

CEPP report at November 2005 Faculty Meeting on DOS-restructuring

I would like to provide a brief report on how CEPP has been addressing the restructuring of the offices of the Dean of Studies and the Dean of Student Affairs and what CEPP intends to do in the future concerning this matter. The last time I spoke to you on this issue was at our September faculty meeting when I explained that CEPP will not be reviewing the process that led to the restructuring but will, in two years time, conduct a thorough review of the academic services each office provides and the rationale for providing those services in one office rather than the other.

Although we are waiting two years before we begin, we have already begun to prepare for the review in a number of important ways. First we are meeting with the deans and associate deans who are, or will be, affected by the restructuring. Second, we are discussing the rationale for moving the Dean of Studies Office from Student Affairs to Academic Affairs. Third, we are discussing the rationale for keeping some of the services previously offered by the Dean of Studies Office in the Dean of Student Affairs Office. And finally, we are trying to get a sense of what the newly created Office of Student Academic Services will look like.

Let me say that there is unanimity on CEPP that our committee as a whole is prepared to devote the necessary time to this issue. We are convinced that CEPP -- rather than a sub-committee -- is the appropriate venue for these discussions to take place. We appreciate the concern some faculty have expressed that CEPP has a lot on its plate this year and that perhaps a subcommittee could assist CEPP in the review of the DOS-restructuring. Although we are busy, I can assure you that every piece of business that CEPP undertakes will be addressed thoroughly and deliberately. Everyone on CEPP understands the significance of the recent administrative changes and is committed to carrying out our charge -- as described in the faculty handbook -- "to recommend to the faculty and administration short and long-range educational plans for the College and thus be instrumental in clarifying, improving and changing major policies and educational procedures." In other words, it is our job to review the academic and educational repercussions of the restructuring, and we intend to do so.

The committee recently met for a lengthy retreat. The purpose of this retreat was to discuss and more clearly define the core academic principles that guide CEPP and the College. We want all of the educational policy and planning decisions that CEPP will make in the coming months and years to be firmly rooted in an academic vision and intellectual conviction that is explicit and thoroughly vetted by the faculty. More specifically, the retreat was organized around a few main questions: 1) What do we mean by academic excellence and rigor? 2) How can we get faculty, administrators and students to increase academic standards and expectations? and 3) How does the DOS restructuring relate to the broader theme of academic challenge? We spent much of our retreat discussing the preamble to the academic vision statement drafted by CEPP in 2003-04. In addition, we began crafting a definition of academic excellence and rigor that compliments and supplements the vision statement.

I urge everyone to read the preamble to the vision statement, which is located on CEPP's homepage. We believe that it is essential for CEPP and the entire College community to be clear about our academic mission and the type of education we want to provide our students. The preamble to the academic vision statement is an excellent launching pad for this discussion. It reads, in part:

We seek to provide “An education that will inform and energize [our students'] lives regardless of the career path they choose to pursue. It is an education that instills flexibility and intellectual agility; hones lifelong learning skills that prepare one to engage the world in responding rather than reacting to its ever-evolving issues; inculcates a taste for interrogation and genuine criticism; venerates the power of reasoned argument in arriving at the conviction of one's beliefs; enriches our lives by sensitizing us to the intricate workings of our complex world; and prepares our students most ably for virtually any career, rather than a single one” (pp. 1-2).

CEPP believes that we need to hold our students and ourselves more accountable to this vision. We see the Vision Statement as providing direction and guidance as CEPP carries out its charge to plan, implement, and review educational policy. We are in the process now of drafting a definition of academic excellence and rigor that will further articulate our academic mission. If we're going to say that the pursuit of academic excellence and rigor is a central goal of the College—as CEPP believes it should be—then we need to be clear what we mean by these abstract and elusive terms. When we have a draft that we're relatively pleased with, we intend to share it with the community and seek your thoughts and suggestions.

By clearly articulating our academic vision and defining as precisely as possible the terms and concepts we use in that vision, we will be establishing the core principles that will guide our decision making on such important matters as the writing requirement, the First Year Experience, and the DOS-restructuring.

We look forward to crafting that vision with your help.