Ad Hoc Committee For A Course on Respect and Responsibility.

March 25, 2010

Members: Melina Bell, chair; Mike Anderson; Paul Gregory; Dan Kramer; Dave Leonard; Shana Levine; Toni Locy; Mark Rush; Angie Smith; Julie Woodzicka

Provost’s charge

The mandate for this committee rests in a motion passed at a University Faculty Meeting on March 1, 2010, as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty charges the Provost, by March 21, 2010, to appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the desirability and feasibility of establishing a one-credit academic course for first-year students that would engage them in discussions, based on multidisciplinary reading selections, concerning the benefits and responsibilities associated with participation in a community of respect."

Rationale for the motion: W&L’s mission is to “provide a liberal arts education that develops students’ capacity to think freely, critically, and humanely and to conduct themselves with honor, integrity, and civility. Graduates will be prepared for life-long learning, personal achievement, responsible leadership, service to others, and engaged citizenship in a global and diverse society.” Engaging first year students in discussions about these values, as an early part of their academic experience, seems a promising way for faculty to further enhance the university’s fulfillment of its mission. The committee could collect information about similar programs at peer institutions, explore different ways such a program might be used at W&L, and report back to faculty on its findings.

In the course of its work, the committee should consider these suggestions:

1. Investigate such courses offered in the past and currently at other institutions. Useful information will include: the purpose and history of the course; syllabus and readings and whether these are the same for all sections; whether the course is required; how faculty are assigned to teach it in the context of managing course loads; and most important, evidence of assessment-based value for the course in meeting its objectives.

2. Consult some background on the subject of teaching values and citizenship: examples (there are many others) are Cultivating Humanity by Martha Nussbaum, 1997 Harvard Press; Educating Citizens: Preparing America’s Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility by A. Colby, T. Ehrlich, E Beaumont, J Stephens, 2003 Carnegie
Institute for the Advancement of Teaching; *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, by Anthony T Kronman, 2007, Yale. I would be glad to purchase copies of whatever you select for the committee to use.

3. Consult with W&L colleagues who have had experience in teaching content inclusive of honor, values ethics, etc. The Student Affairs staff and the Student Affairs Committee should be enlisted as collaborators in this endeavor. W&L had a Teagle grant a few years ago for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of teaching ethics and values, and you might review the results and report of that pilot study.

4. Confer broadly with students to gain their perspective on the idea of the course that is envisioned. How would it be received by the majority of students? What impact would it have on student culture?

5. Approach the work with an open mind and balanced viewpoint, not assuming that a course is needed but rather asking in the first place “what is the evidence that courses like this will meet the intended goals”.

6. As part of your inquiry, consider ways other than a course by which the goals driving this effort could be met and weigh the pros and cons of various options.

**Timetable and report:**
1. Please strive to bring forward a report and recommendations by February 1, 2011 (if possible) so that recommendations can be discussed and voted by the faculty as necessary before the end of the academic year.

2. The Committee’s recommendations should strive for cost-neutrality or at least be incrementally cost-minimal in the present economic environment. For example if you recommend that a course should be offered, outline a plan on how it could fit into normal course loads so that additional hiring will not be required. It may require a consideration of replacing some existing endeavors that are less important than you believe this new venture to be. These issues will no doubt be part of your feasibility study.

3. For recommendations put forward, please state the specific goals and outcomes that will be used as evidence that those goals are being met, and sketch out a rigorous assessment plan to measure outcomes.