

**FINAL REPORT ON
CURRICULAR RENEWAL
AY 2003-04**

May 2004

A. INTRODUCTION

EPAG has now completed the second stage of a multi-stage curricular renewal initiative. Our aim this past year was to solicit faculty views on several aspects of the curriculum and to identify those elements of the curriculum that represent the faculty's priorities for renewal. During the past academic year, we hosted eight thematic faculty fora, four divisional fora, and one forum each for junior faculty, the academic staff, the student Legislative Body, and the general student body. We also met twice with the department chairs, once with the President, and twice with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees. Finally, during the Spring Term, we held a series of curricular lunches for faculty and academic staff. We have been encouraged by the general enthusiasm for curricular renewal among the faculty, and with the thoughtful comments that have been raised thus far. We look forward to an engaging, intellectually stimulating, and important process in the year(s) ahead.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the results of our year-long fact-finding effort. It begins by identifying areas of broad agreement regarding (a) those elements of the existing curriculum that need to be revised; and (b) potential curricular innovations. The report concludes by outlining the next steps in this process.

Overall, several themes emerged from this year's conversations. In no particular order, the more salient of these are the following:

- considerable enthusiasm among faculty and academic staff for renewing the curriculum (tempered only by reasonable concerns about 'transition costs' and 'sustainability');
- strong support from the President and Trustees for curricular renewal as an important step toward realizing the full potential of the College;
- particular enthusiasm for transforming the general education program so that it more purposefully cultivates the common core of learning that the faculty believe is essential to a Macalester education; and
- a general willingness to consider a range of innovative new curricular concepts, structures and programs.

B. THE SUBSTANTIVE FOCI OF CURRICULAR RENEWAL

Extensive conversations with the faculty and other stakeholders revealed a clear interest in revising or developing graduation requirements related to the following educational goals.

1. Promoting Broad Engagement with the Liberal Arts (Breadth)

Existing Requirements

The existing requirements are:

Eight semester hours in courses in the social sciences;

Eight semester hours in courses in the natural sciences and mathematics;

Twelve semester hours in courses in the humanities and fine arts; at least four semester hours must be in the humanities and four semester hours in the fine arts.

Findings

Many faculty members expressed the view that this element of the general education program should be reviewed. Although a number of alternatives were discussed, the faculty favored retaining some version of the existing distributions requirements but establishing more clearly articulated and meaningful criteria for each divisional requirement.

Recommendations

Develop new graduation requirements that more effectively encourage students to have a meaningful engagement with a broad cross-section of the liberal arts (including the natural sciences, the humanities, the fine arts, and the social sciences).

2. Developing Key Academic Skills

Existing Requirements

None -- although it is *recommended* that students develop writing and mathematical/computing skills (see page 41 of the college catalog).

Findings

Many faculty members expressed the view that the curriculum does a relatively poor job of purposefully encouraging and facilitating the development of certain highly desirable competencies, including writing, quantitative reasoning, and information fluency¹. The faculty expressed a preference for revising the curriculum to promote the development of these basic competencies in a more systematic and deliberate fashion.

Recommendations

Develop graduation requirements, supporting programs, and/or curricular innovations that encourage all students to develop writing, information fluency, and quantitative reasoning skills.

¹ a term the Information Services Advisory Committee favors over information literacy; consult ISAC for a more detailed document on definitions and expectations

3. Reflecting the Elements of Macalester's Distinctive Liberal Arts Mission

Existing Requirements

The existing requirements are:

*Four semester hours earned in a course designated as meeting the International Diversity Requirement; and
Four semester hours designated as meeting the Domestic Diversity Requirement.*

Findings

Many faculty members supported the view that the core elements of Macalester's distinctive liberal arts mission should be reflected in the graduation requirements and curriculum. However, a number of faculty members expressed the view that the current diversity requirements are less than optimal in terms of promoting either 'multiculturalism' or 'internationalism'. Some also expressed concern that one of the elements of the College's mission statement (service to society/civic engagement) was not currently reflected in the graduation requirements or curriculum.

Recommendations

Develop graduation requirements, supporting programs, and/or curricular innovations appropriate to the development of knowledge and skills related to multiculturalism, internationalism, and civic engagement.

4. Languages

Existing Requirements

The existing requirement is:

Proficiency in a second language equivalent to four semesters of college study.

Findings

There is broad agreement that cultivating proficiency in a second language is an appropriate educational goal for a college such as Macalester.

Recommendations

Develop supporting programs (e.g. study abroad) and curricular innovations (e.g., Languages Across the Curriculum initiative) to help students meet the language proficiency standard.

5. Providing a Common Academic Experience

Existing Requirement

Macalester currently lacks a college-wide common or shared academic experience.

Findings

Many faculty members expressed considerable enthusiasm for creating such a common curricular experience for our students.

Recommendations

Develop a common academic experience based upon a thorough review of varied curricular possibilities. (One possibility would be seminars linked by theme or content in the First or Sophomore years.)

C. THE PROCESS OF CURRICULAR RENEWAL

Reflecting its desire to ensure that the process of curricular renewal is as transparent and inclusive as possible, EPAG has adopted the following work plan for the next academic year.

1. Working Groups Develop Draft Proposals (Fall Term)

During the Fall 2004 term, EPAG will create working groups (comprising both EPAG members and members of the broader faculty) to develop specific graduation requirements with respect to each of the educational goals enumerated above. Care will be taken to ensure that the work of the groups is coordinated and that they work toward producing mutually compatible proposals. The CST will provide support for this process. The working groups will submit draft proposals to EPAG no later than 1 February 2005.

2. Curricular Retreat to Discuss Draft Proposals (February)

Early in the Spring 2005 term, EPAG will host an off-site faculty retreat. The goal of this retreat will be to review, discuss, and revise the draft graduation requirements submitted by the working groups.

3. Integrating the Draft Proposals (Spring Term)

Following the retreat, EPAG will work on integrating the revised graduation requirements into a coherent package. Many faculty have expressed concern that the overall number of course requirements not be increased and EPAG will take this view into consideration when formulating the final package.

4. Faculty Vote

EPAG will submit this curricular package to the faculty for discussion and vote no later than the April faculty meeting.

5. Implementation

The new curriculum and graduation requirements will be phased in over a period of several years.