

Date: March 25, 2009

To: Dean Cynthia Lowenthal

From: Irina Gigova, Assistant Professor, Department of History

Re: HSS Strategic Plan Assistant Professor Group

Dear Dean Lowenthal,

The discussion within our group that began on March 13, 2009 generated ideas in the following broad five categories, listed here in rank of importance. While the group unanimously found the first item to be of greatest priority, consensus broke down about the weigh of the remaining four categories, with items 2 and 3 emerging equal in the final tally. The members of our group are: Michael Duvall (English), Kathleen Rogers (English), Jason Coy (History), Irina Gigova (History), Chad Galuska (Psychology) and Jennifer Baker (Philosophy).

1. Strengthened support for research on campus

There was a general sense within the group that the “teacher-scholar” model, which many new faculty find so appealing, lacks real and adequate support. While research requirements are on the rise, there is no college-wide discussion of reduced teaching to enable a more vigorous research agenda. The push to bring more students in each class room (the direction the Delaware numbers seem to be pushing us toward), without the possibility to bank students, apply for course reductions or sabbatical leave before tenure would lead to low morale among new as well as tenured faculty.

Our group felt that one way to address some of these concerns would be through the establishment of a research institute on campus that would involve faculty, students, community members and scholars from other Charleston-based universities in the research and scholarship taking place on our campus. Ideally, the center would be a physical space able to bring together all HSS disciplines (and beyond). It would be housed in its own building, with rooms and halls for conferences or seminars. The research institute would offer annual competitive grants for faculty to take time off from teaching. Each year the research theme would be broadly defined to enable faculty from a variety of fields to contribute to an ongoing scholarly conversation. Such an institute would be a great way to showcase our own research and increase our visibility on campus and in Charleston. We all feel that such a facility could be a wonderful way to attract donors to the HSS.

Faculty research could be supported on other levels as well. We would like to see the college offer competitive individual grants accompanied by course release for the completion of specific research projects. The School of HSS also has to affirm the importance of the continued expansion of the library collection and online databases, as the library is the primary HSS lab.

2. Writing across the curriculum

Our group discussed extensively the creation of a structured, HSS-wide program of Writing across the Curriculum (WAC). The program would be headed by a director, not necessarily coming from the English Department, who would coordinate all WAC initiatives and popularize successful existing practices. Each major could have a WAC course requirement that would enable the instructor to improve students' writing and analytical skills in a small class setting. WAC classes could be linked to courses targeting freshmen, bridging students' transition to academic and disciplinary writing. We feel that a school-wide WAC program would introduce cross-disciplinary standards/consistency in writing-intensive classes across while preparing students for the specific expectations and conventions of their major field. Perhaps more importantly, such a WAC program would only increase recognition of what HSS departments already do.

3. Recognition of teaching excellence

With a student body of more than 10,000, the College of Charleston needs to reaffirm its teaching mission and strive to maintain the focus on liberal arts education. Our group felt that not enough recognition is given to the outstanding work our faculty does in the classroom. Departments and schools could do more to acknowledge excellence in teaching in more explicit and public ways. There could be clear standards as to what excellence in teaching entails and when faculty members exceed a set bar (however defined), they should be automatically recognized for their efforts and success. Their names could be listed annually in the college newspaper and faculty whose names appear regularly must be rewarded for their persistent dedication to teaching. Departments and schools could have annual teaching awards (in addition to the college-wide ones). Students (current or alumni) should be able to nominate their favorite teachers.

There is a general concern that the increased emphasis on numbers (associated with the college's participation in the Delaware study) will discourage innovative, cross-disciplinary and team-taught course as well as faculty work with individual students. Larger class size would force teachers to move away from the liberal arts model. It must be possible to balance concerns about numbers with desire for individualized, vigorous and creative education. Perhaps introductory level courses that attract students college-wide might be taught in larger classrooms, allowing for smaller, reading/writing/research-intensive upper-level courses. Student numbers should be weighed in ways that recognize the additional effort that goes into independent studies, student-faculty research, and writing/research intensive courses.

4. Attracting and retaining good faculty

Although there is a general sentiment that current starting salaries are competitive, there are real concerns about salary compression over time. Although President Benson has put compensation on the top of his agenda, the merit raises and the salary increase associated with promotion often do not keep up with costs of living in Charleston. Furthermore, existing resources do not allow many assistant professors to maintain an active scholarly life. We would like to see increased funds for travel, research,

presentations, and speakers. While currently new faculty receive a research stipend from the HSS Dean at the end of their first year, it would be beneficial to extend this support to their first three years on campus. A 4th year sabbatical, after a successful completion of a 3rd year review, would enable new faculty to focus on completing projects initiated during the preceding few summers of research.

Our group also toyed with two additional ideas: 1) the creation of a Center for New Faculty that would provide information on practical issues (housing, parking, travel, schools, etc.) and thus facilitate new faculty in quickly finding their ways around and focus on their work; and 2) doing more to assist spouses of new hires in getting jobs themselves.

5. Diversity

Our group agreed on the importance of bringing greater diversity to our campus and discussed a few possible approaches to attracting students from various backgrounds:

7 1) sending fraternity members to large cities across the nation as ambassadors for the school in recruiting minority students; 2) greater faculty involvement with local schools (a good model could be the cooperation between Memminger Elementary School and the School of Education) in preparing local students to apply to the College of Charleston; 3) larger and better organized outreach program among local schools that would improve the college's reputation among all sections of the community and serve communal interests broadly.