

BRYN MAWR

COLLEGE

July 29, 2020

Michael Allen
Penny Armstrong
Don Barber
Janet Ceglowski
Radcliffe Edmonds
Jamie Taylor, Chair of the Committee on Academic Priorities
Dianna Xu

Dear Jamie and CAP colleagues,

I am grateful for the hard work and careful thought that each member of CAP brought to the Committee's work in 2019-2020. In spite of having a smaller number of committee members for the entire year and changing membership in the second semester, CAP engaged important strategic issues of long-range academic planning and curricular development at the intersection of constant-state faculty and student body size; emerging fields and curricular demands; and the opportunities and challenges offered by inter-institutional collaboration. I appreciate the Committee's thoughtful framing of a number of important issues that CAP, and the College, will continue to address in the coming year and beyond. I want to extend special thanks to Jamie Taylor for leading the committee this year, including through the unprecedented transition to remote meeting; for the collaborative spirit with which she worked with Mary Osirim and me; and for the additional service she has given to the Academic Continuity Planning Group that was created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also grateful for her contributions as a faculty representative to the Board of Trustees, and as acting chair of the English Department. I look forward to working with Dianna Xu, who will serve as Chair of CAP for 2020-2021, and to welcoming Dianna, Don Barber, and Michael Allen back to the committee after their spring semester research leaves. I extend my thanks to Rad Edmonds, who also served as CAP's representative to the Strategic Advisory Committee; to Penny Armstrong for beginning her third term of service on the Committee; and to Janet Ceglowski for her willingness to join CAP during the second semester when three members were on leave. I know that your faculty colleagues join me in appreciation of your exceptional commitment to the present and the future of the College.

Reflections on CAP's Mission and Role

I appreciate CAP's continued deliberations on how the College can address emerging and growing fields of study and student interest at a time when the size of the College's faculty is not projected to grow. Bryn Mawr and other small liberal arts colleges have always experienced this tension, although rapid growth of new fields make this tension

more acute. I want to affirm that the College remains committed to ensuring that departments in all divisions of the curriculum are positioned to thrive. But it is also important that we continue our work to discern whether current shifts to fields such as computer science represent a longer-term paradigm shift or, as the CAP report suggests, are “fluctuating demands.” I look forward to ongoing conversations with CAP, next year and in the future, to engage in this long-range planning.

CAP also raises important questions about strategic and financial assessment of initiatives launched through grants or gifts, and the need to weigh investment of continuing operating resources after the period of “soft money” support concludes. I concur with CAP that opportunities for innovation that gifts and grants make possible are important to the intellectual vitality of the College. Through this funding, faculty expand their expertise, students gain access to new fields of study, and new concepts and approaches are seeded across departments. I also agree that deciding to make ongoing investment in a program launched with soft money requires assessment, including external review, and constructive imagining of how a new initiative can be made as useful as possible to the College.

The specific case of the TLI raised in the CAP report points to some additional complexities. At the time of the generous Mellon Foundation grant that was used to establish the TLI, the Foundation specified that faculty support was expected to continue after the grant. This is a requirement of most grants and gifts, so future sustainability must be an early and ongoing discussion for all new investments; this review cannot only happen at the moment of transition from gift-funded to operating budget-supported. At the time the grant funding ended, the TLI was integrated into the ongoing support offered to faculty and was resourced accordingly. That said, the needs and priorities of the College continue to evolve. The very positive review of the TLI in the External Review of the Education Program did point to the need to continue to assess how the program should transform along with the resources to support it. This suggests that like departments, even established programs and initiatives should be periodically reviewed and guidance given about how best to support ongoing and future work.

CAP Processes

In my reply to last year’s CAP report, I asked CAP to report on the impact of streamlining processes for proposing faculty lines. I am pleased to know that the changes achieved the desired goals for departments and for CAP, and I appreciate that CAP offered listening sessions as an option to departments seeking external perspectives on possible proposals.

I have concerns about the possibility of limiting the number of faculty searches conducted in a given academic year, and I ask CAP and the Committee on Appointments to consider these during their ongoing discussions. As noted in CAP’s report, “by the time departments propose to CAP, they are in real need of resources.” Setting a limit to the number of searches that can be conducted in a given year could have a significant negative impact on a department’s ability to offer its curriculum and to meet student demand for courses—already a problem at times when multiple faculty in a department or program are on leave. Additionally, a backlog of faculty searches seems almost inevitable given anticipated faculty retirements. It may be more fruitful for departments to work with CAP,

Appointments, and the Provost to rethink the search process and look for opportunities to reduce the time demands a search places on faculty and on the Provost.

Reflections on the Bi-College Relationship

I appreciate CAP's leadership in bringing together the heads of Swarthmore's Council on Educational Policy (CEP) and Haverford's Educational Policy Committee (EPC) along with the three colleges' provosts to develop an MOU that prescribes consultative processes for Tri- and Bi-Co department resource requests. Collaboration will remain an ideal rather than a reality without structures and shared expectations on which we can rely.

I thus support the outline of next steps that CAP has proposed to strengthen our capacity to allocate resources strategically and effectively. CAP has long expressed concern about the different schedules on which CAP and EPC work, and the success of this year's discussion with Swarthmore's CEP suggests that this is a fruitful time for all three committees to make progress on coordination that can only serve us all well. I urge CAP and its counterparts to reach out to their provosts for any needed support in advancing discussions and developing greater coordination.

Proposals

CAP had to respond to a large number of proposals this year as well as a significant number of requests for expedited searches. I recognize the volume of work this posed for members of the committee, and I am grateful for their dedication and thoughtfulness in responding to needs expressed by departments across the College. I am glad that the Committee has taken the time to reflect on the criteria for approving an expedited search, and I support the requirement the Committee has established.

Like members of CAP, I am concerned by the number of junior faculty who left the College this year. While this may or may not indicate the emergence of a new pattern in faculty careers, I ask that CAP collaborate with the Provost in considering and responding to external and internal conditions that may contribute to junior faculty departures.

Positions Recommended by CAP

I am pleased by the success of the expedited search for an assistant professor in French that CAP approved in the fall, and the addition of a new faculty member with expertise in postcolonial Francophone literatures. I also join CAP in recognizing the work that faculty in the Bryn Mawr and Haverford French Departments have done to improve curricular collaboration.

I am also glad that the Chemistry Department was successful in hiring a new laboratory lecturer in Organic Chemistry to a CNTT position. Demand for Organic Chemistry from both undergraduate and postbaccalaureate premedical students is substantial, and the complexity and scope of managing the required laboratory required expedited action.

I regret that the expedited search in Computer Science to fill an unexpected vacancy was not successful. The successful searches for an assistant professor and a CNTT faculty member in Computer Science this year will make it easier for the department to offer its curriculum, and I am hopeful that a search in 2020-2021 for an assistant professor will further ease enrollment pressures.

I approve CAP's recommendations to conduct the following:

- Tenure-track search at the rank of Assistant Professor
 - A position in Biology for a scholar in genomics and bioinformatics. Computational methodologies are critical to the discipline, and I appreciate the decision to search for a scholar in a field (genomics) not well-represented in the BiCo. I concur with CAP that this position should support the College's initiatives in data science. Finally, I remind CAP and the department of CAP's 2018-2019 suggestion of a future appointment in Biology with expertise in neuroscience.
 - A position in Chemistry for a biochemist who will also contribute to the Biochemistry and Molecular Biology major and to the postbaccalaureate premedical program. I agree that the demand in these programs makes it wise to search for this position in advance of the senior biochemist's retirement in 2021.
 - A position in English in the field of film and media studies. I agree that enrollments in both English and Film Studies courses, and the need for a second faculty anchor for the Film Studies program, underpin the importance of this position for the curriculum. Tim Harte's appointment as Provost will also limit the contribution he can make to Film Studies. Finally, I concur with CAP that an MOU between the English and History of Art Departments is needed to provide vision and sustain the Film Studies Program.
 - Two positions in the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research to support the curricular focus on trauma-informed social work; one position at the advanced Assistant or Associate Professor level and one position at the Assistant Professor level; hiring staggered across two hiring cycles. I agree that a cluster hiring approach makes sense for the School at this time of significant faculty transition and as a means to building distinctive strength. I join with CAP in appreciating the work of GSSWSR to reimagine how it offers its curriculum, to focus on two defined areas of social work practice, to build connections with the Psychology Department and the Undergraduate College more broadly, and to build demand for its programs.
 - A position in Psychology in Clinical Psychology focusing on behavioral and mental health challenges. This position is important to the department's curricular offerings and to meeting enrollment demands in this large major. I support the department's plan to search for a clinical psychologist whose

work will enrich collaboration with the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.

- A position in Sociology in the sociology of race, especially the African American experience. I agree that this position is critical to the integrity of the department's curriculum, and that this position will make valuable contributions to a number of interdisciplinary programs of interest to many students.

A number of departments—Economics, English, Political Science, and Physics at the time of writing this reply—have said that they will postpone approved faculty searches until 2021-2022 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. I recognize the potential health threat posed by travel and campus visits for search committees and candidates. Equally, we must be aware that postponing faculty searches does have an impact on curricular offerings, and in some cases the impact is significant. In addition, postponing searches this year will leave us with a very large number of searches in 2021-2022. I ask these departments to work collaboratively with the Provost's Office to anticipate and manage these various challenges.

I close by reiterating my thanks to members of CAP for the thoughtfulness they bring to the critical work they do on behalf of their colleagues and the College as a whole, and for the time and effort each member dedicated to this work. I am excited to see the impact of CAP's work on the intellectual life of the College and the future shape of the curriculum.

Sincerely,



Kimberly W. Cassidy
President