

Arts and Sciences Council  
15 January 2009  
139 Social Sciences  
Chair: Prof. Suzanne Shanahan

Having convened the Council's meeting at 3:38 p.m. and wished everyone a Happy New Year, Prof. Shanahan proceeded to address the Council regarding its long ongoing discussion of "underloading," a matter concerning Duke's policies on student course loads. The proposal at hand this afternoon was based on a proposal presented to the Council by students in November of 2007. When the relevant deans proved to have a few reservations about that proposal, Dean and Vice-Provost of Undergraduate Education Steve Nowicki had advised a one-year extension of the then-current policy concerning the matter. During that time the proposal was to be thoroughly reviewed and, if necessary, revised. Now at last Prof. Shanahan was able to report that the interim time-out had involved the thinking of students, faculty members, and deans alike, and eventually resulted in an "exciting collaboration coming out of the Academic Standards Committee." Various revisions having been recommended and put in place, the proposal now being presented was not only supported by the Duke Student Government but also vetted and approved by the academic deans of Trinity College and the Pratt School of Engineering, and subsequently approved also and unanimously by the Executive Committee of the Arts and Sciences Council (see "Underload Proposal: November 2008"). Moreover, both Dean Nowicki and Dean of Academic Affairs Lee Baker now endorsed the proposal enthusiastically.

Having briefly summarized this history of the matter, Prof. Shanahan invited comments from the floor.

Prof. Michael Morton (Germanic Languages) wondered about the proviso concerning Study Abroad (i.e., underload students must "Not be studying abroad or otherwise away from Duke"). What was the rationale for this? Dean Nowicki replied that that specific passage was left in lest the basic academic purpose of the

underload be jeopardized. “We did not want to alter or interfere with the programmatic ideals of the Study Abroad Program.”

Prof. Shanahan added that “This is basically about doing something worthwhile on campus.” Many activities available on campus were not likely to be available abroad. For example, serving as editor of the *Chronicle* would be difficult for a student in France.

Dean Margaret Riley (Director, Study Abroad) observed that Duke certainly had had students who would like to “do underload” in order to travel, but “We want our students abroad to have an immersive experience that includes a full academic experience.”

There being no further comments from the floor, Prof. Shanahan called for the question, and the proposal was unanimously approved. Indeed, the proposal elicited applause for the “Herculean work” that had been involved in crafting it.

The next agenda item was an “update” presented by Dean Nowicki, who began by observing that he had last addressed the Council some fifteen-and-a-half months earlier. Although that was very early in his present incumbency, he had at that time already sketched out his major objectives and values as well as he could. Salient among these was his intention to address his own very multifaceted task as a faculty member. He intended from the beginning to maintain that perspective. For one thing, he had continued both to teach and to do research because being a teacher and scholar was what motivated him. In the interim since his last address to the Council, he had spent lots of time talking not only with students but also with faculty members and coaches and dining people and custodians and so on, his purpose being to try to understand what kinds of impact on students these people provided.

Though he had already been at Duke some twenty years, this approach had taught him a good deal. Along the way he had conversed in particular with what had begun as an Undergraduate Leadership Group, a sort of crisis-management group that had been formed in troubled times by Provost Peter Lange. This group had taught Dean Nowicki much that was new. Though it might still be helpfully convened in a time of crisis, it essentially had become a sort of “forward-looking

think-tank.” A number of other players had been added, including (to mention just a few) Larry Moneta, Kevin White, Chris Kennedy, Judith Ruderman, and David Jamison Drake. This obviously wide-ranging group had spent a lot of time talking about campus life, one of the major subjects being “transitioning”—i.e., the nature of facts and feelings associated with becoming first-year college students, then moving on to become sophomores. Transitioning came in many forms, for example in K-ville, fraternities, sororities, and so on. Not only these but other matters discussed within his Lange-invented group had brought out some issues that needed to be pursued. An obvious example at the moment was the impact on students of the current economic situation. In short, to stay alert and be sensitive to what really was happening in the lives of students, he had assembled a group that was intended to identify situations, not to take action but, if necessary or advisable, to pass news of them on to other persons or groups for possible action.

One important thing that had come out of this leadership group, at least in part, was a more open approach (in some ways reminiscent of “Campus Culture”) to the socio-economic situations of Duke’s very diverse student body. Indeed, Duke was going to start working with students on the matter. One of the most salient issues in this very complex matter could be designated by the simple word *space*. Among other subjects, it should be obvious that Duke, with all its plans for building, should not and could not wait until all of its forthcoming buildings had been built. Thought had to be given to space *now*. The current system really did not treat our non-affiliated students very well. “So we have begun thinking *now*.” In fact, some changes in housing policies were either currently or soon to be made manifest.

“Working with our students is paramount,” he insisted. Duke, therefore, was aiming to have more faculty members engaged with more students. The goal was not to use more of their time (obviously everybody was busy) but to “remodel what we do and how we do it.” More faculty members were going to be involved, he hoped, in Saturday new-student orientation. For example, he himself had taken a group of six new students to show them his favorite part of Durham’s Eno.

Attention was also being paid to working with the faculty members in the faculty residence program, colleagues of ours who—it turned out—had already begun to do a lot of valuable things with first-year students. Something else that should be mentioned would be the current planning to set up what he liked to think of as Duke’s own “Chautauqua Lecture Series,” which would target first-year students. Dean Nowicki was also very pleased to know and report that some “nice dinners,” complete with table cloths, had been set up in the residence halls on East Campus and enlivened by interesting faculty lecturers. In fact, this sort of dining in the dorms had proved to be so successful that there was talk of initiating something similar on West Campus.

The last information he wanted to introduce this afternoon for general pondering was the fact that Duke’s administration was beginning to think about what Duke might be like in the coming years. Duke University was going to be about a hundred years old before long, and the “critical missions” most likely to be paramount then appeared now to be health care, research, and education. Would education be very different then? The probable answer was “Yes,” and “We had better start thinking about it now.” One of the things he himself planned to do in 2009 and 2010 was to convene a working group (or maybe working groups) of faculty members and administrators who would think about and imagine what education would or should be like in fifteen years or so. Now was the time to employ such skills as we have to move as thoughtfully and wisely as possible. Very much at stake was the future of our current younger faculty.

In response to Dean Nowicki’s invitation for general comments, Prof. Margaret Humphreys (History and Medicine) voiced her curiosity concerning something that had appeared in the most recent *Chronicle*. Some undergraduate body, she said, had put forth the idea that one response to the present economic crisis might be the enrolling of seniors for a one-year master’s degree. What should we think about this? “That might or might not be a good idea,” Dean Nowicki replied.

Here was a fine example of why we should have discussions, in this case very quickly. Was the idea, in fact, feasible? “Duke students have a lot of good ideas,”

he said, “and it’s important to listen to them.”

There being no further comments, Prof. Shanahan welcomed to the lectern Dr. Edward Gomes (Associate Dean for Trinity College of Arts and Sciences Information Science and Technology).

Noting first that although he had come onboard only fairly recently (i.e., since March, 2008) from his post in Duke’s Library Information Services, he had in fact been a Duke employee for twenty-three years. Currently he was involved in a number of projects, a very major one being the redesigning of the web for Trinity College. How might we find a clearer, simpler way to present whatever there was to be presented in the various and very different parts of Arts and Sciences? The aim now was to devise a simpler way for presenting very different components and at the same time maintain sufficient similarity to indicate that these elements were all parts of a single very large entity. The goal was to “migrate” *en masse* all of our various sites to a single framework by the first of July, 2010.

Dean Baker had a professorial question: Would the finished project provide a personal template for individual professors? Professors nowadays needed a place to put their syllabi, their publications, and so on. Dean Gomes replied that other institutions were not headed in that direction. “Nobody does this. Nobody provides a faculty template.” As a matter of fact, though, he had himself built just such a template in response to the request of a Duke professor. In fact, he himself “would love to see this done.” It would be good if OIT could develop some tools to help make this possible, but it was not presently in the planning. On the other hand, every faculty member at Duke had a web-space.

Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences George McLendon at this point expressed his agreement with Dean Baker: individual faculty templates might be very useful in a later phase of the project now in hand—provided we could figure out how to make them.

Dean Gomes: “I really do think this is something we should keep on the radar for round two.”

Prof. David Malone (Education) asked that Dean Gomes give his opinion

concerning the level of general faculty satisfaction with the current technology at Duke.

Dean Gomes: “The level of overall satisfaction is not good.” Websites needed to be simplified in order to be more manageable.

Dean Penny Sanders (Arts and Sciences Communications) observed that some departments were much more “visual-oriented” than others, enabling them to be more dynamic, to “achieve an air of vitality.”

Dean Baker inquired whether or not it was correct that faculty web space belonged to OIT (the Office of Information Technology), not Arts and Sciences. Dean Gomes: That was correct. “We need to have a look at that issue, but the fact is that when one was hired at Duke nowadays, one acquired a net ID, a password, an e-mail account, and a lot of storage place.” There was plenty enough of the latter to enable one to build a personal website.

Dr. Ron Grunwald (Biology) remarked that he was concerned about technological support in this present era of belt-tightening. The fact was that there was now increasing usage in and increasing reliance on the lab sciences. Were we going to find some extra money somewhere?

A brief conversation ensued: obviously there was no simple or easy answer to the problems involved, but it was necessary that we be very thoughtful about filling classrooms with twenty-five or so computers when many students themselves had laptops. On the other hand, Duke had never been an every-student-must-have-a-laptop school. And, of course, Duke needed to take into consideration the kinds of work that were being done in our classrooms, even the staffing necessary to support some classes. All of these things and more had an impact on the way we had to think about spending money.

At this point Dean Nowicki admonished again that, whatever was to be decided about these matters, it would be incumbent on the deciders to bring Duke’s students into the picture.

Everything apparently having been said for the moment, and ending but by no means finishing, Prof. Shanahan thanked both of the afternoon’s speakers. Then,

before dismissing everyone, she inquired whether the minutes of the Council's November meeting might be approved as written and distributed. That chore being tended to, the Council's January meeting was closed at 4:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dale B. J. Randall  
Executive Secretary