascinating debate over how to re-imagine the university in order to take advantage of a wealth of potential synergies without losing the distinctiveness that has made each division what it is. Two models have been proposed. One envisions further integration through, among other things, a Faculty of Arts and Sciences. A second model recognizes the limits of integration and seeks to refine the collaborative arrangements, which are currently in place, as well as propose mechanisms for identifying new ones. Collaboration or integration? Each has its advantages and disadvantages. We cannot possibly do justice to the complex debate here, but some aspects of the problem deserve attention.

The Present Situation

Presently, a variety of forms of integration and collaboration exist. Eugene Lang College and the Graduate Faculty share faculty and participate in several B.A./M.A. programs. Mannes has discussed offering a music concentration to Eugene Lang College students. Eugene Lang College and The New School are sharing faculty and courses for a new undergraduate concentration in Media Studies. Mannes, Jazz, Parsons, and Eugene Lang College take advantage of a joint slate of courses in math, science, and foreign languages offered through a growing program in Undergraduate Liberal Studies. The New School offers hundreds of courses in the liberal arts for students from around the university. At present, nearly 1,000 credit registrations come from other divisions in The New School courses each semester. For

the most part these arrangements have been successful. But they have not been easily achieved and dozens of other programs like them that have not been mounted due to obstacles, some of them legitimate, others hard to fathom.

Obstacles to Collaboration

Financial Disincentives. At present few financial incentives exist for different schools to cooperate. In fact, there are *disincentives*: such as fears of lost revenue, cancelled classes, lack of space. Some of these obstacles are difficult to overcome, but others are obviously unnecessary. The university should adopt the best practices of comparable universities in this area so that cooperation will not be impeded by budgetary disincentives.

Joint Appointments. At present there is no mechanism for systematically identifying areas where a joint appointment is desirable or necessary and possible. If staffing is always seen primarily from the perspective of the isolated division, then even where joint appointments would be both desirable and possible, desirability and possibility will be invisible. Equally without coordination part-time and half-time appointments multiply with the overwhelming likelihood of unnecessary duplication, or poor utilization of good resources

Faculty Status. Joint appointments and other forms of collaboration are hampered by disparities in faculty status. Differences in workloads and tenure across the schools make it difficult for collaborations to take root. This is true at Eugene Lang College and the Graduate Faculty where collaboration has been the most extensive and fraught with the most difficulty and mistrust.

Ensuring Quality. One unstated obstacle to interdivisional collaboration has been the suspicion of the quality of the faculty and curriculum among the schools. While suspicion often dissipates when faculty from different schools become familiar with one another, behind the suspicion lurks real problems: the university lacks university-wide quality control mechanisms, and hence means for the routine, systematic and public monitoring of the quality of faculty and curriculum.

Publicity and Communication Problems. The principle that courses should be available to all is undermined by the fact that students are poorly informed about what courses are open to them, and hence by the lack of adequate means for providing such knowledge, or, fine-tuning the problem, fitting students to those courses most integral to their program of study. Hence students are unable to make best use of the university's academic resources.

Integration or Collaboration?

Making the Existing Models Explicit. The most important obstacle to university integration has been the lack of discussion about the various models under which it operates. Two competing models exist, each of which has a constituency in its favor, but neither of which has either been made explicit or systematically pursued. The problems of integration will remain stalemated until the unspoken problem of how best to pursue it is resolved. Each of the two models has its strengths and weaknesses, which tend to be complementary. Since we cannot pursue both

simultaneously, and because the strengths and weaknesses do complement one another, then what is required is to pursue one of the models in way that maximally copes with its limitations.

Collaboration. The implicit model behind the present administrative arrangement is one of collaboration. This model does not allow for integration of faculty and curriculum; rather it is best suited to responding to local needs that arise out of school self-interest. Those needs are addressed through a series of *ad hoc* “coordinating committees” staffed by the interested parties. The model most completely respects the academic autonomy and the different cultures of learning in the different divisions. The disadvantage is that the programs that emerge out of these collaborations almost always depend on the people involved, as well as their continuing commitment of time and energy. When those people lose interest there are no structures in place to preserve the collaboration. More importantly, the collaborative model does not offer the university a mechanism to think strategically about where to commit its resources and why.

Integration. The alternative, integrationist model takes a broader, strategic approach. It would operate along departmental rather than divisional lines. That approach would require the university to build up academic departments of high quality. It would require those departments to develop attractive academic programs in their area of expertise, and to service the needs of all schools in the area of expertise. While this approach maps easily on to some areas of the university as it presently exists, it does not naturally respect the strengths and missions of the different divisions, nor does it fit with either the operating procedures of some of the professional divisions, in which their academic advantage is, precisely, making maximal use of the pool of part-time specialists, uniquely available in New York City.

Flaws in the Collaborative Model. The collaborative model emphatically fits with the present state of the university. But it is flawed from an academic point of view. It is not guided by the ends of academic excellence that would come with the appointment of first-class scholars and teachers who organize and promote degree programs in their specialized area. Nor does it presume that, in principle, all appointments should be subject to academic evaluation by those most qualified to provide it. The promotion of long-term academic growth and the ideal of academic monitoring are extrinsic to the logic of governance through coordinating committees.

Recommendations

In the absence of any political will to change present arrangements, what should be done in the interim? Our recommendations begin with a suggestion about how collaboration can best be implemented so as to offset its vulnerabilities.

1. If the weakness of collaboration is its formal indifference to academic issues, then the best possible way to offset that weakness is to have the coordinating committee composed of those directly responsible for the academic well-being of the different schools. There should be a Deans’ Council, which would provide a central location where the strategic overview of university commitments could take place. The first order of business should be to review existing collaborations to assess what works and what doesn’t in order to develop a working model for future collaborations.

2. A central task of the Deans' Council would be the mapping out of key areas for cooperation: i.e., identifying areas of joint need that would benefit from the making of permanent (or long-term contractual) faculty appointments.
3. A committee of experts chosen from university faculty should review the curriculum of each degree program every five years.
4. A University Tenure and Reappointment Committee should be instituted. The existence of such a committee would not override different needs and demands within individual schools. On the contrary, we understand that one of the functions of a University Tenure and Reappointments Committee would be to make explicit the needs and expectations attached to different positions.
5. There ought to be a way for chairs to use BANNER to identify courses that are open to students outside the division who are interested in a particular field. Similarly, students ought to be able to click on a subject area and find all the courses that are taught.
6. Despite the university's best efforts, structural obstacles to collaborative work remain. Among them: the absence of a standardized class schedule, different start dates and times for classes among the divisions; budgetary issues affecting the recompense for schools enrolling students from outside their home base. There are models available from comparable universities and we urge the university to adopt current best practices.

PART 4: REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL EDUCATION

Changing Profile of General Education

Since the Carnegie Foundation report in 1977, general education has been on the agenda of American Higher Education. But, according to a report by the American Association of Colleges and Universities on "The Status of General Education in the Year 2000," "there is very little evidence that academic leaders have made much advancement in the science or art of developing shared educational values and embedding them in the life of institutions." Despite this lack of progress, the profile of general education is changing in progressive educational circles. General education is no longer a backwater where students reluctantly take requirements imposed upon them; rather, general education is increasingly seen as a place "where the action is" in undergraduate education, providing students with what is essential "equipment for living." As students begin to recognize that education is a lifelong process rather than a discrete interval in one's early life, they will need to develop critical skills which allow them to make intelligent choices, communicate effectively, evaluate information for which they have no profound expertise, and learn to educate themselves about new problems or fields as they arise. General education is the place where those skills are most actively developed. Students, faculty and institutions that ignore its importance do so at their peril.

Problems with the Present Approach to General Education

For many students, general education remains a box to be checked off at someone else's behest, while for others it is a "cafeteria" where students are free to take "anything they want" without adequate advice. Neither approach is satisfactory. The first order of business must be to re-imagine the possibilities of a general education. The list of subjects and skills an educated

citizen needs to know is nearly endless. Since it is impossible to cover everything, the faculty must think hard about the electives students have available to them, whether or not they develop critical skills mentioned above, and how they are integrated with other courses offered.

New Initiatives

The Liberal Arts Planning Committee has initiated two “foundational” courses in Art History and History (with one in Literature to follow) that will bring students together from all of the schools in a common endeavor. In addition, it has recently hired a new Director of the Undergraduate Humanities Program and authorized him to undertake a search for two full time faculty to ground the new curriculum in the liberal arts. It has also begun substantial discussions about what that curriculum ought to look like, how it would serve diverse student needs, where it would be located, etc. This is an important first step in the New School’s efforts to craft a distinctive approach to education in the liberal arts that is consistent with its mission. Significant efforts have also been made to the development of critical skills like writing, collaborative learning, proficiency in English and oral communication. (See exhibits for individual reports on those issues.) A new University Writing Center has been established and a new director has been hired to oversee the development of writing “across the curriculum.”

Making the Case for General Education

Ultimately, the institution must make the case for the importance of general education to its students and faculty, and to follow that discussion up by installing a curriculum that has the resources, care and visibility it needs to flourish. That is easier said than done. Many students in the Arts schools feel strongly that their first priority must be to the development of their craft as designers, musicians or artists. A substantial number of them (though certainly not all) tend to look upon general education courses as something that has been imposed upon them from above and consequently, they approach these courses with diminished enthusiasm. Though their teachers remind them of the need to understand the cultural, social and political context in which they are working, in practice these concerns are not given the importance they deserve. At UULS, for example, general education is usually squeezed into 2 hour and 40 minute sessions once a week to accommodate studio schedules, making it difficult for students who are trying to learn a language, discuss a particularly difficult text, or master calculus. At Lang College, the freshman year program is meant to provide students with the skills they need to do college level work as well as to expose them to different modes of inquiry. But the range of courses remains eclectic and deliberately idiosyncratic, with too few professors taking responsibility for introducing students to broad areas of knowledge. Given the diversity of student need, the university probably could not, and should not, develop a single “one size fits all” approach to general education; rather, it must craft an integrated general education curriculum that is responsive to its arts students and its liberal arts students in The New School and Lang who sometimes take advantage of the flexibility to follow a narrow range of interests, or pursue a haphazard course of study that offers no focus at all.

The Conversation Goes Both Ways

Some observers might think that general education means bringing the liberal arts to the professional schools. Designers are castigated for not knowing anything about Plato, but it never occurs to faculty and students in the liberal arts that they may lack the rudiments of, say, visual literacy. New School University has unparalleled resources in its professional schools that have not been fully exploited by its students in the liberal arts. Visual literacy is just one example, and instruction in this area could be drawn from the faculty in Media Studies. Similarly, students in the liberal arts should have the opportunity to explore the social, political and ecological implications of design with faculty from Parsons, or learn to analyze analogous implications of public policy with the faculty from Milano.

Advising

While good advising is important in any educational setting, the committee found that it is of crucial importance to students where so much flexibility is built into the curriculum, where the reliance on part-time faculty can make for classes of uneven value, where the lack of dormitories and other shared settings make informal discussion about classes difficult. Given these circumstances, it is paramount to make advising a priority. In addition, advisors must understand the importance of their role; they must be adequately informed about course offerings not only in their own divisions, but also across the university; and they must be prepared to challenge students to think seriously about the breadth and depth of their coursework, as well as its relation to the careers they imagine for themselves. This can only be accomplished if advising is given more space in the academic schedule rather than being crammed into a week or two before classes when everything is rushed. (One faculty member described advising as a “last minute clerical exercise.”) In addition, the university must work to reduce the ratio of advisors to advisees (which is as high as 45 to 1 in at least one division). In the end, advising is the most reliable means of ensuring that students take advantage of university resources and understand the importance of their choices.

Center for Teaching Excellence

While everyone agrees on the need for competencies in writing, oral communication or collaborative learning, few instructors outside those who were trained in those fields know how to foster those skills. In the past few years our efforts to train faculty in the necessary pedagogies have depended on modest development funds or orientation sessions run by beleaguered administrators. While there have been some notable successes, faculty enthusiasm and subsequent commitments have tended to wane due to lack of follow-through or supervision.

Numeracy and Scientific Literacy

As one interviewee put it, “we live in a world where it is shameful to be illiterate but it is okay to know nothing about numbers or science.” This is a particular dilemma at the university,

which has a heavy concentration of students in the arts. Consequently, the committee made it one of the foci of its inquiry. (See exhibit on science in the university.) UULS has been the primary location where Parsons students go to improve their skills. But because they are required to take only one course in math or scientific reasoning, UULS has been unable to develop intermediate courses that would give students a solid grounding in either. Lang has made a dramatic commitment to bolstering its math and science curriculum: hiring a biologist, a physicist and a mathematician in the last four years. Moreover, faculty members have been quite inventive in their attempts to appeal to liberal arts students who may be “phobic” about math or science. (One of them offers a course that teaches biological principles through the study of infectious diseases.) Such courses have been fairly successful in attracting students. But the instructors concede that it is hard to offer advanced instruction in these areas without proper laboratories and/or an academic culture that motivates students to pursue scientific or mathematical modes of inquiry. Most of the administrators we talked to were opposed to requiring students to take more courses in math or science for fear that they would be filled with students who did not want to be there. They preferred to have students demonstrate competencies in these areas, though it’s not clear how those competencies could be shown.

The committee was struck by the fact that there are yearlong requirements in place for writing in several schools, but little for math or science. It is hard to explain the tilt as anything but simple prejudice. The committee urges the administration to require each undergraduate division to demonstrate the extent to which its students have developed competencies in these areas and to provide plans to educate those who have not. It also urges the university to find inventive ways to give students more laboratory experience, where scientific principles can be demonstrated first hand.

Recommendations

The importance of general education is integral to the university’s mission and diverse constituencies from around the institution agree. The next steps will be to ensure that this good will and commitment are translated into a better-integrated university curriculum.

1. Scheduling, balance of trade, lack of structural support and insularity have made it difficult to imagine an integrated curriculum in the liberal arts. The first step must be to overcome those obstacles in order to make a general education program accessible to students from various parts of the university.
2. Numeracy and scientific literacy are not yet integrated into New School curricula. They must assume the same importance as the new initiatives around writing, which can serve as a model.
3. Advising must be recognized as a central component of the curriculum and a place for it must be made in the schedule and life of the institution, so that students can make intelligent, well-informed choices about classes and careers.
4. The university should consider reviving the Center for Teaching Excellence to ensure that the general education curriculum provides an active learning environment, rooted in innovative pedagogy.