

DATE: May 22, 2009

TO: BALS Committee

FROM: College of Arts and Sciences Committee on Instruction

RE: Bachelor of Liberal Studies Proposal

Members of the Committee on Instruction were pleased to consider your updated proposal for the Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies. The committee acknowledges and appreciates your efforts to address its concerns.

The Committee confirms its support of the development of an interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary program in the College. A well-designed liberal arts degree as an option for bright and motivated students has merit. The findings quoted by Derek Bok substantiate the benefits of such a curriculum.

However, in taking into account the changes made in response to Committee concerns, reservations remain. Those concerns are noted below, and some suggestions for further improvement are offered.

Finally, the Committee on Instruction has voted to forward the proposal on within governance but requests that its list of concerns accompany the proposal to the Assembly.

Concerns:

- The development of students' individual curricula continues to be an issue. How and when will students design a personal plan? Will this be a formal process? Who will be involved in plan approval—executive committee, faculty mentor, advisor? Will formal admittance into the program be required?
- Some of the existing minors and concentrations lack sufficient structure and rigor.
- A sample four-year course timeline is requested for one of the pairings.
- LBS 100 is improved by use of the college theme as a central course theme; however, the course remains broad.
- There remains a lack of unifying core content for the LBS 200 and 495 to provide structure. Moreover, the committee would like to see more content for LBS 200, 495, and 496.
- For LBS 496: How are the students' experiences at seminars, lectures, etc., woven into the course?
- The BALS 200 textbook by Klein centers on education policy. A text that directly focuses on interdisciplinary studies subject matter is recommended.
- Letters of Support are requested. Although mentoring is a normal expectation of faculty, department and faculty support are critical for a program in which considerable time and effort is spent with students who are not majors.
- Library Materials Budget, p. 25: totals do not add up.

- Undecided students should not automatically be designated as BALS majors. The program should be for motivated students who specifically choose BALS as a major. Clarification regarding the statement that “the program will serve as an 'incubator' for undecided students as they explore educational options with the College” is needed.

Recommendations:

- Review the liberal studies programs at other institutions that are recognized for excellence in this area (e.g., Mills College).
- Have local liberal studies expert Julie Thompson Klein, past president of the Association for Integrative Studies (AIS) and former editor of the AIS journal, *Issues in Integrative Studies* from Wayne State University, review the proposal and provide feedback.
- Request a list of interdisciplinary courses from departments to see if/how these might be incorporated within the BALS curriculum.