

Chapter 7: The General Curriculum

A liberal education “requires breadth, depth and integration in learning. It also requires the cultivation of those habits of intellectual and moral self-discipline that distinguish a mature individual. To these ends, St. Lawrence seeks to provide an education that fosters in students an open, inquiring and disciplined mind, well informed through broad exposure to basic areas of knowledge; an enthusiasm for life-long learning; self-confidence and self-knowledge; a respect for differing opinions and for free discussion of those opinions; and an ability to use information logically and to evaluate alternative points of view” (University Catalog, p. 5).

Overview

In keeping with its mission of providing “an inspiring and demanding undergraduate education in the liberal arts,” the St. Lawrence curriculum is rich, varied, and rigorous, with a wide array of majors, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary, leading to Bachelor of Arts or Science degrees, minors available in most major fields, and many area study programs. To graduate from St. Lawrence, students must complete 33.5 semester course units, including eight to 12 units in a major field and six units in specified distribution areas. Students entering St. Lawrence must now complete one course in the distribution areas of Arts/Expression, Humanities, Social Science, and Mathematics or Foreign Language, and two courses in Natural Science/Science Studies and Diversity. One of the Natural Science/Science Studies courses must include a laboratory, and Diversity courses addressing “critical study of sameness and difference” must be taken in two different departments ([University Catalog](#), p. 15). St. Lawrence uses a course unit system in which a standard course is worth one unit but courses offering variable credit ranging from 1.50 to .25 units are available throughout the curriculum. Recognizing that a liberal education requires breadth, depth and integration of learning and skill development, the St. Lawrence curriculum represents an intentional sequence of pedagogical and learning opportunities over the course of an undergraduate

career. In addition, we have a commitment to offering a sufficient number of required and elective courses that allow students to graduate on time, as indicated by our [graduation statistics](#) and recent course [close-out report](#).

In this chapter, we first introduce our curricular objectives and the distribution requirement system crafted to implement them and then discuss a number of concerns about the perceived importance of these designated educational outcomes and the means by which we ask students to pursue them. We then describe specific programs which have enhanced aspects of the general curriculum since our last decennial review and discuss our approaches to curricular change and development.

Curricular Objectives and Distribution Requirements

Throughout numerous faculty meetings during AY 1997-98, the faculty established eight curricular objectives that are articulated in the University's Aims and Objectives statement:

1. A depth of understanding in at least one field of study
2. The ability to read, write, speak and listen well
3. The ability to conduct research and to think critically
4. An understanding of diverse cultures
5. An understanding of scientific principles and methods
6. An understanding of the natural environment
7. An expansion of aesthetic sensibilities and capacities
8. A personal ethic of considered values

During the AY 1999-00, faculty meetings were dedicated to developing distribution requirements more congruent with our newly articulated curricular objectives

and other emerging curricular developments. It is widely thought that the revision to the distribution requirements that the Faculty undertook in 1999-00 was a modest but thoughtful effort and while a number of important curricular initiatives have been introduced and implemented since that time, we have not formally revisited either the eight curricular objectives or the distribution system devised broadly to address them. Moreover, the check-off list mentality that the distribution and diversity course requirements breed among students, and the lack of direct assessment data on the learning outcomes for the courses bearing these credits, prompted the Middle States Steering Committee to reflect pointedly on the state of our General Education curriculum.

Perceptions of Our Current Curricular Objectives

In addition to gleaning perceptions about the University's Mission Statement, the primary purpose of the spring 2007 [survey](#) on mission, aims and objectives was to collect feedback from students, faculty and staff on the University's eight curricular aims articulated in our Catalog. Specifically, we investigated the degree to which the eight specific curricular aims and other objectives stated in the Catalog are perceived as central to our educational mission and also sought to determine whether certain education outcomes not currently accounted for in our stated mission, aims and objectives are perceived as important components of our academic and co-curricular work with students. It is our hope that the survey responses will lead to constructive conversations in the academic affairs and student life divisions of the institution.

On the survey, participants were provided with two lists of educational outcomes: one representing dimensions of academic/ intellectual growth and development (20 items) and the other representing dimensions of personal growth and development (10

items). Nine items represent our stated curricular objectives¹ while the remaining items were taken from other goals stated in our Aims and Objectives narrative, learning goals widely addressed on campus but not articulated in our Aims and Objectives and educational outcomes advocated in recent AAC&U literature. A total of 493 students, 121 faculty and 92 administrative staff members completed the questionnaire for an overall [survey sample](#) of 24% of the student body, 54% of the faculty, and 38% of the administrative staff. One limitation of the data is the uneven response rate of students, because first-year students were asked to complete the survey of mission in connection with the administration of the CSQ. Thus, within the student responses, voice of first-year students are overrepresented while voices of upperclass students are underrepresented.

Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale, with options ranging from “essential” to “not important at all”, the degree to which each of the 30 learning objectives is important for students to achieve through their liberal arts undergraduate experience. Table 7.1 represents the percentage of students, faculty and staff who rated as “essential” each of the eight St. Lawrence curricular objectives from the University Catalog.

Table 7.1. Percentage of students, faculty and staff rating each of the eight St. Lawrence curricular objectives as “essential” to a liberal education.

	student	faculty	staff
read & write well ¹	62%	93%	96%
think critically ²	59%	91%	84%
speak and listen well	60%	80%	89%
understand in depth at least one field or discipline	48%	55%	48%
a personal ethic of considered values	45%	55%	51%
understand diverse cultures	38%	48%	46%

understand the natural environment	24%	41%	27%
understand scientific principles and methods	23%	29%	13%
expansion of aesthetic sensibility	16%	26%	16%

¹ Although they appear separately and are therefore counted here as separate items, “read and write” and “speak and listen” well are combined as one objective in our legislation and publications.

² In its entirety, the curricular objective reads: The ability to conduct research and to think critically.

Although all constituencies endorsed “read and write well” most strongly and also closely agreed on the essential status for the items “think critically” and “speak and listen well”, the endorsements by each group are notable both in how they differ and how they are similar. Students tended not to have strong endorsements for items overall but there is a striking similarity among the groups in the way these curricular objectives ultimately rank from most to least endorsed. It is notable that except for the top three objectives listed in Table 7.1, close to 50% of the faculty respondents do not perceive each of the remaining curricular objectives as essential. An overview of the findings at the 2007 May Faculty College generated constructive preliminary conversations among faculty and staff with the expectation that we will return to the data once the complete report is ready. When we revisit the entire data set, the current limitations to this representation of the data, including the overrepresentation of first-year students among student respondents and the analysis of only one response category (i.e., essential), will be addressed in greater detail.

Student Perceptions of their Educational Experiences

In addition to the internal mission, aims and objectives survey from spring 2007, data from the HEDS Senior Survey (2007) are also illuminating and indicate that students believe the curriculum is meeting its goals for only some of the current curricular objectives. The following items from the HEDS survey are reasonable approximations of

our eight curricular objectives and the first group represents learning outcomes that over 80% of St. Lawrence seniors rated as greatly or moderately enhanced by their undergraduate experience:

- Gain in-depth knowledge in a subject area (92%)
- Think analytically and logically (88%)
- Write effectively (84%)
- Communicate well orally (83%)

A lower percentage of seniors (50-79%) reported improved capacities in:

- Understanding moral and ethical issues (72%)
- Relate well to people of different races, nations, and religions (66%)
- Appreciate art, literature, music, drama (61%)

And a troubling percentage of seniors (below 50%) reported improved abilities to:

- Understand the process of science and experimentation (48%)

A closer look at the data on the questions about science leads us to question the extent to which any gains come from our distribution requirements. For example, while 81% of Natural Science majors feel that their understanding of the process of science has been greatly or somewhat enhanced, only 39% of Social Science students and 34% of Humanities students feel this way. To the extent, then, that the eight curricular objectives represent goals that we expect to be achieved through general education as well as the major, we may be much less successful than is demonstrated by aggregate data. Given that this is the one area of our general education requirements where we require not just one course, but two, this finding should lead us to do more intensive assessment of how students meet University aims and objectives outside of their dominant area of study, including their co-curricular experiences.

Compared to 91.8% of their peers, 89.9% of St. Lawrence seniors were generally to very satisfied with their overall undergraduate education, but while 70.0% of seniors

elsewhere would definitely or probably choose their respective institutions again, only 57.5% of St. Lawrence seniors reported the same (HEDS, 2007). We are almost at par with our peers regarding overall satisfaction with educational experiences, and we suspect that the latter discrepancy is largely due to perceptions related to campus environment and social life on campus (see Chapter 6).

A closer look at seniors' satisfaction with specific aspects of their academic experiences reveals ratings comparable to, yet rarely in excess of, peer ratings of their academic experiences. On the other hand, the internal data trends suggest that in a number of academic skills areas (e.g. use of quantitative skills; appreciation of arts, literature and drama) we have improved since our last decennial review. Faculty and staff exploration and understanding of the academic and nonacademic variables that contribute to senior satisfaction with our curricular and co-curricular programs requires exposure to and discussion of these data, and we intend to ensure that this happens.

Perceptions of Aspirant Curricular Objectives

Another purpose of the spring 2007 mission, aims and objectives survey was to explore perceptions of other liberal education learning outcomes to provide the faculty with a starting point to discuss curricular objectives that may better represent our current ideals. These additional items were gleaned from the general St. Lawrence mission statement, from prevalent programs in our curriculum, and from various recent publications by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

Table 7.2 shows the mean ratings of the top eight educational outcomes for the faculty out of the 30 listed on the survey; only three of them are among the University's eight stated curricular objectives. The five remaining educational priorities as rated by

the faculty represent outcomes that either may appear elsewhere in our general aims and objectives statement (e.g., integrate knowledge) or are endorsed by AAC&U as important outcomes for a liberal education (e.g., understand and practice academic integrity).

Table 7.2. Top eight educational outcomes for St. Lawrence faculty
Percent rating outcomes as “essential”.

1. read&write well	93%
2. think critically	91%
3. understand and practice academic integrity	88%
4. speak and listen well	80%
5. integrate knowledge	76%
6. engage in and respect the free discussion of opinions	74%
7. demonstrate respectfulness toward practices and beliefs of diverse peoples	66%
8. evaluate critically a wide range of information sources	65%

Appendix E shows the degree of endorsement for students, faculty and staff for all 30 educational outcomes listed on the spring 2007 survey. Numerous and interesting differences in educational priorities are apparent among group ratings and warrant further discussion among students, faculty and staff. The overall relatively weak endorsement for certain educational outcomes that the University has spent resources to promote and establish more soundly in the curriculum (e.g., apply quantitative reasoning to solve problems and engaging in community service) need to be better understood.

Whether our distribution requirement system adequately prepares students for challenges encountered after they complete their studies at St. Lawrence University is of critical importance to the faculty. Whether we are adequately addressing other important learning outcomes (e.g., creative thinking, quantitative reasoning, teamwork) recognized by AAC&U as central to a liberal education also warrants our attention in the next campus-wide discussions of the St. Lawrence curriculum. As AAC&U acknowledges in

Our Students' Best Work, “These outcomes do not emerge from only one or two relevant courses. Rather these are complex capabilities which are appropriately cultivated from high school through the final year of college, at increasingly higher levels of challenge and expected accomplishment” (p. 7).

We may have things to learn from other liberal arts institutions that approach core general education work by focusing intently on educational goals directly rather than through distribution requirements or through requiring interdisciplinary minors to complement disciplinary majors. Closer work with one's academic advisor in order to design appropriate programs of study may also be a necessary component of any new direction taken to strengthen our general education curriculum.

Central Components of and Opportunities in the General Curriculum

First-Year Program

St. Lawrence has one of oldest and most nationally respected [first year living/learning programs](#) in the country. Each residential First-Year Program (FYP) college is built around a team-taught, multi-disciplinary course that explores a thematic, rather than narrowly disciplinary, issue or concept. Through innovative written and oral assignment sequences, small-group work and extensive feedback from instructors, mentors and peers, students develop competencies in critical reading, writing, speaking, listening, performing and researching skills, all critical literacies at the heart of a liberal arts education and upon which they will build in subsequent courses.

A major component of the FYP is the nexus between the academic, residential and co-curricular elements in order to facilitate the ideal of a living/learning community. Each college lives together, thus providing opportunities for social as well as academic cooperation and community-building. The office of Residential Life oversees the residential staff in the FYP colleges, and many residential and co-curricular programmatic activities are keyed to the themes of each college.

Because the FYP is an evolving academic program, constantly assessing and re-tuning how best to meet the changing needs of our students, as well as acknowledging the multiple literacies demanded by an increasingly globalized and digitized world, there have been several significant changes since our last Middle States review (see [First-Year Program white paper](#)). In past years, FYP colleges were team-taught by groups of three faculty with a class size of 45-48 students, but the trend since the late 1990s has been toward two-person teams and a class size of 30-32. For the past several years there have

been no three person teams. The smaller class sizes make sense for multiple pedagogical reasons: smaller classes are more intimate and it's easier to engage students in group work and discussions; the course work, in terms of content and mechanical issues, is easier to coordinate with two faculty; and with the smaller class sizes, faculty don't need to split up into multiple "seminars" as much to teach intensive writing and oral communication skills.

Until 2001, each college stayed together for the spring semester portion, the focus of which was on research-oriented skills. In that year, faculty voted for "stand-alone" seminars, still emphasizing research and oral presentation skills, and now students can select from up to 35 research seminars based on thematic or multi- or single- disciplinary topics based on their academic interests. Even though the First-Year Seminar (FYS) is not residentially-based, class size is limited to 16-17 students, thus allowing students to build relationships with another group of first-year students and another faculty member.

Most significantly, in 2006 the faculty of the FYP passed a new [Philosophy and Goals Statement](#) that added new goals to the programmatic elements listed above that relate to "the social nature of knowledge production and social awareness, as well as self-reflectiveness and ethical concerns." The new philosophy and goals were conceived in collaboration with the Rhetoric and Communication Program, which initially grew out of the recognition that the FYP needed to change the focus from teaching writing and speaking as separate components to a focus on the integration of speaking, writing and research skills under the rubric of information/communication literacy.

For the past 20 years at St. Lawrence, the FYP has been the site of exciting and innovative pedagogy, engaged learning and collaboration between academic and co-

curricular initiatives. The new philosophy and goals are evidence of a program anticipating and responding to the expanding literacy goals of a liberal education in the 21st century.

Academic Advising and the Sophomore Year

Recognizing that the “sophomore slump”—what happens when a second-year student lacks motivation to achieve academic, personal and career goals—is a persistent problem, St. Lawrence, along with Skidmore College, Colorado College, and Connecticut College, has received a grant from the Teagle Foundation to address this issue.

Accordingly, the colleges has developed “frameworks for small group dialogues that will enhance sophomore engagement and learning in the liberal arts. These dialogues will bring students closely together with faculty and staff to discuss the goals of a liberal arts education, how to draw on that education to explore personal identity and examine ethics and values and how to commit to a liberal learning approach as a critical means of discovering one’s place in the world.”

Additionally, the associate dean of academic advising instituted a new program aimed at sophomores called “Ya Gotta Declare Yourself,” to help students as they make their way through distribution credits and toward declaring a major in their second semester. One new initiative is a series of sophomore-only dinners throughout the year where students are seated with individual faculty members who will offer an “intellectual autobiography,” the story of how each came to be an artist, biologist, historian, literary critic, or whatever self-definition is appropriate. Faculty members will tell the story of how they came to discover their academic passion, including the pitfalls encountered along the way.

Among other sophomore support initiatives are departmental “major information night” pizza dinners, where faculty in different programs or departments have an open house for any students who might be interested in pursuing a particular major. Faculty can answer questions about courses, provide information on how to declare a major and change advisors, and get to know prospective majors.

As students declare majors, the curricular goals served by distribution courses such as breadth of knowledge, and the development of core skills in reading, writing and research, are supplemented by the acquisition of deep understanding in a particular field or discipline. Departmental learning goals, though often used by individual departments and programs to plan course sequences within a major, were institutionalized in the fall of 2006. (For an in-depth discussion of departmental learning goals and assessment plans, see Chapter 9). In all programs and departments, students move through sequential areas of discipline-appropriate content and methodology, culminating, for most departments and programs, in a capstone course called the Senior-Year Experience (SYE).

Senior-Year Experience

President Sullivan arrived in 1996 with a goal to engage students more deeply in their senior year and offered to increase the size of the faculty if faculty adopted a senior project graduation requirement. During the lengthy period of faculty consideration of the idea, President Sullivan added 18 new [faculty lines](#) by 2001, when the faculty voted to initiate a voluntary SYE departmental requirement, rather than a mandatory one for all seniors regardless of disciplinary major. Many departments have implemented a required SYE, while others, especially in the sciences, encourage faculty-mentored independent

research projects in the senior year. According to a spring 2002 faculty resolution, the SYE involves “course work or independent projects undertaken in the senior year and designed to provide the means of integrating work done both inside and outside a student’s major.” SYE courses “will demand significant academic integration and actively engage students in the distinctively challenging ways that transcend those of regular course offerings.” Many students devise independent writing or research projects with a faculty mentor; others take senior seminars with the SYE designation.

Because part of the 2002 legislation called for subsequent assessment of the SYE, an ad hoc group representing the Academic Affairs Committee, Faculty Council and the University Assessment Committee recently prepared a thorough [report on the impact of the SYE](#) on the University curriculum, budget and faculty workload, and student learning.

Pre-professional Programs

In addition to advising programs for students interested in [health careers](#) or [law](#), St. Lawrence offers the following pre-professional and certificate programs:

[Education](#)

St. Lawrence offers a complex array of undergraduate programs that broadly fall under the heading of Pre-professional Programs in Education. These programs include preparation for initial teaching certification in grades 7-12 in a range of humanities, sciences and languages, and K-12 art. St. Lawrence also offers training leading to full professional certification as a teacher in the same certificate categories. Each of these programs has been registered and approved by the New York State Education Department as well as receiving national [accreditation by TEAC](#) in March 2007.

- Certification Minor in Education (for undergraduates only): includes course work and student teaching done at the undergraduate level. Approximately 25-30 undergraduates complete this program each year.
- Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Certification Program (combined undergraduate/graduate option): course work at the undergraduate level and student teaching done at the graduate level. Approximately 10 graduated students complete this program each year.
- Initial/Professional certification option of the M.Ed. Program in General Studies in Education (graduate-only option): includes all pre-requisite courses and student teaching on the graduate level. Approximately 10 graduate students complete this program each year.
- M.Ed. Program in General Studies in Education: this offers two curricula, both of which lead to professional teaching certification within New York State and reciprocating jurisdictions. Approximately 25 graduate students complete this program each year.

Other education offerings have also been registered and approved by the New York State Education Department (see [Graduate School Course Catalog](#)). They are:

- Graduate Program in Educational Leadership: Leading to the master's degree, the school offers a 39-semester hour School Building Leader Initial Certification Option and a Non-Certification Option . Also two Certificate of Advanced Study (C.A.S.) options are offered in Educational Leadership: 1. a 33-semester-hour Combined School Building Leader/School District Leader Option for candidates who already hold a master's degree in education, and 2. a 21-semester-hour

School District Leader Option for candidates already certified as a School Building Leader. Approximately 20 graduate students complete one of the graduate level programs in Educational Leadership each year.

- Graduate Program in Counseling and Human Development: Two master's degree options and one Certificate of Advanced Studies are available: 1. at the master's degree level, a 36-semester-hour School Counselor Concentration leading to a provisional New York State certificate as School Counselor; 2. The Certificate of Advanced Studies in Counseling (an additional 24 semester hours) leading to Permanent New York State Certification as School Counselor; .and 3. a 60-semester-hour Mental Health Counseling Concentration for those who will work in community agencies, not in schools. Approximately 25 graduate students complete one of these programs annually.
- [Coaching Certification](#) for New York State: Four courses (taught in the Sports Studies and Exercise Science department) earn students a certificate to coach in the public schools of New York State. Approximately 10 undergraduates complete this program annually.

Our Department of Education carries out a continuing process of self-assessment and evaluation. The graduate program seems to work effectively as part of St. Lawrence's contribution to the overall New York State Education System. It is of particular value in the North Country, in providing an easily accessible avenue for professional development for school teachers, counselors and administrators.

[Basic Engineering Combined Plan](#)

St. Lawrence has articulation agreements with Clarkson University, Columbia University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the University of Rochester and the University of Southern California in which a student may combine a liberal arts education with an engineering degree in a 3+2, a 4+2 or a 4+1 combined plan. The “basic engineering liaison officer” is the person responsible for advising students on the pre-engineering programs and the name of the current holder of this responsibility is given on the Faculty Council committee list. Many graduate schools in engineering appreciate the broader range of skills, in particular communication skills, possessed by liberal arts graduates.

Concern has been expressed by some faculty that campus-wide curriculum development initiatives (such as the Senior-Year Experience) may make it difficult for our students to fulfill the requirements for the engineering 3+2 program. This leads us to be aware of a more general point, which is that some of these rather small but important programs may tend to get overlooked when broad plans for curriculum change are being discussed, and we need to be mindful of this.

Pre-management Program and MBA (4+1)

Though St. Lawrence does not have an undergraduate degree in business, we have a very strong Department of Economics, which graduates about 55 to 70 majors a year. The position of this department is that there is strong empirical evidence that in business schools, liberal arts graduates do fully as well as business majors. Students interested in a business career (mostly, but not all, economics majors) have several options outlined in the University Catalog. The Pre-Management Program consists of academic coursework as well as career-building and leadership skills; upon completion, students are awarded a

certificate in addition to the appropriate bachelor's degree. The MBA 4+1 program is based on articulation agreements with Clarkson University, Union College and RIT, that allow St. Lawrence graduates to complete the MBA degrees of these institutions in one year rather than the usual two or more. Advising students on these choices is the responsibility of a faculty member of the Economics Department.

Additional Curricular Support and Research Opportunities for Students

Since our last decennial review, St. Lawrence has added a number of programs and initiatives that enable students to create and pursue their own academic and research interests in addition to SYE independent projects:

- [University Fellows](#) projects (1999) are student-initiated, faculty-mentored, University-funded independent research projects during the summer.
- The Center for International and Intercultural Studies ([CIIS Fellows](#) projects (2002) are proposed by student/faculty teams and funded for off-campus field work.
- [McNair Scholar](#) projects (2003) are student-initiated, faculty-mentored, independent research projects undertaken with the explicit intention of orienting and preparing talented students for graduate school who come from populations underrepresented in higher education.

In addition to the office of Academic Advising and the support services discussed in Chapter 6, St. Lawrence offers a number of academic resources, initiatives and opportunities, many of which have been newly founded in the last two academic years.

- The [Academic Achievement](#) Office helps students identify academic areas of strength as well as areas in need of improvement, and helps plan specific strategies

to achieve greater academic success through the Peer Tutoring Program, individual academic counseling and Academic Success Workshops.

- The Munn [Writing Center](#)/WORD Studio (i.e., Writing, Oral Communication, Research, Design) trains peer tutors to work with students on writing and research assignments, as well as oral projects. Peer tutor feedback is also available through Instant Messaging.
- The Newell Center for Arts Technology ([NCAT](#)) consists of an electronic classroom, a digital imaging and editing lab, and project spaces for faculty and students in support of digital technologies in the arts.
- The [Quantitative Resource Center](#) offers mentoring in mathematics, computer science and statistics as well as assistance with quantitative skills across the entire curriculum and support for student and faculty research projects.
- The [Brush Art Gallery](#) offers slide lectures, panels and discussions, films, demonstrations and workshops, in addition to class tours, student employment and the opportunity for students to exhibit work.
- The [Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership](#) is a collaboration between the academic and co-curricular divisions. In addition to living/learning space, the center is composed of the Leadership Academy, the David Garner Center for Collegiate Volunteerism and the Community-Based Learning Program. The Center offers workshops, speakers, credit-bearing courses and volunteer coordination designed to foster citizenship and leadership skills.

- The Center for Diversity and Social Justice provides, in collaboration between academic affairs and student life, activities, interactions and learning experiences to encourage intellectual and practical understandings of social justice.
- Owen D. Young [Library](#) and Lauenders Science Library support and facilitate the educational mission of the University through extensive book and journal collections, interlibrary loan services, classroom space, and support services for students and faculty, individually as well as for courses. Information literacy is at the heart of the libraries' mission in terms of acquiring information as well as evaluating sources.
- The Division of [Student Life](#) offers support for students through co-curricular programming in the Student Activities and Leadership Office, Career Services, the Health and Counseling Center, the Chaplain's Office, Residential Life, and a multitude of clubs and student organizations.

Academic Planning and Curriculum Development

Curricular development may be initiated by individual faculty who bring new areas of expertise upon their arrival and develop new courses in these areas or by seasoned faculty who develop new interests often as a result of participation in grant-funded reading and/or travel groups. Curricular changes may also be initiated by departments and programs that create or re-organize their internal curricula in light of new faculty members joining them, to reflect changes in their disciplinary or interdisciplinary fields, or in response to extensive reflection such as that prompted by the campus-wide articulation of department and program learning goals in AY 2005-06. While the approval process for individual courses is well established, there is no clear set

of guidelines for how a new curricular thrust gets initiated, vetted, piloted and adopted. We also recognize that this work involves faculty initiative and creativity, entrepreneurship and the discovery of funding resources, and that the path toward new curricular initiatives is not necessarily adaptable to prescribed guidelines. Though we see this as creative and positive, we also wish that faculty were better informed about emerging curricular innovations with the potential to impact the general curriculum.

Course Proposals and Approvals

The Academic Affairs Committee ([AAC](#)) is charged with the review of new course proposals for inclusion into the permanent curriculum and the review and approval of new academic minors and majors (before sending endorsed majors to Faculty Council to bring before the entire faculty). As well, the committee is charged with the general overview of all matters that affect academic policy and also receives ad hoc charges from Faculty Council (e.g. development of a field trip policy) and the vice president and dean of academic affairs (e.g. review of a series of four commissioned white papers in 2005).

The normal review process for new courses involves submission by faculty of one to three forms along with the course syllabus. The main form for course approval ([Form A](#)) asks faculty a series of questions about the role of the course in the overall University mission and how it addresses the home department's curricular goals. In particular, faculty are asked in their responses to these questions to reflect seriously on how their proposed course meets one or more of the eight University's curricular objectives. [Form B](#) is used for reviewing courses which request distribution or graduation credit. Faculty are asked to reflect on how their course specifically meets distribution criteria as described in the rationale for each category, given in the faculty legislation. [Form C](#) is

utilized for review of courses requesting SYE designation. Over the past five-six years, AAC members have set higher standards for review and faculty responses to these questions have improved, that is to say, become both more reflective and specific.

Developing the Curriculum: The White Papers

Recognizing that we must constantly assess and re-vision our curriculum in order to fulfill our mission, aims and objectives as we enter an increasingly globalized and competitive century, in 2005, then-Academic Dean Grant Cornwell solicited a set of white papers from various faculty constituencies in order to rethink and possibly strengthen components of our curriculum. A number of these papers emerged from fledgling programs such as the Rhetoric and Communication Initiative and the Academic Planning Initiative, while two others reflected ongoing developments in established programs such as the Civic Engagement/Community-Based Learning Program and International and Intercultural Studies. Because these papers were authored by a relatively small number of faculty, there was a strong sense that the ideas presented in them needed to be more widely shared and reviewed at faculty meetings and formally discussed with the Academic Affairs Committee. Both of these processes were accomplished in AY 2005-06 and to date, some progress has been made by each initiative, and results will be communicated when the new dean reports to the faculty this academic year.

The white paper on [*Academic Planning at St. Lawrence: Cultivating Intentionality*](#) posits that “critical to our practice of advising as teaching is the cultivation in students of the habits of purposeful intention in the design of their academic pursuits. The paradigm shift from academic advising to academic planning entails a crucial

exchange of responsibility for students' academic programs from faculty advisors to students themselves.” To that end, several FYP classes, among others, began a pilot project using eportfolios and reflective prompts that ask students to collect their best work and engage in critical reflection on how the skills they are learning in various locations come together. Ideally, the eportfolio would be a collection of work and reflection on the synthesis of their academic and co-curricular choices over their four years here. Funded in part by a Mellon grant, this project is ongoing.

A substantive shift in advising has also occurred in the way students meet with advisors and register for courses. Faculty members in Academic Planning and elsewhere, Information Technology staff and the University Registrar devised an automated system called “Academic Planning and Registration” (APR) that requires students to create “working lists” of course choices in order to facilitate conversations with their advisors on their academic plans and trajectories before they get a “PIN” from the advisor to move their choices into a finalized course list. The APR system also lets students and advisors write notes and comments, e-mail, and access college transcripts from one site. The system is upgradeable and has the potential to expand as faculty and students make further suggestions for improvement. In fact, the APR system may ultimately serve as a depository for student eportfolios after the pilot project is assessed. Initial feedback from all constituencies has been overwhelmingly positive and we believe the APR system is an integral part of academic planning, especially suited to enhancing student agency in the process of course selection and individual academic goals.

The Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership, with its attendant component of

Community-Based Learning, was also introduced in a white paper, [*Participatory Democracy and Liberal Learning*](#). In addition to the programs discussed above, the center, in conjunction with external grant funding, sponsors an academic program called the Akwasasne Semester at a Mohawk reservation near campus, and has also received grant funding for an American Association of Colleges and Universities initiative called Bringing Theory to Practice ([*BTtoP*](#)). This grant has recently led to a second BTtoP grant. As one of the first two “Intensive Sites,” along with Georgetown University, St. Lawrence will use a variety of engaged teaching methods in the FYP with the goal of increasing student intentionality and empowerment, and examining through systematic collection of longitudinal data and multivariate analysis the relationship between various engaged learning pedagogies and students’ personal and civic development and well-being.

Of considerable importance in the way we imagine our curriculum evolving to serve our mission in light of emerging 21st century critical literacies is the white paper on [*The Rhetoric, Communication, and 21st Century Literacies Initiative for Student and Faculty Development*](#). Although the paper recognizes that St. Lawrence’s curricular objectives such as the ability to read, write, speak and listen well, and the ability to conduct research and think critically are important, “they do not adequately address the emerging 21st century literacies essential for citizenship in an increasingly diverse and globalized world.” The paper advocates broadening our curricular objectives to “include multiple information, digital, and media literacies. We are committed to cultivating a paradigm shift away from approaching writing, reading, speaking, and research as discrete skills and toward a paradigm of academic synthesis.” Drawing on the work of

established faculty development and pedagogical innovation in the FYP, Summer Writing Institute, Oral Communication Initiative and the Center for Teaching and Learning, the authors proposed the creation of a Rhetoric, Communication, and 21st Century Literacies Initiative that would involve “curricular and cross-disciplinary efforts to encompass and integrate student learning and performative competencies in all areas of communication (writing, speaking, research, and information/media literacy) with the ways in which faculty envision, design, and teach their courses.” Faculty development work has continued under the auspices of the RCI working group, the CTL, and the Library, and we now have a Mellon grant and a newly endowed Maurer professorship to allow fuller implementation of the initiative.

Concerns About Curricular Growth and Development

Formal structures for curricular changes such as approvals for new courses or minors exist and are utilized through the Academic Affairs Committee, but at the institutional level the processes by which emerging curricular initiatives evolve and move into the realm of institutional priorities or earn the allocation of funding are not always perceived as systematic or strategic. Yet we realize that important or innovative curricular initiatives driven by individual vision or effort also require generous and serendipitous vetting by forward-thinking leaders and may otherwise be stifled by a too rigid, top-down process. The latitude at St. Lawrence for creativity and responsiveness to changing priorities, emerging technologies, and national and global priorities is often invigorating.

Though St. Lawrence pursues outside grant opportunities that can be matched to budding or maturing faculty initiatives, there remains a perception among the faculty that

funding opportunities or nascent curricular pilot proposals are not shared broadly enough, either through Academic Affairs or through our grants office. While we recognize that pursuing external grants is a competitive and complicated business, we would suggest that a more public presentation of recent, pending and potential funding opportunities be accomplished. Though the Academic Affairs Committee has done a good job with the course approval process, it may be time to consider whether the committee would be an appropriate venue to engage with larger questions of curricular innovation, pilot projects and grant funding. We would also encourage the dean and those working on significant grants to report on and discuss new or continuing initiatives once each semester. It is our sense that faculty who felt more informed about pending or potential curricular initiatives would better appreciate the holistic manner in which such initiatives often arise. We feel this issue is less about changing our process of seeking grants and starting pilot initiatives and more one of communication about what we are doing in ways that invite faculty into the conversation.

Finally, given our spring 2007 survey results, it seems time to revisit our educational aims and objectives so that we agree on the starting point for any subsequent significant changes in the curriculum and attendant resource allocation issues. Creating time and opportunities for the faculty to redefine our educational priorities is an essential step in this process, and in light of our mission “to educate the whole person” this work would be enhanced by conversations with colleagues from the student life division.

Recommendations

1. We recommend the director of institutional research and the special assistant to the president for assessment produce a report based on a complete analysis of the spring 2007 Survey on Mission data. This report should be shared with the academic and student life divisions.

2. We recommend the dean of academic affairs initiate a process for the reconsideration of our curricular objectives and distribution requirements by the full faculty.

3. The results of the SYE assessment report about the impact of the SYE on the University budget, curriculum, student learning and faculty time should be broadly discussed by faculty groups this spring semester.

4. Faculty Council should be asked in conjunction with the dean of academic affairs to consider whether the Academic Affairs committee may be an appropriate venue to engage with larger questions of curricular innovation, pilot projects and grant funding.

5. Encourage the dean of academic affairs to identify individuals and groups of faculty who are working on significant grants, especially those with potential for broad curricular impact and development, and to report on and discuss new or continuing initiatives once each semester.