

Committee on Academic Priorities

Jane Hedley, *English*, 2012-13 – 2015-16, *Chair* 2015-16

David Karen, *Sociology*, 2013-14 – 2016-17 (*on Leave* 2015-16)

Michael Rock, *Economics*, 2014-15 – 2017-18

Janet Shapiro, *GSSWSR*, 2014-15 – 2017-18

Jonas Goldsmith, *Chemistry*, 2015-16 – 2018-19

Tim Harte, *Russian*, 2015-16 – 2018-19 (*on Leave Semester II*)

BRYN MAWR

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Addendum to the Annual Report to the Faculty 2015-2016

Last fall President Cassidy announced that funds had been raised to create two new faculty positions, one to further internationalize the curriculum and one in STEM. Departments, programs and interested groups of faculty were invited to submit brief proposals (of no more than five pages) for new positions whose areas of specialization would address pressing curricular needs, advance the Plan for the Strategic Direction of the College, and/or strengthen relationships with other institutions whose curricular offerings have the potential to enlarge our students' range of opportunities for undergraduate and graduate study. President Cassidy asked us to think boldly and creatively about how these new positions might be shaped. We encouraged proposals not only from existing departments and schools but also from interdisciplinary groups of faculty who could see a need or an opportunity and speak to its importance.

By February 15, which was our deadline for this first phase of the process, we had received six proposals in IS and three in STEM. All these proposals were of considerable interest. In IS, CAP identified two that are especially salient for the College at this time: a position in International Human Rights, proposed by the Steering Committee in International Studies, and a position in Middle Eastern History, proposed by the Middle Eastern Studies Initiative in conjunction with the History Department. We have asked both groups to submit a full-blown proposal next year; by the end of AY17, if all goes well, one of these positions will be approved for search. We see a need for this new position; however it ultimately is defined, to address urgent programmatic needs in International Studies, whose major is seriously under-resourced at present. A second international position is on the horizon also; as soon as that position becomes available, we will again solicit brief proposals as to how it might best be filled.

In STEM, the proposals we received pointed toward two rather different ways to fill this new position. Of the three proposals that were submitted, two came from departments whose enrollment pressures are severe; on those grounds alone, their proposals deserved to be taken very seriously. The third proposal, submitted by the Physics department, was for a faculty member in Engineering. Instead of allowing us to better support what we already offer in Science and Mathematics at the undergraduate level, such a position would represent a new departure for the College, adding a field of study that is not already part of our STEM curriculum. This would arguably be a bolder move, one that could change the College's market niche a little. Our Strategic Directions document argues for giving our undergraduates exposure to Engineering, a field in which women are currently underrepresented. The president tells us that she gets lots of questions about Engineering from prospective students and their parents. We already have 4 + 1 arrangements with several other institutions, including the University of Pennsylvania. A member of the Bryn Mawr faculty who offered some Engineering courses could help us evaluate and improve these arrangements; they could also help our students see how a career in Engineering, or a career with a component of Engineering, could leverage their liberal arts education. We might even be helping some students see that it's not for them, which could also be valuable.

Can a single faculty position in Engineering be supported and integrated into our liberal arts curriculum without generating further needs we would not be in a position to meet? How might such a position best be configured: should it be free-standing, or sit within one of our existing departments? The proposal from Physics was persuasive and interesting, but for now CAP would like to keep the question of where to situate this position open: obviously there are a number of possibilities, including Biology and Environmental Studies, to name only two. Next fall we propose to facilitate a conversation with stakeholders in STEM departments, as well as looking into what other liberal arts colleges are doing to expose their students to Engineering. In due course, we would expect to bring a proposal to the faculty at large for discussion. As we envision this deliberative process, we see several possible outcomes. One of our currently overenrolled STEM departments might see a way to use a tenure-track position in Engineering to strengthen what they already do. The program in Environmental Studies is a possible home for such a position as well. It's conceivable that the upshot of these conversations will be a decision to approach Engineering in a different way—by means of a staff position affiliated with LILAC, for instance. In that case, Plan B for the new STEM position would be to add it to an existing department where enrollment pressures are severe.

Our conversations this year around the new international position, as well as with the folks in Environmental Studies who are struggling to establish a clear direction for the ES program, have also brought a larger issue to our attention, which is that our interdisciplinary programs are fragile. Bryn Mawr's faculty is departmentally organized; that being so, the faculty members whose leadership and whose courses these interdisciplinary programs depend on are often constrained by the needs of their "home" departments to offer a mix of courses or take a sabbatical leave whose timing is disadvantageous to the interdisciplinary program. Provost Osirim has resolved that from now on, whenever a new faculty member is hired into a position that involves a significant contribution to an interdisciplinary program such as International Studies or Environmental Studies, a memorandum of understanding will be developed that spells out this faculty member's teaching and other responsibilities toward the program in question.

Tenure committees will need to be formed in such cases that are interdisciplinary as well. Another key issue in this context is that the steering committees for these interdisciplinary programs need to function quasi-departmentally; they should therefore have a limited membership whose responsibilities to the program are understood to be just as important as their departmental responsibilities. There may well be a larger group of affiliated faculty who contribute courses, advise students and direct senior work, but the steering committee itself must be small enough to hold regular meetings that all of its members can attend without fail.

Should we create a department of Environmental Studies? International Studies? Comparative Literature? Proliferating small departments is clearly not a good idea, but what if we were to move one or two senior faculty members out of the departments they currently belong to? We could do this without changing their teaching commitments very much, but as members of an ES or an IS or a Comparative Literature department they would be more visible to students and better positioned to give administrative and curricular leadership. In Environmental Studies, insofar as several positions with a dedicated ES component have recently been created at Haverford, the possibility of a bi-co department should also perhaps be explored. These are questions both CAP and the Curriculum Committee will have a stake in, going forward.

One further issue that surfaced for CAP this year has to do with our mandate as the Committee on Academic Priorities. Our work has been largely reactive over the past few years: departments make position requests in the wake of departures and retirements, and although these may be strengthened and even re-directed by the CAP review process, they are not often denied. Thus except where a new position is created through fund-raising, a rare occurrence, CAP is seldom in a position to recommend adding new fields of study. Could and should our attention to the College's academic priorities be more proactive? One way for this to happen would be for the president and the provost to identify big-picture questions for CAP to address. Another might be for CAP to develop a more robust picture of where retirements are likely to occur over the next ten years, so that we could think longer-term about existing faculty lines that might be re-allocated to address new needs or re-configure existing resources. Yet another way to be more proactive could be to look more closely at how our core curriculum is being staffed: are our required courses (in language, in quantitative skills, in college-level reading and writing) mostly being taught by interim faculty, which could have serious implications for student retention in the first two years? In asking this kind of question we would be opening up a conversation that would potentially involve the Curriculum Committee as well.