

Strategic Curricular Review Memo
November 16, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

We are entering a very exciting time for Illinois Wesleyan University. The Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees in February and calls for us to complete strategic planning for the curriculum. Many things have changed since the last curricular review, including a growth of the faculty and an expansion of the curriculum. We have also seen dramatic changes in the society in which we live. Thus, it is time to take stock of what we are currently doing and celebrate our accomplishments. It is also time to examine whether there are ways for us to further enhance student learning and better prepare our graduates for the future – a future that requires them to be broadly educated, adequately prepared to live and work in an increasingly technological and global society, and challenged to contribute as citizens of the world.

My hope is that we will use this opportunity to reinvigorate our teaching and introduce faculty development programs that continue to prepare us for engaging students in new courses at the forefront of our disciplines. We also can consider enhancing programs that do not currently have sufficient faculty and expanding programs into new areas. We need to address these issues and reflect on the education we provide to our students. The time is ripe for us to move forward on implementing our part of the strategic plan. (A copy of the Teaching and Learning Goal of the Strategic Plan is available at http://www.iwu.edu/president/Strategic/Goals_Teaching.shtml.)

The curriculum rests squarely in the hands of the faculty and changes to the curriculum should come from the faculty. The curriculum is tied to faculty resources so any discussions involving the curriculum will also need to include a discussion of resources. A major outcome of the review is to create a process by which our curriculum is developed strategically so that in the near future resource allocation, program development, and program assessment are built into a periodic review of each part of the curriculum, from departmental and school offerings to the general education program. In that way, we can identify areas that need additional resources and/or faculty lines. At the same time, we need to enhance faculty development to better deliver our programs. Although course load reduction is not an immediate objective, part of faculty development is the systematic reduction in workload and more efficient use of resources. Therefore, we have the opportunity to develop initiatives such as a course release program, an expansion of the junior leave program for all probationary faculty members, funding for a lecture series in support of the curriculum, a leave program for senior faculty, and the expansion of the Mellon Center. Programs such as these will be important in supporting our development of the curriculum.

Three basic parameters of this strategic curricular planning cycle are listed below

- No tenured or tenure-line faculty member will lose his or her position nor will any major programs be eliminated as a result of changes to the curriculum.
- The standard faculty course load will remain at 6 courses per year for the near future.
- We will continue to emphasize the liberal arts as the core of our students' education, and we will continue to provide opportunities for professional and pre-professional preparation in selected fields.

All elements of the Illinois Wesleyan education are on the table for discussion, including but not limited to internationalization and study abroad, writing instruction, Gateway colloquium, May Term, interdisciplinary programs, information literacy, opportunities for student learning beyond the traditional classroom setting, and the relationship of majors to the general education program. The curriculum is based on our mission, vision, and identity so we must be cognizant of these defining statements as we discuss the curriculum. We need to think broadly but also keep in mind our limited resources and ways we can use our resources to advance our mission. We also need to address the capabilities of our students. Finally, we need to know how to use new resources as they become available.

I have consulted with CUPP, FDC, and CC regarding how we should begin the process and the following is a result of these discussions. The process will consist of two phases. The first phase will involve reflection on our current curriculum and examination of the curricula at peer institutions to determine not only the elements of our curriculum that need to be revised or enhanced but also identify areas of particular strength at Illinois Wesleyan. The second phase will be to transform ideas into reality and propose specific changes to strengthen, refine, and enrich the curriculum. An implementation planning document will address both resource and staffing needs and outline a process for continual curricular review.

I will create a Curriculum Strategic Planning Task Force to carry out the first phase of the review and ask that it be completed by the 2007 Fall Faculty Conference. The Task Force will be composed of the following members:

- One representative from Council on University Programs and Policy,
- One representative from Curriculum Council,
- One representative from Faculty Development Committee,
- Four "at-large" members elected from the faculty, and
- Two student representatives.

The representatives from CUPP, CC, and FDC will be elected by each committee and the "at-large" members will be elected from the faculty following standard procedures. The committee representatives will work with their respective committees and provide a conduit for information to flow between the Task Force and the committees. The elected faculty members will continue on the Task Force through the second phase. The Task Force chair will be elected from the at-large members in

order to provide continuity through the 2007-08 academic year. Zahia Drici, Director of General Education, Jean Kerr, May Term Director, Stacey Shimizu, Acting Director of the International Office, and Mona Gardner, Director of Institutional Research and Planning, will act as Task Force advisors to provide information as needed. Other members of the Illinois Wesleyan community may be consulted for additional information. The Task Force will work in consultation with the Provost, but the Provost will not serve on the Task Force. The Provost will provide support for the Task Force in order to facilitate its work. The charge for the Task Force is included below.

The Charge:

1. To gather information and perspectives on our current curriculum from students, alumni, faculty, university-wide program directors, and other important constituencies (e.g., employers and graduate schools).
2. To explore best practices of innovative curriculum and teaching at other universities.
3. . To summarize the strengths and weaknesses of our current curriculum based on the analysis of our curriculum and best practices elsewhere. This summary will provide the basis for a set of objectives to improve our curriculum to be developed during the next phase.

The Task Force will need to complete its work and present its summary to the faculty during the 2007 Fall Faculty Conference. That way, the faculty will be ready to start the second phase with the purpose of making specific recommendations for changes in the curriculum by the beginning of the 2007-08 academic year. The second phase should be completed by the end of the 2007-08 academic year. The Task Force will have the opportunity to hold a series of open forums and focus groups early in the spring semester as data are gathered and the objectives are refined. The Task Force will also provide regular updates at faculty meetings. As a part of this initial planning process, all faculty members will have a chance to be heard and provide input into the development of the objectives.

The Task Force has a full agenda to complete in a short time period. I look forward to seeing the results of its work as the academic year progresses. I also ask for your assistance in helping the Task Force complete this important project.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the review, please do not hesitate to contact me at provost@iwu.edu.

Sincerely yours,

Beth A. Cunningham
Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Overview of the Process Used

The task force first spent a considerable amount of time sharing thoughts about the structure, potential processes, and eventual uses of a report of this type. We wanted to produce a working document that reflected the opinions and needs of the faculty as a whole. We were particularly cautious about pre-determining what needs and concerns might end up being presented.

Our first data-gathering effort was at the 2007 Fall Faculty Conference. Faculty workgroups discussed the strategic curricular implications of various issues, including:

- capstone experiences
- the impact of the General Education program on other curricular areas
- mid-level depth within majors
- integration of technology into classroom teaching
- thoughts about a structure for making decisions about curriculum from a strategic perspective

Next, members of the task force met with each department, school and program on campus and asked the following questions:

- What types of capstone experiences are available for students in your department or program?
- What observations can you offer about the issues of middle-level depth and critical thinking/writing skills in terms of your curriculum?
- What, if anything, does your department do in terms of integration with other disciplines?

Information collected at these meetings was eventually folded into the larger report presented in Section V of this document.

Following these meetings, additional information was requested of the chairs, school directors, and program directors in the form of updates on departmental concerns since the North Central Study was conducted. We also requested input about the top three current concerns of each area and its curriculum. This information was also used in the preparation of Section V of this document.

The task force also held two open forums to gather faculty input. Faculty were encouraged to bring their observations and concerns about the current curriculum as well as their thoughts and suggestions about future curricular plans.

Data and information from all these sources was then collated and discussed. At this point, the task force began to see lines along which faculty seemed to perceive curricular concerns. The task force then divided into three subgroups to work on these areas of common concern. One group began working in detail on an overview of the state of the General Education program. Another worked with information gathered as described

above to create an image of the status of various departments and programs as seen through the eyes of the faculty in those areas. A third group began working with data, primarily from the Registrar's Office, regarding time slot utilization and enrollment patterns across campus. As this third group neared completion of these tasks, they also worked on the Process and Structure portion of this document, Section III.

Each step of the way through the process, it was the intention of this group to prepare a document that could be used by the faculty (and administration) in the clarification and presentation of needs and concerns from a curricular perspective, especially when those requests involved a strategic component. This document does not contain suggestions for the downsizing or elimination of any program or department. Recommendations of this type were specifically omitted from our charge, and decisions of that magnitude would require investigations of impact that would be far more detailed than were possible in this study.

Executive Summary

One goal of this study was to identify curricular concerns, both current and future, that have strategic planning implications. The second goal was to provide a framework inside which decisions about these types of curricular issues can be made.

First and foremost, we would like to note that the members of the Illinois Wesleyan University faculty deserve significant praise for their commitment to delivering the curriculum to our students despite the issues outlined below. We would also like to note that faculty members spend a sizeable amount of time engaged with students on various types of projects that fall outside of regular classroom work, but that are still related to their studies – i.e., Independent Studies or Honors Projects, writing letters and reviewing applications for grants and graduate school, or simply connecting with students who need more personal attention. This additional investment of time is not reflected in any of the standard calculations of faculty loads, departmental resource deployments, or seat usage figures. In short, our study found that the faculty's priority is providing our students with an excellent education.

As we gathered information from departments, it became apparent almost immediately that the concerns of the faculty run clearly along the lines of meeting the curricular needs of current programs. There were no strong cases made for the addition of new programs, and for the most part there were no significant suggestions for the expansion of existing programs into new, related areas. The two exceptions to this were Chinese and the changes to the Writing Program.

It also became clear, both through the student survey and through the data received from the Registrar's Office, that enrollment pressures continue to be a major problem. Current data reveal that seat usage is at about 79% of capacity campus-wide. This issue becomes clearer (and perhaps more pressing) when the data are viewed either by level or by department. Students encounter a 90% of capacity rate when they attempt to enroll in 100 level courses. They encounter the same capacity rate (or higher) when they attempt to enroll in courses in as many as eight of our most popular departments. These figures result from a comparison of seat usage to seat availability in all classes offered at each level or by each individual department. From the perspective of courses for majors, enrollment pressures are encountered in almost every department to some degree, but appear to be particularly acute in Business Administration and Psychology. Many departments relate much of the "tightness" in major courses to the need to offer courses in General Education. Each General Education course offered by a department represents a section of a major requirement or elective that cannot be offered.

Additional concerns, currently manifesting in two different trends that have less to do with human resources and more to do with effective planning, are the increasing move away from the traditional class times and the concentration of more classes on a T-Th schedule and proportionally fewer on a M-W-F schedule.

Enrollment issues aside, there are a number of departments where there are areas of the major curriculum that are currently unavailable or understaffed. The continued success of students in these departments is in some cases dependent upon addressing these gaps. Anthropology, Computer Science, and Theatre Arts are all currently operating without the ability to deliver key curricular elements. Other departments, particularly in the Sciences, are experiencing difficulty in their ability to deliver

effectively their curricula due to strains on current levels of non-faculty staffing – lab assistants, department office personnel, etc.

There is a campus-wide feeling that budgets for instructional technology should be increased. Technology for classroom use as well as for labs is lacking to some degree for almost every department.

Other areas of curricular concern encountered during the course of this study relate to increasing conflicts between Interdisciplinary Programs and the various departments upon whom these programs depend for major-level courses. Issues range from over-lapping areas of authority to course availability. As these majors, and any new programs that may be developed in the future, become more popular among IWU students, these problems will need to be addressed.

While there does not appear to be widespread interest on campus to expand into new academic areas, we did perform a comparison of the programs available at IWU and those offered at a list of peer institutions. We found there to be several unique programs offered at IWU that do not appear on the program lists of the schools in the peer group used for this study. There are also some areas that are becoming common on the campuses of these peer schools that are missing from our list. Chinese, which will be offered in a pilot program at IWU beginning Fall 2008, is the only one of these areas that are in the planning stages on campus. Other areas not offered at IWU include specific programs in Biochemistry, Gender Studies (unique from Women's Studies), and Neuroscience. Substantial additional data and study would be required in order to decide if these are programs that should, in fact, be added to our curricular offerings.

The members of the task force see this report as the first step in a longer process concerning the health and future of the curriculum at IWU. The extensive summary of the General Education program provides the context in which a more detailed evaluation of that program could be executed. We hope the observations and data provided in this report will start conversations across campus and prove useful as various constituencies continue think about the strategic implications of curricular decisions and the directions we should be moving our academic offerings.

Guidelines for Submitting Proposals for New Academic Programs or Areas

I. Introduction

One of the tasks assigned to this work group was the design of a framework for making curricular decisions from a strategic perspective. What follows is our attempt to begin that process.

Every request for resources needed in order to introduce a new program of study into the curriculum will necessarily read differently from every other request. There did not seem to be one single list and order of priorities that would evaluate effectively and equally all kinds of proposals. Subsequently, this list includes questions that will be pertinent in some cases and extraneous in others. It was our hope that, by including as much information from as many viewpoints as possible, a sense of relative benefit and urgency would appear when comparing multiple proposals for new curricular programs.

The current language in the Faculty Handbook (Chapter IV, Section 3, c-2) reads,

While enrollment burdens will continue to receive paramount attention, proposals for new tenure lines may be submitted based on at least two of the following four kinds of anticipated benefit: alleviating enrollment pressures, meeting outstanding program needs, adding valuable new subject areas to the university's curriculum, and meeting all-university requirements for General Education, May Term, and the Gateway Colloquium.¹

In many ways, the following documents serve only to clarify the ways in which such arguments might be framed.

- Section II: A Proposal for a Faculty Group to Facilitate Curricular Decisions from a Strategic Perspective (<http://www2.iwu.edu/provost/facgov/curricular/structure.pdf>)
- Section III: Guidelines for Submitting Proposals for New Academic Programs or Areas (http://www2.iwu.edu/provost/facgov/curricular/submitting_proposals.pdf)

¹ The entire section concerning faculty hires can be found at <http://www2.iwu.edu/provost/facgov/curricular/FacultyHandbookIV-3.pdf>.

A Proposal for a Faculty Group to Facilitate Curricular Decisions from a Strategic Perspective

The current procedure for securing and renewing faculty lines runs primarily through CUPP. There is not an established procedure for gathering information and input from other existing sources. The inclusion of input from Curriculum Council would seem to be particularly important in the consideration of new curricular areas. However, in the current environment in which we are looking for ways in which to reduce the amount of faculty time devoted to committees, the addition of another completely new body seems counter-cultural.

We are recommending the establishment of a standing structure made up primarily of members drawn from other existing committees. The ways in which this membership might be achieved would need to be determined by each of the groups whose involvement is proposed. Since it is unlikely that there would be a steady, ongoing stream of proposals of this type in any given academic year, it is possible that the addition of these new responsibilities would be minimal. This group would only be convened for the consideration of a proposal with strategic curricular implications, such as a new program or area or the significant expansion of an existing area. Routine proposals for renewal of existing lines, for instance, would not require that this group be convened.

We suggest that this group be comprised of the following:

- Two members from CUPP
- Two members from Curriculum Council
- Two members from Student Senate
- The new academic dean, when/if that position becomes a reality, ex officio

And, as appropriate for various proposals:

- The directors of General Education and May Term
- A representative from the library faculty
- A representative from the IT staff

Guidelines for Submitting Proposals for New Academic Programs or Areas

II. The Structure of Proposals

For a brand new line or group of new lines representing an expansion in an existing area, as opposed to a simple replacement of an existing line, the following information should be submitted, as appropriate for each proposal:

- An evaluation of activity in this academic area at peer schools. Attention should be paid to the wider curricular context in which this program/area exists at the various comparison institutions, including an evaluation of other similar areas of study offered at these schools that are absent at IWU and might impact our ability to deliver a meaningful curriculum in the new area in question.¹ In relation to our peer schools, would the addition of this area/program put us ahead of the curve, joining the pack, or playing catch-up?
- An evaluation of the growth of this area nationwide, including information about institutions that may be less similar to IWU than those considered above. Is this an area of growth or decline in academia nationwide?
- An evaluation of resource requirements and the current level of availability of those resources.² Resources in the following areas should be considered, as appropriate:
 - **library**, including reference works, circulating volumes, journals, e-resources, faculty research needs;
 - **computer and technology**, including software, hardware, peripherals, classroom technology needs;
 - **classroom space**, including an evaluation of available space at the times when courses would be likely to be scheduled, and any alternative sights that might serve should conflicts occur;
 - **lab space and equipment**, based on real time current requirements within the department and taking into account projected growth and needs of existing areas within the department;
 - **staff support**, including office support, teaching assistance, IT support;
 - **availability of appropriate office space**;
 - **faculty research resource needs**, other than library resources.
- An evaluation of the resource impact on other related areas if any resources are shifted to this new area.

¹ A clear group of peer institutions needs to be identified, with emphasis on similarity of academic programs and philosophy as well as size and endowment, and applied campus-wide in proposals of this type.

² A standardized format for resource evaluation, perhaps developed in coordination with the various campus providers of support, should be developed and applied uniformly in all proposals.

- An evaluation of the possible impact on enrollment in other courses in the same or other related areas. This impact might be either positive or negative – e.g. making courses non-viable in some cases or alleviating enrollment pressure or increasing subsequent interest in others. What has been the impact on other campuses as this new area was added?
- An evaluation of sustainable student interest.³ Are there enough students interested in the area to enroll the classes more than once?
- An evaluation of the ways in which the area would interface with the General Education program and May Term. Information should be included about how these contributions can be sustained over time, should the new area see the development of high demand.
- An evaluation of the procedure by which decisions regarding faculty resource allocations will be made in cases where a proposed new area would contribute courses to/through more than one current department.
- An evaluation of the contributions of other types of resources from each department in cases where a proposed new area would contribute courses to/through more than one current department.
- An evaluation of the ways in which this new area would bring either diversity or sharper focus to current departmental offerings, in the context of the curriculum as a whole and of the liberal arts mission of IWU.
- An evaluation of the possible difficulties that might be encountered should a key person or key persons leave the university. Is this an area of specialization that is well-represented in the candidate pool?

³ Again, a standardized format should be developed for use across campus. Data might be collected through student interest surveys among majors in related areas, undecided students, or larger-scale surveys.