

Arts and Sciences Council
12 February 2009
139 Social Sciences
Chair: Prof. Suzanne Shanahan

At 3:35 p.m. Prof. Shanahan convened the Council, welcomed those present, and proceeded to predict that the day's meeting had a good chance of being "delightfully brief"—though she also warned that one needed to be heedful of the fact that February would be followed by March and April, at least one of which could be (as the poet said) "the cruelest month."

Prof. Shanahan then invited corrections in the January minutes. None being voiced, she pronounced them ready for filing and proceeded to characterize the scheduled discussions of the day as being preparatory in various ways. Though "interdisciplinarity" was hardly a new subject in academia, Duke surely needed to entertain further conversation about it. Indeed, a broad-range "disciplinarity push" was well underway at Duke. In our programs, centers, institutes, certificates, and majors—in fact, all across our arts and sciences-interdisciplinarity was visibly present. How should Duke go about deploying and managing this phenomenon? Did our traditional forms and approaches still make sense? All in all, it seemed like a good idea to review the overall picture and not "slippery-slope our way" to wherever we might be going. Without denigrating interdisciplinarity, we should be careful about how we manage it now. She was very pleased, therefore, to introduce Duke's Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies, Dr. Susan Roth (Psychology and Neuroscience).

Dr. Roth thought perhaps it would be best to begin by reading aloud a statement that President Richard Brodhead had written recently:

A Bold Vision: New Forms of Knowledge

To develop the skills of problem-solving in many-sided and rapidly changing situations, the abstract mental exercises that have formed the staple of education as we have known it will need to be supplemented with the chance to encounter problems in their unabstracted, real-world forms, where the plurality of their dimensions and the specificity of their challenges can be fully grasped. Further, although mental independence and solitary reflection will be as important as ever, many issues will require the sharing or pooling of understanding, the bringing together of bodies of knowledge that no one person could possess alone. Working in teams will be as characteristic of the integrative regime of knowledge as working alone was of the regime of specialization; and learning how to

supplement our understanding with that of others with different mental horizons will be increasingly essential.

Accompanying this statement was the caveat that:

This vision presumes that our scholarship and teaching will reflect:

An understanding of the complexity of societal challenges in their real-world forms.

An understanding of the value of the integration of bodies of specialized knowledge.

An understanding of the imperative to work in teams, as well as the challenges and rewards of doing so.

With such teams in mind, Dr. Roth observed that one of the compelling facts of current life at Duke was that an examination of new “hires” revealed that many newcomers had a “very interdisciplinary quality in their scholarship.” In the department of Economics, for instance, many of our new colleagues were associated in some way not only with Economics but also with one or another of our institutes. A significant challenge from her own perspective was trying to deal with faculty members with multiple bases. The situation in her office had sometimes been summed up facetiously by the question “How do they decide which picnic to go to?” More seriously, how might all these people be present in multiple places sufficiently to make an impact? And, naturally, the more colleagues Duke acquired of this sort, the more “normative” the situation would become. Problematic as the situation might be, complexities were now being observed not only in the Provost’s office (notably via her office) but also in the office of Interdisciplinary Program Management.

Though there had been a time not so far back when there was widespread uncertainty as to what the term “interdisciplinarity” itself might mean, the urgency to define it was waning nicely, and she hoped that there would be a general understanding of the term implied by the titles listed on the five-by-seven-inch cards which she had brought to distribute to members of the Council. There were now over a dozen undergraduate interdisciplinary certificates, each with its own particular character and including, e.g., Children in Contemporary Society, Energy and Environment, Genome Sciences and Policy, Global Health, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, Latin American Studies, Modeling Biological Systems, Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, and more.

Duke also had a variety of interdisciplinary institutes, among them The Kenan Institute for Ethics, The John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute, The Nicholas Institute for

Environmental Policy Solutions, The Duke Institute for Brain Sciences, The Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy, and The Duke Global Health Institute. Complex as the system was, anyone wishing to learn more about interdisciplinary studies at Duke was welcome to access <www.interdisciplinary.duke.edu>.

Drawing her remarks to a close, Dr. Roth suggested that it might be useful to ponder three over-arching questions concerning interdisciplinarity:

1. In departments engaged in interdisciplinary work, how might we be assured that such work would be both accounted for and recognized?
2. What were some creative ways to make sure that interdisciplinary studies were a part of the experience for all undergraduate Duke students?
3. And (more a question for herself, but worth everybody's pondering) how might one go about not only achieving good results here with interdisciplinary studies but achieving also national recognition of the nature and value, indeed the need, of such studies.

In response to several of her remarks, Prof. David Malone (Education) asked Dr. Roth to comment on a "structural question." Granted the importance of both Institutes and Centers here, how did Duke distinguish between the two? Dr. Roth: Duke had both University Institutes and also school-based Centers within Duke's nine schools, all of these being under the office of the Provost and, since 1998, a Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies. The overall organization was indeed complex, but further information was available on the Interdisciplinary Studies website.

Dr. Ron Grunwald (Biology) wondered what implications might inhere in the fact that Duke's centers and institutes were moving in the direction of becoming more and more like departments in both their organizations and their functions. Did this not drain resources from our departments? Dr. Roth observed that as matters stood currently, a center might well be reaching out and contributing to a handful of departments. Dean of the Faculty George McLendon added that when one had a fixed income, one always had to make decisions about how to distribute it. Furthermore, whatever the current practice took away from departments depended to some extent on what one thought a department was. The complicated reality was that the faculty got resources from more than one place.

Dr. Roth went on to observe that however real and complex the resource

question might be, there were other and concomitant issues to consider. For example, how did one indicate to undergraduates the various kinds of opportunities that centers might or could afford? And complicating the whole picture still further, of course, were the varying goals of students.

Prof. Jennifer Brodie (African and African American Studies) had some other questions about interdisciplinary courses. In particular, at the “level of structure” she had run into a problem concerning the number of seats required for a course. This had proved to be a logistical nightmare that really should be addressed. She had also perceived problems concerning the nature of new interdisciplinary “hires”—in particular concerning a current search in Theater Studies. When it came to interdisciplinarity, what were the rules concerning which department was to be the “lead department”? It would be very helpful to have more clarification and, of course, more protection for any junior candidate entering multiple departments.

Dr. Roth replied that she was very much aware that Duke did not yet have models for all the situations that might occur. And, yes, it certainly was important to stay alert to situations where the choice of a later hire might vary depending on an earlier but still recent one. In short, “Ongoing communication is critical.”

Speaking of problems, the recent chair of the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee, Prof. Ruth Day (Psychology and Neuro-Science) alluded to the requests that had been made for certificate programs to have a “huge overlap in courses.” There seemed to be something like “an explosion of people” eager to mount programs. Dr. Roth interjected that she herself was “happy to think that we are now in the next phase.” Prof. Day agreed, but nevertheless wanted to comment on the nature of interdisciplinarity in Duke’s faculty, in particular the phenomenon that to be fully recognized, to be a real participant, to be appreciated, it appeared that one nowadays had to be connected to an institute. In fact, Duke now had a lot of interdisciplinarians who played roles in two or more fields. Were there any mechanisms in place for supporting such people? Dr. Roth replied that there were, indeed, “some motions in that direction,” but her work had thus far focused on groups, not individuals.

Prof. Michael Morton (Germanic Languages) returned to Prof. Day’s first remark: the rush to certificates had been an important phenomenon for the last couple of years. To what extent, he wondered, were the Provost’s office or Dr. Roth’s office or the Arts and Sciences Council or the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee or some other entity concerned with problems relating to certificates? Dr. Roth replied that she had a feeling that she herself would be more involved. Prof. Morton felt that would be important. It was both clear and worrisome to him that some certificate programs were “growing to the size of departments.” Some groups which initially had

been perceived as temporary had turned out to “be of pretty long duration.” To tell the truth, they appeared to be “segueing their way into eternity.”

On a more encouraging note, Dr. Grunwald observed that some students were currently able to build remarkable and coherent programs with the help of the Global Health Institute. Dr. Roth replied that “The students are driving a lot of this.” And some of the results had become incredibly complicated—e.g., whether Global Health ought to become a major. And similar arguments might be made for Genome Sciences and Policy.

Prof. Shanahan readily acknowledged that “We need to continue to consider this business. We are still at the beginning of the conversation.” She then turned to the next agenda item—the double-feature remarks of, first, Dean McLendon and then of Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, Steve Nowicki.

Dean McLendon said that his very brief words would essentially be a preview of coming attractions. Much of the current news, local and national alike, was obviously about the current economic situation, and he would be talking later about its impact on Duke University. Though some of the information now afloat in the air was confusing, all he could say at the moment would be “couched in uncertainty or innuendo” and not really helpful. In a couple of weeks, however, after the trustees had met, there would be much more clarity. Among other things, he should be able then to give a report on the salary situation. At present he could say only that he planned to set aside some time in March to “have an open meeting for both faculty and staff, whoever wants to come,” in order to discuss the specifics that would relate to faculty and student matters. In short, he looked forward to a dialogue “when we have more facts.”

Concerning the proposed meeting, Prof. Victor Strandberg (English) asked whether Dean McLendon would be able and willing at that time to “produce two numbers.” In the twelve or fifteen years when Prof. Strandberg had sat on the Council, he had requested these numbers and been promised to have them, but they had never materialized. The first number he hoped to have was “an honest estimate of what is the maximum amount of debt that an undergraduate student can have and still remain at the University”; and the second number he requested was “a typical average amount of debt that a student leaves this University with.” Dean McLendon responded that he could immediately and with certainty answer one of those questions. The amount of debt incurred by a student at the behest of Duke University was \$5,000 per year. As far as Duke was concerned, such a student could not leave with a debt larger than \$20,000. However, some Duke students chose to leave with more debts than that because “historically that had been a very inexpensive way to borrow money.”

Dean Nowicki (billed as the second half of this agenda item) agreed, noting that students and their families had sometimes found it expedient to go into additional debt.

On a somewhat lighter note, he took care to excuse himself from commenting on any current rumor that Duke faculty members themselves might soon be subject to presiding over mandatory weekly bake-sales.

Dean Nowicki therefore moved on to his primary subject, *viz.*, an updating of the Duke Center for Civic Engagement. When the highly successful program called DukeEngage had been proposed and planned a little over two years ago, it was, in fact, meant to be only part of what was the more complex and multi-faceted Center for Civic Engagement. The latter was intended to be something of a “central clearing house,” but it was DukeEngage that had gone on to be enormously successful— seemingly second only to Duke basketball insofar as public attention was concerned.

It was time now to return attention to the nature and structure of the over-arching entity. Or perhaps the better figure was that of a hub with spokes reaching outward. Such spokes—to name just a few—would include Student Affairs, Community Affairs, Religious Life, The Hart Leadership Program, and Study Abroad.

More particularly at the moment, Dean Nowicki hoped to create and charge a faculty committee that would initiate a constructive conversation reaching “across the spectrum.” The basic time-table that he had in mind was simple: Spring Discussion and Initial Planning succeeded by Fall Development and Presentation of Planning. To achieve that end he had already been looking for two co-chairs, and he was pleased this afternoon to announce that Dr. Samuel L. Wells (Dean of the Chapel) had recently been appointed to be one of them.

Prof. Morton was especially glad to hear that Study Abroad was among Dean Nowicki’s spokes. In his department there was interest not only in DukeEngage but also in some European institutions and centers.

Dean Margaret Riley (Study Abroad) observed that there was much to be said for having some administrators on the committee. “Yes, yes,” said Dean Nowicki. He had meant to mention administrators. And his intention also was to reach out to others beyond “the usual suspects.” He would like the yet-to-be-constituted committee on the Center to be thoughtful about its overall scope.

When Prof. Brodie inquired whether she had heard Dean Nowicki say that DukeEngage was involved with religious studies, he replied that he did not mean to imply that. In any case, he wanted to be careful to insist that DukeEngage was only one part (albeit a major one, indeed a flagship) of the Center. It was the nature of the Center itself that the forthcoming new committee would be defining. And he wanted it noted that he himself had no preconceived notion in the matter.

Prof. Leslie Digby (Evolutionary Anthropology) thought it might be helpful to recognize at the outset that while DukeEngage could hardly be considered academically oriented, Study Abroad was quite specifically educational. How did we resolve (or *did* we resolve) this kind of dichotomy? Dean Nowicki acknowledged this to be a provocative and valuable question. How should we—or how in the future might we—conceive the difference between what is now traditional academic learning and that which is now viewed as non-academic?

Dean Daniel Scheirer (Office of Health Professions Advising) observed that his office dealt with a large number of Duke students who were being evaluated by medical schools, but he had never heard any of these applicants mention the Center. It certainly would be a good idea to introduce the Center into their world. Dean Nowicki agreed wholeheartedly. It was clear that even people at Duke were unlikely to have heard of the Center unless they themselves were deeply engaged with DukeEngage.

At this point a brief but energetic multi-person conversation was sparked (partly erroneously) by the realization that although the Carnegie Foundation had not long since honored Duke for some of its good work, the University would do well to garner together all of its information on the subject and generally make it better known, certainly via a website and perhaps by other media as well.

At 4:40 p.m., pretty clearly in a room energized with good will, Prof. Shanahan declared the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Dale B. J. Randall
Executive Secretary